

**Public Broadcasters,  
the Internet, and Democracy**  
Comparing Policy and Exploring Public Service Media Online

Hallvard Moe



Dissertation for the degree philosophiae doctor (PhD)  
University of Bergen



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Bergen, 2008.

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## Abstract

This thesis is a study of public service broadcasting facing a digital media system. Its focus is on internet services since the mid-1990s. With a comparative design, the thesis discusses how public service broadcasters seized opportunities and handled challenges related to the internet, and how national and supranational regulatory regimes and policy actors coped with public service broadcasting venturing online. I concentrate on publicly owned former monopolists, assessing four such institutions in three states: the British BBC, Norway's NRK, and the ARD and the ZDF in Germany.

I argue that traditional practices of media policy do not suddenly change in the digital era. Rather, settings for public service are to a large extent still defined within well-established frameworks, and dependent on the conditioned legacies of each state's political culture. Discussing similarities and differences in the development of the institutions' internet activities, and their corresponding national regulations, I find the development characterized by ad hoc solutions. This also applies to the EU policy regime, built on a competition law-logic. With the latter regime, I argue, we are incapable of grasping the autonomous democratic functions of public broadcasters' online services. Moreover, the regime provides insufficient space to play out national differences.

The thesis goes on to explore the democratic functions of public broadcasting institutions in an online environment. With a founding in normative public sphere theory, I contend that there is a potential in online communication not only for dialogue, but also for dissemination. Both communicative forms should be utilized by public service actors in ways that consistently counter processes of enclosure and balkanization in the public sphere. On this basis, I develop a scheme for public service media online. By scrutinizing marginal parts of the cases' internet activities I lastly explore this scheme, and the limits of public broadcasters' publicly funded online offers. Thereby, I aim to revitalize discussions about the functions of public service as a media policy tool in the digital era. In my view, public service media remain relevant. The thesis substantiates why, and outlines how.





## Sammendrag

Denne avhandlingen er en studie av allmennkringkasting i møte med et digitalt mediesystem. Avhandlingen fokuserer på utviklingen av internet-tjenester siden midten av 1990-tallet. Med et komparativt design analyserer jeg hvordan allmennkringkastere utnyttet mulighetene og håndterte utfordringene knyttet til internetts framvekst. Videre undersøker jeg hvordan nasjonale og overnasjonale regulatoriske regimer og politiske aktører taklet allmennkringkasternes bestrebelser på internett. I de komparative analysene konsentrerer jeg meg om offentlig eide tidligere monopolister: BBC i Storbritannia, norske NRK og Tysklands ARD og ZDF.

Jeg argumenterer for at tradisjonelle mediepolitiske praksiser ikke plutselig forandres i møte med digital teknologi. Allmennkringkasternes vilkår defineres fortsatt innen veletablerte rammeverk, avhengig av nasjonale politiske kulturers særtrekk. Den komparative analysen av allmennkringkasternes internetttjenester og deres nasjonale reguleringer viser at utviklingen har vært preget av ad hoc løsninger. Dette gjelder også for EUs regime, som er basert på en konkurranselovgivningslogikk. Jeg viser hvordan EU-regimet ikke gir tilstrekkelig rom for nasjonale ulikheter. Med utgangspunkt i et slikt regime klarer vi heller ikke å gripe det demokratiske potensialet i allmennkringkasternes internetttjenester.

Avhandlingen fortsetter med en utforskning av hvilke demokratiske funksjoner allmennkringkasterinstitusjonene kan inneha på internett. Med normativ offentlighetsteori som grunnlag argumenterer jeg for at det er et potensial i internettbasert kommunikasjon, ikke bare for dialog, men også for disseminering. Begge kommunikasjonsformer bør utnyttes av allmennkringkastingsaktører på en måte som motvirker innhegninger i, og balkanisering av, offentligheten. Jeg utvikler så et forslag til hva allmennmedier på internett kan bestå av. Til slutt tester jeg dette forslaget, og grensene for institusjonenes offentlig finansierte aktiviteter, gjennom en diskusjon av tre marginale internetttjenester fra case'ene. Målet er å revitalisere diskusjoner om allmennkringkasting som et politisk verktøy. Etter mitt syn forblir allmennkringkasting relevant. Avhandlingen underbygger hvorfor, og viser hvordan.



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## List of publications

The five articles constituting part II of this thesis are all single-authored by Hallvard Moe, and have all been published elsewhere. I have not revised the articles for inclusion in the thesis. Notwithstanding some basic formatting, the articles appear as they did when submitted for their original publication (see appendix 3 for a brief postscript updating the two empirical articles which were finalized first). Here, I list the time of final submission and original publication, as well as copyright information, along with the complete reference for each article.

Article 1: “Commercial Services, Enclosure, and Legitimacy: Comparing Contexts and Strategies for Public Service Media Funding and Development”, pp. 51-69 in Gregory Ferrell Lowe and Jo Bardoel (eds) *From Public Service Broadcasting to Public Service Media. RIPE@2007*. Göteborg: Nordicom. Final version submitted August 2007 and published January 2008. All rights reserved. Copyright Hallvard Moe, 2008.

Article 2: “Public Service Media Online? Regulating Public Broadcasters’ Internet Services – A Comparative Analysis”. *Television & New Media* 9(3): 220-38. Final version submitted September 2006 and published May 2008. All rights reserved. Copyright Sage Publications Ltd, 2008.

Article 3: “Between Supranational Competition and National Culture? Emerging EU Policy and Public Broadcasters’ Online Services”, in Ib Bondebjerg and Peter Madsen (eds) *Media, Democracy and European Culture*. Bristol: Intellect Books. Final version submitted March 2008 and published autumn 2008. All rights reserved. Copyright Intellect Books, 2008.

Article 4: “Dissemination and Dialogue in the Public Sphere: A Case for Public Service Media Online” *Media, Culture & Society* 30(3): 319-36. Final version submitted June 2007 and published May 2008. All rights reserved. Copyright Sage Publications Ltd, 2008.

Article 5: “Discussion Forums, Games, and Second Life - Exploring the Value of Public Broadcasters’ Marginal Online Activities” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 14(3): 255-70. Final version submitted December 2007 and published August 2008. All rights reserved. Copyright Sage Publications Ltd, 2008.





## Preface

This thesis is the result of a four-year research project. Not surprisingly, I started out with a pretty wide scope, and a vague idea about what I was up to. During the project's course, the scope has gotten narrower, and my thoughts clearer. The project began with a general interest in looking at recent developments related to public service broadcasting. It grew into a comparative study of media policy as public broadcasters venture on to the internet, combined with critical discussions of what these broadcasters can contribute online.

I have worked on several texts throughout the project period. Five of them are presented here as research articles. This is, then, a so-called article-based thesis. It consists of two parts. Part II is the five articles. From different perspectives, and through different analyses, they all deal with public broadcasters, democracy, and the internet by comparing media policy and by exploring public service media online.

The official statutes of the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Bergen call part I of an article-based PhD-thesis *sammendrag*, summary in English. Somewhat confusingly, the same statutes specify that the text should not only summarize, but also juxtapose the different articles' research questions and conclusions, and discuss them with a general perspective. Informally, the part is sometimes referred to as a *kappe* – cloak or cape in English – connoting something covering or wrapping the articles. Others refer to it as *The final contribution*, signalling the text's presumed place in the chronology of the writing process, as a piece for substantiating or add to the different articles.

In my case, part I is chronologically the final contribution, and it should serve all the purposes mentioned above. By drawing on the different articles of part II, it lays out the main arguments of the thesis, and guides the reader through the collection of articles. Just as importantly, part I provides room for contextualization of the study, and for thorough theoretical and methodological discussions. In so doing, it also builds on some of the other texts – apart from the five articles of part II – I have worked on during the project period. Lastly, part I presents overarching conclusions to the thesis.

## Preface

As such, part I serves both as introduction and conclusion. This illustrates how reading an article-based thesis is not the same as reading a monograph. Presumably its novelty in the field of Media Studies in Norway, combined with the differences to monographs, have lead PhD-thesis authors to offer elaborate explanations (or excuses) for why they have written an article-based thesis. They do so even though, in the formal statutes, the two formats are explicitly given equal status. Neither one is derivative – and a monograph is not the “natural” way to present a research project. Having said that, there are of course interesting differences between the two formats.

The research article genre requires the text to stand on its own. When putting thematically related articles together in one book, this invariably entails some repetition. Moreover, articles written for different publication channels must adhere to different requirements. This not only concerns length, but also style, and editorial preferences. In my case, writing for an edited volume devoted to discussions of public service broadcasting in a digital age, aimed at readers from the media industry as well as researchers, posed other challenges than writing for a generalist media studies journal. Articles also “freeze” the research process in time, as they tend to be finalized at different points during a project. When read chronologically, they may demonstrate conceptual developments, or show how arguments have evolved. Additionally, in contrast to research articles, *The final contribution* is written to complement other texts, not primarily to function on its own. All these characteristics separate the article-based thesis format from the monograph format.

The articles already exist individually as communications of the results of my research. One could say that a main rationale for presenting the articles together with *The final contribution* is to get the text assessed as a thesis for the PhD degree. I do, however, hope this book can have some relevance also beyond that. I hope the discussions undertaken in *The final contribution*, as well as the articles seen as a whole, can be of value for those interested in public broadcasters, the internet, and democracy – in comparing policy, and in exploring public service media online.

Bergen, June 2008

## Acknowledgements

A lot of people have helped me write this thesis.

My supervisor Jostein Gripsrud should be thanked first. He has been stuck with me for 8 years now. Jostein skillfully steered me through my Master's thesis, before encouraging me to pursue a PhD-scholarship. All the while, he has included me in an extremely encouraging research environment. This project would not have been started – let alone finished – without Jostein's continuous support.

Next, I would like to thank all the good people at the Department of Information Science and Media Studies, University of Bergen; at Lehrbereich Vergleichende Strukturanalyse, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (especially Professor Klaus Eder); and at the Department of Media, Cognition and Communication, University of Copenhagen. They all provided splendid settings for the project.

I am grateful to all the reviewers, editors, seminar and conference participants, as well as other colleagues who have gotten involved in, read, and commented on my work.

A special thank you to Trine Syvertsen and the rest of the PaP group; my international PhD student friends Marta Cola, Kari Karppinen, and Jakob Svensson; my office cohabitants Erlend Lavik and Helle Sjøvaag; and the undemocratic beer drinkers.

I salute my dear friends – and Loeyning (which is a state).

Finally, I thank Anne Karin Sele Moe, Bernt Fredrik Moe, and Hedvig Moe. And Ms. Tine Rude.



# Part I

*The final contribution*



## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The intrinsically contentious public service arrangements have remained central to European radio and television ever since these media got organized as broadcasting. The traditional broadcasting institutions started out as monopolies, constructed to maintain a national identity by reaching the whole citizenry, and bringing it together in a national public sphere. Based on different premises, these institutions have tackled sweeping transformations of the societies they were built to serve with varying degrees of success. All the while, they have been subjected to debate about the legitimacy of their remit, the scope of their activities, and their responses to new competitors. Throughout, public service broadcasting and its institutions have shown considerable resilience.

Filed under the heading “digitalization”, the latest wave of changes is not necessarily bringing brand new issues to the table. It is, however, making public service broadcasting controversies more pertinent. Coinciding with increased globalization in a broad sense, the emergence of digital media technology – including the internet – facilitated a thorough restructuring of radio and television from the 1990s onwards. Conventional borders around broadcast media are blurring. This affects all parts of the media, including regulation, organization, production, distribution, and uses. Changes fuel protests against public service institutions’ privileges, and test existing media policy regimes. On a more fundamental level, this development is connected with the diversification and fragmentation of the political, economic, social, and cultural domains of our society; compelling a critical reconsideration of the democratic role and the design of public service media.

This thesis analyzes public service broadcasting facing a digital media system. Its focus is on services beyond traditional broadcast radio

and television – specifically on internet services since the mid-1990s. The thesis discusses three main research questions: (1) how have public service broadcasters seized opportunities and handled challenges related to internet activities? (2) How have national and supranational regulatory regimes and policy actors coped with public service broadcasting venturing online? (3) Which democratic functions might the traditional public broadcasting institutions have in an online environment?

To answer the first two main research questions, I take a comparative approach. I concentrate on a specific type of public service broadcaster: the publicly owned former monopolists I will refer to as public broadcasting institutions. I assess four such institutions in three states: the British BBC, Norway's NRK, and the ARD and the ZDF in Germany. These institutions have all demonstrated substantial abilities to change, while maintaining a leading position in their respective home markets. Through mainly qualitative analyses, I identify similarities and differences between these four cases. I discuss these similarities and differences with reference to national policy processes, and to political, social, and economic contexts. My study further scrutinizes supranational policy developments, specifically the role of EU competition rules. I do not strive for all-encompassing assertions – the cases are not selected to represent public service broadcasting in general. Still, the thesis' aim is neither limited to looking at how the cases have developed over time, nor to questioning their specific situations and relations to contextual factors. Answering the third main research question, the study mobilizes normative public sphere theory, and provides a contribution to the discussion on how the ideas behind public service broadcasting can make sense across media platforms and communicative forms.

In the articles constituting part II of this thesis, I argue that traditional practices of media policy do not suddenly change in the digital era. Rather, settings for public service are to a large extent still defined within well-established historical frameworks, and dependent on the conditioned legacies of each state's political culture. Thus, both public broadcasters' strategies and levels of political support need to be understood with due attention to national characteristics. Discussing similarities and differences in the history of the internet activities of the institutions, and in view of corresponding national regulations, I find the development mainly characterized by ad hoc solutions. This also applies to the EU policy regime, founded on a competition law-logic. With the latter regime, I claim, we are incapable of grasping the potential autonomous



democratic functions of public broadcasters online, and of acknowledging the need for sufficient space to play out national differences.

There is a potential in online communication, I contend, not only for dialogue, but also for dissemination. Both communicative forms should be explored by public service actors in ways that consistently counter processes of enclosure, and of balkanization in the public sphere. On this basis, I develop a scheme for public service media online. By scrutinizing marginal parts of the cases' internet activities I lastly explore this scheme, and the limits of public broadcasters' publicly funded online offers. Thereby, I aim to revitalize discussions about the functions of public service as a media policy tool. In my view, public service media remain relevant. The thesis substantiates why, and outlines how.

I will focus on the period from the mid-1990s. Still, also I pay explicit attention to historical dimensions. Internet services do not represent the first venture beyond broadcasting for these institutions, just as digital technology does not entail a sudden revolutionary shift. Throughout the discussions, I relate current processes to earlier developments of public service broadcasting and media policy. A historical dimension should contribute to a sound diagnosis of the present situation, as well as a grounded assessment of further potential for public service media.

Part I of the thesis introduces the articles of part II, discusses their arguments and findings, and relates them to each other. Part I further presents the study and its field, and argues for the value of my contribution by way of historical contextualization and elaborate theoretical and methodological discussions. It does not provide a complete overview of recent developments of all dimensions relating to public service broadcasting, nor does it go into detail on general issues of digital radio and television. Yet, it offers more than introductory comments. Its purpose is to discuss fundamental issues of my study in a way research articles do not allow for; to underpin the articles in part II; to bind them together; and offer the conclusions of the thesis as a whole.

This first chapter discusses the issues at hand and the motivation for my study. It also presents and summarizes the five articles of part II.

### **Public service broadcasting in the digital era**

From the time of the construction of public radio institutions, the introduction of television and later colour television, through political up-

heaval, war, economic recession, and migration – public service broadcasting has always been changing. By the mid-1990s, every old European public broadcasting institution found itself in a competitive environment. By way of neo-liberal reforms, national governments had invariably introduced domestic competition in the form of commercial broadcasters. Simultaneously, transnational multi-channel television provided via satellite and cable was gaining momentum. The development was a symptom of a more general shift that put market before state and individual before community, and which paid much attention to the cultural diversity of social life. Trying to fight off new market entrants and find a way to keep serving their societies, public service broadcasters continued to change, also by moving closer to their competitors (e.g. Born 2004; Lucht 2006; Syvertsen 1997 for comprehensive studies of this period).

Digitalization brought even graver prospects of turmoil. The discourse on digital broadcasting has since its advent in the mid-1990s focused on freedom and viewer control (Moe 2005): digitalization would render radio and television channels superfluous and offer unlimited content on-demand. The very form of broadcasting was said to be changing – both in terms of senders, production, distribution, and receivers – paving the way for new forms of user-participation and true interactivity. The task of offering a mixed menu to every member of society would consequently become a lot tougher.

Economic motives are the key force behind media digitalization. Both commercial and non-commercial actors see potential for saving money. In addition, commercial businesses also envision new income streams. For public broadcasters, the coming of digitalization coincided with political pressure to cut expenses, and to make complex institutions financially transparent and well run. As a countermove, the public institutions looked for new sources of revenue. On this basis, they embarked upon the different challenges and opportunities linked to digitalization.

A first set of opportunities and challenges was related to distribution. In Germany, the ARD and the ZDF tried to cooperate with large commercial interests to offer a common national digital satellite television platform, but ended up with one each directly competing with the privately run platforms (see Brockmeyer and Eicholz (eds.) 1999). When a public initiative made Berlin-Brandenburg the world's first region to switch to digital terrestrial television distribution in 2003, the public broadcasters constituted an important part of the offer – as they also did when more regions got digital terrestrial television in the following years.

The NRK took a leading role in shaping Norwegian policy on digital television distribution, arguing in favour of different technologies throughout the 1990s before settling on the terrestrial alternative (Moe 2003). In 2006, the NRK got a licence to build and run a terrestrial commercial network together with commercial public service broadcaster TV2 and the privatized national telecom Telenor (Regjeringen 2006). The UK market was characterized by fierce commercial competition between Rupert Murdoch's satellite service BSkyB and the terrestrial provider ONdigital (briefly re-branded ITV Digital). When the latter went bankrupt in 2002, the BBC stepped in and gained a primary position in the roll-out of nationwide terrestrial digital television (Collins 2002a; Iosifidis 2005; also Starks 2007, 64ff for a more subjective perspective). In sum, these public broadcasters that had been allowed by national policy to meet competition aggressively in the 1990s, took a proactive approach also to digital television distribution.

A second set of opportunities and challenges was the change in production equipment and the introduction of new journalistic practises. As production became digital, new possibilities for editorial creativity opened up; new programme formats were being shaped; and new roles were assigned to the journalists. A wide variety of reality television formats, often involving different types of audience feedback, filled up the schedules. As so-called video journalists, staff members were now often supposed to report and edit for all distribution channels. And, from the late 1990s, these distribution channels were no longer restricted to just radio and television: meeting a third set of opportunities and challenges, public service actors began to think seriously about media forms and platforms beyond broadcasting. Again, many public broadcasters approached the new possibilities eagerly, experimenting with new services and boldly stating ambitious aims for the future. Besides ventures into interactive television, the internet has this far been the main outlet for the new services.

### **Public service broadcasting and the internet**

The internet is a worldwide infrastructure of interconnected computer networks. Its history is by many told with the late 1960s as a starting point, specifically related to the initiative of the US military's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA). Others stress the contributions of

independent researchers, or focus on the importance of different grassroots and countercultural movements for the construction of the internet as we know it. Though the respective importance of these factors remains disputed, they are all relevant: the internet – like communication infrastructures before it – was built on a long line of different technological inventions (cf. Hannemyr 2005, 13; Rasmussen 2002, 13ff). The internet offers a many-to-many mode of communication where it is relatively easy for anyone to act as sender. Further, data transfers are built on a common open standard protocol which simplifies the introduction of new services on the internet, like email, instant messaging, peer-to-peer file sharing, and the world wide web.<sup>1</sup>

Since its inception in the early 1990s, the world wide web has made crucial contributions to the consumer appeal of the internet. It became widely used as a tool for public communication, to the point where it is now commonly applied as a synonym for the internet. The Mosaic web browser software, launched in 1993, was able to show both text and graphics within a well-functioning user-interface (Hannemyr 2005, 35; Rasmussen 2002, 29ff). For entrepreneurs, this meant the internet's commercial potential became clearer. For public broadcasters, it meant a new outlet. In 1994, the web housed approximately 3000 sites. Four years later, the number was estimated to 1,2 million (Rasmussen 2007, 88). In 2007, estimates range from 15 to 30 billion (Pandia 2007). These sites include everything from long-abandoned personal homepages, via an abundance of news providers and huge public and commercial databases, to all kinds of shops – to mention just a few obvious examples.

Different internet services facilitate very different uses, and have diverse effects. The impact of email on both personal and professional communication has been immense. The consequences of peer-to-peer file sharing for everything from amateur creativity to the future of the music and audiovisual industries are indeed wide-ranging. Concentrating on the world wide web, we can identify different, often conflicting, implications for varied parts of our societies. The potential for economic utilization is vast, through advertising, by selling physical goods online,

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<sup>1</sup> Another important technical characteristic is packet switching: on the internet, pieces of information are sent in individual blocks the fastest way via the network's distributed nodes, not collectively as a stream from sender to recipient as in broadcasting and telephone networks (Hannemyr 2005, 19ff; Rasmussen 2002, 17ff).

and by offering digital content from fiction films to scientific research articles at set prices. Different genres of websites facilitate novel opportunities for public communication, based on both written and audiovisual content. At the time of writing, the web's potential as a tool for social networking – through services like MySpace and Facebook – has been subject to the strongest hype for some time.

During the so-called dotcom-years in the late 1990s, public broadcasters leaped into an unfamiliar world online. Since then, the internet has taken up an increasingly important position in political, economic, and social life. In 2008, political issues – be it the race for the US presidency or the construction of a city train line in Bergen, Norway – thrive on the internet. OECD countries (among them UK, Germany and Norway) boasted a total of 221 million broadband subscriptions by June 2007 – equal to 18.8 per 100 inhabitants (OECD 2007).<sup>2</sup> The average time that users spend on the internet is estimated to equal time spent on television in some Western states (e.g. IBM 2007; Markoff 2004). Advertising money online is getting level with – and may soon be exceeding – the amount spent on television (e.g. Sweney 2008a).

Public broadcasters have continued their part exploratory, part ambitious ventures online, expanding into a wealth of activities. Their services not only include internet-distributed audio and video, but also text- and image-based reporting, interactive games, and massive amounts of user-generated content. Seemingly, such services represent something very different from broadcast radio and television, to which both public service remits and funding schemes are closely linked. If we want to un-

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<sup>2</sup> Importantly, to an overwhelming degree internet use remains based in the wealthier parts of the world. Although the numbers of users are substantial for instance in China and India, the per capita statistics still put North American, European, Oceanian, and rich Asian countries far ahead of the rest. This applies both to internet use in general, and even more clearly to broadband access. Africa accounted for 14.2 % of the worlds population in 2007, but only 3,5 % of internet usage. In contrast, North America has 5,1 % of the population, but 18,8 % of world internet usage (Internet World Stats 2008). A list of broadband access per capita puts Chile as the highest-ranking Southern American country at #23. No African countries are found among the top 30 (Nation Master 2008). Such patterns reflect the political, economic, and social impact of the internet worldwide. Smaller, but still substantial, differences also exist between the wealthier countries. For instances, Norway is #7 on the list of broadband access per capita (with 19,25 %), the UK is #15 (14,66 %), and Germany is #21 (10,20 %) (NationMaster 2008).

derstand the development of public broadcasting institutions and the role of public service media, the internet clearly is a key area.

In this thesis, the main focus is on the internet. Thus, my aim is limited to scrutinizing merely one part of the development public service broadcasting goes through. I do not set out to give a complete picture of the unfolding developments, nor an exhaustive map of the BBC, the NRK, the ARD and the ZDF's past and present internet services. I am interested in how core public service values and traditional policy issues are transferred online in different contexts as these institutions enter new media platforms. Importantly, this does not mean I think broadcast radio and television will disappear. On the contrary, I believe broadcast media will remain a vital part of the media business and of media uses also in the years to come (Moe 2003).

Of the relevant external internet activities, I focus on those seemingly furthest removed from the traditional doings of public service broadcasting. I do not propose a full scheme for all kinds of actors' public service media remits. Instead, I have chosen one kind of public service broadcaster. I presume that this kind have taken a proactive role in grasping new opportunities, and also face the weightiest challenges.<sup>3</sup> However, just as the cases' internet activities cannot be studied without giving attention to their other digitalization-related services, the institutions themselves cannot be understood in isolation. I therefore relate the internet activities and the institutions to their contexts throughout this thesis.

Having introduced the issues at hand and the motivation for my study, I now turn to present the findings and arguments of the five articles that make up part II of this thesis.

### **The articles: findings and arguments**

The licence fee is firmly linked to broadcast media. Accordingly, as public broadcasters venture on to new platforms, they face challenges to their basic legitimacy. This is the starting point for the first article of part II – henceforth referred to as *The contexts and strategies article*. Dealing with all four of my cases, the article focuses on two characteristics central to

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<sup>3</sup> As Syvertsen (forthcoming) argues, we should be careful not to portray public service broadcasting in general as being in a state of constant crisis.

an understanding of differences and similarities in contexts and strategies: firstly, elements of, and attitudes towards, commercial funding, and, secondly, arrangements that promote enclosure. These two characteristics are identified across media platforms and in other auxiliary ventures. In some of the cases, the first characteristic has traditionally served to demarcate public service from commercial broadcasting. In other cases, this division has not applied. How have attitudes and regulations related to funding changed in the face of new media platforms? Enclosure describes the creation of walls around content by technical or economic means – in conflict with core public service values of open access and universality.<sup>4</sup> How are attitudes towards such arrangements played out in different contexts? What do distinct strategies for funding and development imply for the legitimacy of the public broadcasters’ funding schemes?

Reviewing a wealth of initiatives across the cases up until 2007, I find the cases to represent a continuum. On one end, the NRK advocates an optimistic and expansive strategy, where demarcations between commercially and publicly funded services tend to be somewhat unclear. The NRK has also undertaken several provisions that promote enclosure, especially on new media platforms – all with political consent. On the other end of the continuum, the ARD and the ZDF exist in a more stable environment, with strict constraints on commercial enterprises. As a response, the German operators have adopted a “pure” strategy, portraying themselves as clearly opposed to enclosure. The BBC is located between these relative extremes. Notwithstanding recent deviations that might entail future problems with enclosure, this institution has sought to balance an extensive international commercial arm with domestic public service tasks – and is encouraged politically to do just that.

I argue that all the broadcasters have taken a proactive approach when looking for alternative sources of funding in the digital era. However, I find the cases’ conditions facing new platforms to have largely been defined within deep-rooted historical frameworks, dependent on the accustomed legacies of national political culture. As a result, I argue, both developments of strategies and arguments, as well as the public

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<sup>4</sup> Enclosure is often used more generally to criticize expanding corporate media power, especially on digital networks (e.g. Benkler 2006, 146, 395, 444ff; Coleman and Dyer-Witheford 2007, 935).

broadcasters' level of political support, need to be understood with appropriate attention given to national features. This implies that any concrete strategy or policy cannot be universally applied. Nevertheless, I conclude, the German situation has clear advantages in emphasizing core public service values of open access and universality. Despite contextual differences, the basic ethos highlighted by a "pure" strategy remains worthy of protection and imitation.

Due to its wide empirical scope, this first article serves both as a mapping of the cases' broader relevant dimensions, as an initial application of the comparative approach, and as an entry to the more detailed discussions of internet-specific issues.

Based on the wider characteristics of strategies and the weight of national frameworks identified in the first article, article number two – which I will refer to as *The national policy article* – moves on to ask how the public broadcasters' internet activities have developed in different national contexts. Are they considered public service media online? I present an analysis of the development of the BBC, the NRK and the ARD's web activities from the early moves in the mid-1990s up until 2006. I discuss the reasoning behind the initiatives, the involvement of competing interests, and the actual regulatory conditions under which the services have developed.

I argue that the history of the cases' activities, and the corresponding regulations has, to different degrees, been marked by ad hoc solutions. The status of the NRK's internet services remained uncertain throughout the period under scrutiny. From the outset, UK regulations made it possible for the BBC to commence services which were quite problematic according to core public service broadcasting principles. The German regulations were revised repeatedly, and appeared, in line with the findings from *The contexts and strategies article*, to provide the most stable framework. The UK and the German policy approaches introduced different – and changing – restrictions on the scope of the broadcasters' online services. They shared the basic idea that internet activities should only support traditional radio and television – despite the broadcasters' claims that the internet constituted a "third pillar". As a consequence, I find, the internet is not recognized as an autonomous platform for public service media – despite all the cases' proactive approaches. On this point, the Norwegian, unsettled approach has an advantage; it leaves an opening for a more ambitious realization of public service potential online.



I find both the cases' approaches and the national frameworks to be distinct, coloured by historical developments, national political cultures, and market conditions. On this basis, I conclude, any specific organization and definition of public broadcasters' public service activities online should be made with due attention to national characteristics – with consideration of the needs of each society. Still, identified parallel traits across the cases may illustrate a tendency of convergence of national regulations. Beyond its particular findings, *The national policy article* serves as a stepping-stone for two interrelated interests taken up in the following analyses. Firstly, the article calls for studies of supranational regulatory bodies' impact in terms of pressure of regulatory convergence. Secondly – and more tentatively – it questions the dismissal of the internet as an autonomous platform in public service remits.

The first call is answered in the third article, referred to in following as *The supranational policy article*: what are the tendencies in, and implications of, emerging EU policy – represented by state aid rules under competition law, enforced by the European Commission – for the development and status of public broadcasters' online services? My cases have all been targets of complaints from competitors pertaining to new media activities. I analyze three policy processes following from these complaints. They concern, first, an online curriculum service from the BBC; secondly, the demarcation of the ARD and the ZDF's public service online activities; and, thirdly, the question of the role of the NRK's internet presence in relation to its overall remit. In the discussions, I explore the presumption that there is a contrast between national cultural policy aims and supranational competition law considerations.

At the outset, I demonstrate how EU policy has not been blatantly opposed to public broadcasters. Rather, this supranational policy actor has respected a “free zone” for public service broadcasting outside competition regulations. In EU policy terminology public service broadcasting is a service of general economic interest, to be defined by each Member State. However, the EU's emerging approach to online services seems to signal a break. Based on my analysis, I identify three key tendencies in the Commission's approach: firstly, public broadcasters are ascribed a mere supplementary role on the internet. They should only complement market actors. Secondly, instead of assessing whole programme schedules or broadcast channels, the Commission gauges specific online initiatives in isolation. In so doing, the Commission also seeks to separate services tailored to individual demand from those cater-

ing to societal needs. Thirdly, I identify a tendency to see online activities as just supportive of existing broadcast programmes. I argue that these tendencies have problematic implications: although not devoid of cultural policy considerations, the Commission's approach is fundamentally based on a competition law logic. This entails a hindrance to an expansion of public service broadcasters' "free zone" shielded from the market on the internet.

An additional implication of the Commission's approach, I contend, is that national differences are given less room than previously in policy considerations. Public service broadcasting remains defined within nations, and any one public broadcasting institution is still supposed to serve a national citizenry. This is also a premise for EU policy. Even so, a competition law-guided perspective – seeking to level the playing field across national borders – rubs off also on national policy actors' arguments. I find especially the British case, and to a lesser extent the German, to illustrate how national authorities adopt and build on a competition law rationale when dealing with the online services' status. There is a tension here between external and internal forces of change. I argue that we should be careful not to overstate the division between the supranational actor as advocating competition law aims, and national authorities as campaigning for cultural policy concerns. Still, supranational competition law gains ground on other policy concerns as the future framework for public service media takes form.

In sum, the emerging EU approach entails that public broadcasters are not fully enabled to take their public purposes onto the internet. Concluding *the supranational article*, I hold that a sound transfer of the ideas behind public service broadcasting to the internet should pay attention to two issues: we must ascribe proper weight to established practices of public service broadcasting policy founded in national cultural policy concerns, and at the same time acknowledge the potential offered by innovative online services. The latter requirement again points to the need for thinking about how different communicative forms and genres on the internet may fit into an idea, and constitute a legitimate autonomous part, of public service media.

Deviating from the comparative approach, article four – *The dissemination and dialogue article* – undertakes a theoretical discussion, freed from my specific cases. It employs and operationalizes normative public sphere theory, ascribing it a heuristic function for thinking about public service media. In developing a scheme for public service media online, I

make use of two concepts to describe the ideal communicative forms necessary in the public sphere: dissemination and dialogue.<sup>5</sup> Those optimistic on behalf of the democratic potential of online communication focus on its merits in helping citizens to address each other on a level basis through dialogue. While public service broadcasting may have succeeded in disseminating important information to all, it has been criticized precisely for failing to facilitate public dialogue between citizens. As I make a basic case for public service media online, I set out to problematize the division between broadcasting as dissemination and online communication as dialogue.

Throughout the article I pursue a twofold hypothesis: firstly, that dissemination is vital for any understanding of public online communication. Secondly, that there is a normative potential in dissemination in the public sphere. This potential needs to be taken into account when developing a legitimate concept of public service media online. I argue that such a concept should not only grant online communication's potential to facilitate dialogue, but also recognize disseminating characteristics: based on the ideas behind public service broadcasting, the internet can be employed also for the task of spreading information to all. I hold that the potential inherent in both these idealized communicative forms should be explored and exploited by public service media online in ways aimed at countering processes of enclosure and balkanization of the public sphere. The objective should be to build broadcast and internet services into a whole where they overlap in terms of functions, and profit from each other.

My case for public service media online does not provide a universally valid model. Nor does it dictate which kind of existing or prospective institutions should provide the service. These decisions, I argue, have to be made based on the specificities of actual media systems and wider society. Yet, my case does call for any implementation of public service as a media policy tool to, firstly, consider both the disseminating and dialogical potential in online communication, and, secondly, acknowledge the importance of connecting online and broadcast

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<sup>5</sup> My use of the two terms is inspired by John Durham Peters' eloquent work to rehabilitate dissemination (Peters 1999; 2005). In a recent essay, Peters pursues his project, arguing that "conversation is not the only format suited for democracy", that "dissemination offers the relief of tuning out or going at one's own speed", and that "listening to others is a profound democratic act" (Peters 2006, 124).

media. I acknowledge that further development of this general prescription calls for some kind of explorative testing. Returning to my empirical cases, this is what I pursue in the final article of part II.

The fifth article I will refer to as *The marginal services article*. It scrutinizes three services: a ZDF discussion forum; a game provided by the NRK; and a BBC activity in the virtual online world *Second Life*. These marginal services seem to be far removed from the practices of broadcasting, and are fitting for questioning customary ideas about public service, and dominant attitudes towards the potential roles of online communication. My starting point is the three tendencies identified in the emerging EU policy approach discussed in *The supranational policy article*. Further, the exploration is grounded in my case for public service media online, as developed in *The dissemination and dialogue article*.

Based on the analysis, I argue that we need to balance the autonomous role of online communication against the need for public broadcasters to construct their total public service output as a coherent whole. The latter means we should pay special attention to how online services may serve connections between more or less isolated groups on- and offline. Differing from the emerging EU policy approach, my perspective addresses online activities not as isolated initiatives, but in their broader context; and it acknowledges the value of internet initiatives freed from specific broadcast programmes. Thus, my perspective tries to compensate for the bias of a strict market impact logic, which downgrades public service actors to merely supplement commercial players online. Throughout *The marginal services article*, I point to concrete ways to implement my ideas in the existing services.

My interest in discussing the potential role of seemingly trivial services within a public service media context ties in with my reading and employment of normative public sphere theory: we should recognize the worth of a wide range of communicative forms in the public sphere, and the need for spelling out divergence, not just striving for consensus. Ultimately, the exploration of the three marginal services, and the highlighting of an alternative to the emerging EU policy approach, should serve as a basis for discussing specific demarcations of public service media online in specific settings. Such demarcations must, I contend, consider the remaining multipurpose potential in diverse forms of online communication for public service media. That is a reasonable way forward for public service as a media policy tool.

## **Conclusion**

This first chapter has placed the issues under scrutiny in this thesis in relation to the ongoing developments of public service broadcasting. Arguing that the internet represents a key arena for these developments, I have clarified the scope of the study. The chapter has further introduced the articles that constitute part II of the thesis, and showed how they relate to – and build on – each other. In the remaining chapters of part I, I elaborate on different aspects of my study to show the relevance of the design I have chosen, and the arguments I have made, in the different articles. Firstly, the next chapter places the study in its field, and presents its approach.



## **Chapter 2:**

### **The research field and the approach of the present study**

Although this thesis is about public media institutions' activities on the internet, its starting point is broadcasting. Understanding the challenges and opportunities of transferring the ideas behind public service broadcasting online requires a historical dimension. Therefore, I build on the rich and varied tradition of research on this form of institutionalization of broadcast media. It is on this footing I move on to the internet.

This second chapter maps the field of public service broadcasting research. It focuses on recent contributions, and pays special attention to work on public service broadcasting and the internet. Relating the present study to this context, the chapter then presents the approach of my study.

#### **Studying public service broadcasting in the digital era**

Public service broadcasting has been a keen object of study for media scholars. Three enduring strands of research, identifiable from the late 1970s, may help characterize the resulting works (Moe and Syvertsen forthcoming); (1) policy studies, (2) institutional studies, and (3) studies of public service broadcasting and democracy. This categorization is useful for situating the present study among recent contributions within the field.<sup>6</sup>

Media policy deals with the technologies, processes, and content which mediate the public in a broad sense (Braman 2004). It covers so-

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<sup>6</sup> For discussion of earlier contributions to the field, and a tentative characterization of a fourth emerging strand of postmodern studies, see Moe and Syvertsen (forthcoming).

cial control of the media, as well as the outcome of the efforts of diverse social forces, constraints, and interests (cf. Syvertsen 1992, 12; Østbye 1995, 41). Media policy incorporates different forms of regulatory regimes related to culture, trade, consumer protection, and competition. It also incorporates a range of differently structured actors encompassing supranational organizations, national governments and political parties, as well as commercial lobbyists and interest groups based in civil society.<sup>7</sup>

The first strand of research – policy studies – offers analyses of changing broadcasting markets, and policy-makers’ responses to these changes. Such studies try to grasp the complex interplay of technological, economic, political, and cultural forces that produces new situations for public service broadcasters. More or less explicitly, they consider how familiar dilemmas within media policy are played out or changed under new circumstances. The second strand – institutional studies – focuses on how these changing circumstances affect specific public service broadcasters as organizations and media producers.<sup>8</sup> Further, these studies raise the question of how change impinges on the organizations’ output. The third strand of research emphasizes the relations between

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<sup>7</sup> Some recent media policy studies have taken up the concept of ”governance”. Though it is given varied definitions, and some call it a “fashion term” (Kleinsteuber 2007, 43, my translation), the concept seems to be introduced to stress the inclusion of actors beyond national authorities, and different social forces, in the analysis (e.g. Donges (ed.) 2007; McQuail 2007, 17; Syvertsen 2004a, 16ff). I agree with the need to take a wide range of forces and structural developments into account when trying to understand media policy in general, and the implications in the current situation specifically. Indeed, in different parts of this thesis I discuss for instance industry lobbyists and civil society actors’ involvement in the shaping of media policy. Still, I will stick with the terms ”policy” and ”regulation” (see also Humphreys 1994, 5ff). This not only signals that my main interest lies in the relationship between the broadcasters and national and supranational policy actors, but it is also motivated by historical differences in media policy in the UK, Germany, and Norway, as well as by my comparative interest: whereas the control of British public broadcasting may be said to have introduced novel forms of governance (e.g. through Ofcom), the German regime has not. Despite its broadcasting councils, it is described as a “developing country” in relation to governance (Kleinsteuber 2007, 62, my translation). Through the analyses in the thesis, I seek to describe such differences, and discuss their importance for public service broadcasting – but I do so with reference to media policy. I discuss further methodological issues of comparative media policy analysis in chapter 6.

<sup>8</sup> Institution is used here in a restricted sense as referring to specific media organizations (see Moe and Syvertsen 2007, 149-50).



democracy and public service broadcasting. On the basis of political theory, scholars explore how public service broadcasting might be said to contribute to public life, and critically suggest improvements. Proponents of this strand often argue explicitly in favour of public service as a key democratic force in society.

Purely historical studies notwithstanding, the shared task of recent contributions to all three strands is to assess and understand public service broadcasting today. As a ramification, any analysis from any strand needs to deal with a common question: how do social fragmentation within mutually reciprocal domains like economy, politics and culture; globalization in a broad sense; and remarkable technological change affect public service broadcasting?

On this basis, the policy studies strand has offered a great range of contributions. Recent years have brought several case studies providing overviews of the general policy situation in specific states (e.g. Brogi 2003 on Italy; Collins 2003 on the UK; De Bens 2003 on Belgium; Machill 2003 on France) and on the European level (e.g. Papathanassopoulos 2002, 65ff; Richeri 2004; Storsul and Syvertsen 2007). Furthermore, a long line of work has focused on more specific processes. Issues of distribution – and the role of and consequences for public service broadcasters – have been well covered, both through general overviews (e.g. Hujanen 2004), comparisons between different markets (e.g. Lax et al. 2008 on radio; Steemers 1999; Storsul and Sundet 2006 on television), and case studies (e.g. Collins 2002a; Iosifidis 2005 on the BBC's role; Holznagel and Grünwald 1999 on the German case; Moe 2003 on the NRK's role – all on television). Another often-discussed aspect concerns questions of funding. Both the balance between commercial and public funding (e.g. Steemers 2005 on the BBC; Comrie and Fountaine 2005 on New Zealand's TVNZ), and the role of purely advertising-funded actors (e.g. Cowling 2004) have been studied. The transformation of public service broadcasters into multimedia actors have further been granted due attention (e.g. Aslama and Syvertsen 2006 on the Nordic countries). All these studies offer insight into how different policy concerns behind public service broadcasting – related to competition, trade, and social and cultural considerations – are balanced.

Other studies have started from changes in media policy itself. A central topic is practices of performance assessment and accountability (e.g. Born 2003a on the BBC; Coppens 2005 especially on Belgium; Jakubowicz 2003a; 2003b for European-wide discussions; Meijer 2005 on

rating vs. quality; Saranovitz 2005 on the Israeli regime). A final important issue is the changing role of policy actors – national and supranational – and their instruments (e.g. Holtz-Bacha 2006, ch. 7; Jakubowicz 2004a; Ward 2003 on the EU; Syvertsen 2004a, 179ff on the Norwegian case; Smith 2006 on the construction of Ofcom).

Contributions to the second strand – institutional studies – have also covered a wide spectrum in recent years. Changing practices of production is one key issue. Much research deals with new television programme genres and formats (e.g. Bennett 2006 on interactive formats; Enli 2008; McNair and Hibberd 2003 on participatory formats; Kjus 2006 on reality formats; Ytreberg 2002a on scheduling). For radio, similar discussions tend to be included in broader studies, such as historical work on radio journalism (e.g. Eide and Nyre 2004); or analyses of the impact of commercialization and digital technology on public service radio (e.g. Jauert 2003 on Danish DR). The reappearing processes of organizational changes have also been studied extensively (Born 2003b; 2004 on Channel 4 and the BBC, respectively; Lowe and Alm 1997 on the Finnish YLE). A final important batch of studies has looked at shifts in the relationship between public service broadcasting and its listeners and viewers. This includes issues like changing forms of self-presentation (Ytreberg 2002b), public broadcasters' "whiteness" in a multicultural society (Creeber 2004 on the BBC), as well as more direct studies of the users' role in ongoing processes of change (e.g. Severson 2004 on Swedish digital terrestrial television).

Recent contributions to the third strand have offered input to ongoing debates about the potential democratic functions of public service broadcasting through diverse discussions of its social roles. Jürgen Habermas has been, and continues to be, the central theoretician. This is for instance the case for Barbara Thomass (2006a) when she outlines a scheme for European-level public service broadcasting with reference to deliberative democratic theory. Still, some recent contributions offer different inputs. For example, Andrea Gourd (2002) explores the relations between a Habermasian deliberative democratic theory and Niklas Luhmann's theory of social systems in a critical study of the emergence of a digital television system in Germany, and the public service broadcasters' roles in it. Jens Lucht (2006) draws on both Luhmann and Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann to develop a revised public sphere concept. He then employs this concept in a discussion of the ideal tasks of public service broadcasting, existing German institutions'

merits in completing these tasks, and future possible reorganizations. Yet others call for revitalizing general frameworks or specific public service institutions with support from a range of revisions of and/or alternatives to Habermas (e.g. Born 2005; Dahlgren 2001).<sup>9</sup>

Across these three strands, recent studies make up a substantial body of research, which aids our understanding of the development of public service broadcasting in the digital era.

### **Studying public service broadcasting and the internet**

Moving one step closer to the issues under scrutiny in the present study, work on public service broadcasting and the internet can also tentatively be separated into the strands of (1) policy studies, (2) institutional studies, and (3) studies focused on public service broadcasting and democracy.

In contributions from the first strand – policy studies – national policy developments have been discussed as public service broadcasters venture onto the internet. Some include discussions in analyses of policy aspects deemed crucial for the future of public service broadcasting (e.g. Aslama and Syvertsen 2007, 169-70). Andra Leurdijk (2008) offers scrutiny of individual services. She looks at the *BBC Creative Archive* and a similar service from the Dutch Vara, assessing them according to policy issues like copyright, market distortion, cooperation with third parties, and quality standards. Other contributions stem from the field of law. Christoph Degenhart (2001), for instance, undertakes a close reading of German media law to gauge the legitimacy of the internet plans of ARD member WDR from the late 1990s. The WDR took a leading position among ARD members. Degenhart discusses concrete implications of this strategy, and finds it illegitimate in pursuance of German regulations (see also Brenner 2002, 203ff, 237ff). Thorsten Held (2008) reaches a different conclusion in a more recent comprehensive study. He demonstrates how online services are within the German Basic Law's concept of broadcasting, and problematizes current regulations' restrictions of the scope of public broadcasters' online services.

Some policy studies also take an explicitly comparative approach. Assessing early developments at Australian ABC, the BBC, and the

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<sup>9</sup> I discuss the emergence and criticisms of this strand of research in detail in chapter 5.

NRK, Terje Rasmussen (2002, 151) points to three key policy issues as public service went online: whether internet initiatives were to be included in the remit; whether advertising should be allowed; and whether online services should support radio and television or be treated as an autonomous part of the output. He further criticizes especially the NRK for lacking coordinated plans in the late 1990s, and points to the potential advantages of cross-platform productions (Rasmussen 2002, 154). Some of these tendencies are identified also in the present thesis, which in addition goes further in discussing potentials of online communication, and in seeking to understand differences and similarities between the cases. The latter is an issue Rasmussen barely touches.

Josef Trappel (2001) compares Austrian ORF and Swiss SRG/SSR, adding France Télévisions in a later study (Trappel 2006). Focusing more than Rasmussen on regulatory status and consequences, he identifies substantial national differences. Trappel (2006) finds the Swiss approach to be the most cautious, and the French to be the most expansive, with internet services organized in a special “interactive television”-division within the public broadcaster. The ORF stands out by seeking to integrate the internet services within the overall organization and its remit. My interest lies close to Trappel’s, but I add the EU as a supranational policy actor to the analysis.

Some existing broader analyses do include discussions of EU regulations of public service broadcasters’ online activities (e.g. Humphreys 2007, 107; Michalis 2007, 234ff). Frands Mortensen (2008, 210ff) critically examines the history of the European Commission’s involvement on the issue, and the application of EU law. These works identify policy challenges ahead, and remain fundamentally positive towards the contributions of public service media (but see Richeri 2004 for a contrasting, more pessimistic view). Mortensen, especially, shares my interest in exploring alternative ways forward.

Production for the internet is a key issue within institutional studies, the second research strand. Several authors have looked at how institutions get organized to tackle cross-media production of different kinds. They look at specific genres or programmes (e.g. Erdal 2007; Puijk 2007 on the NRK), at challenges related to internet-specific practices like the application of web radio (O’Neill 2006), at utilization of the potential in online journalism (Engebretsen 2006), or at dilemmas with commercial search engines (Newman 2007; Sadrozinski 2007 for views from the BBC and the ARD, respectively). Yet others focus on new media

services or texts. An example is Nico Carpentier's (2003) perceptive study of the BBC's *Video Nation*, a participatory format which started out with a broadcast television programme slot, but that was later moved online. Carpentier shows how this move led to changes both to production, presentation, and uses. Another interesting contribution is Myra Macdonald's (2007) study of the BBC's cross-platform initiative *Asylum Day*. She argues that despite incorporating new modes of interactivity, the BBC failed to realize "enhanced opportunities for engagement with a diversity of perspectives" (Macdonald 2007, 686-7; see Burns 2008; Jacka 2006, 184ff for discussions of Australian ABC's early online services; Puijk 2004 for an analysis of sports content online). I also discuss the public service value of specific internet services in this thesis. I do, however, have a somewhat different objective: I am interested in how such services stand against a normative idea of the democratic functions of public service media online.

A number of recent studies are characterized by their explicit focus on the relations between public service broadcasting, the internet and democratic life. That is, they belong to the third strand of research. Some include the role of internet services in broader discussions of public service broadcasting in a digital age. Jo Bardoel and Greg F. Lowe (2008) claim that change from a mode of transmission to a mode of communication is a key challenge. This change, along with the improvement of cross-media content, is deemed necessary to develop public service media. And the mission of public service media "lies in rigorously honing an audience-centred view. This implies serving citizens in all the ways their public interest activities seek to fulfil social, cultural and democratic needs" (Bardoel and Lowe 2008, 22). Settling that the public service remit remains relevant, Karol Jakubowicz (2008) proposes a six-step strategy to ensure the future viability of public service media. This includes introduction of wide-ranging internet services of all genres, linked to or independent from broadcast programmes (Jakubowicz 2008, 35ff; see Thomass 2003, 2006b for earlier proposals). While certainly thought provoking, such proposals tend to suffer from a lack of specificity. They run the risk of remaining on a general level without consideration of concrete actors and initiatives in specific contexts.

A few works take one step further by focusing exclusively on the internet and/or one specific case. I use a discussion of two such contributions (Coleman 2004; Murdock 2005) as a stepping-stone for outlining a scheme for public service media online in this thesis. Jackie Harrison

and Bridgette Wessels (2005) offer a further innovative example. They claim that “new forms of pluralism and diversity of participation and representation that facilitate audience engagement” characterize the current communication environment (2005, 850). In this environment they explore the public service value of initiatives outside traditional institutions. Reviewing such cases’ use of both the internet and digital television services, the authors recommend communication policy to

address processes for harnessing and facilitating the ‘ground-up’ potential of reconfiguring media forms in order to secure and reimagine an active public service communication sector (Harrison and Wessels 2005, 850).

Georgina Born underlines the importance of basing reflection on the role of what she calls “public service communications” in “recent currents in democratic theory” (2005, 111). Discussing theorists like Seyla Benhabib and Chantal Mouffe, and using examples from the BBC, Born sketches “a normative typology” of forms which “a pluralist communicative democracy” could take, both in relation to “old” and digital media (Born 2005, 116-7): a form where the majority hosts divergent and contesting minority perspectives; a form with intercultural communication between minorities and between majority and minorities; as well as a form for intracultural communication within minorities. In addition, there must be forms of both territorially and issue-based publics facilitated by all kinds of media technologies. In sum, these forms have “the potential to populate a new normatively grounded conception of public service communications” (Born 2005, 117). I share Harrison and Wessels’ explorative interest when it comes to understanding what public service media online may look like. I also agree with Born that a foundation in democratic theory is crucial for such explorations to be sound. However, I add a second element to that foundation by comparing – empirically studying the development of public broadcasters’ internet activities and the national and supranational policy regimes they relate to.

### **The approach of the present study**

In this thesis, I mainly relate to the first and third strands of research: policy studies and studies of public service broadcasting and democracy.

But I also build on contributions from the second strand, the institutional studies. I analyze public service broadcasting policy, with an explicit interest in exploring the democratic potential of public service media online, and in testing this potential on existing media productions.

The first article of part II – *The contexts and strategies article* – presents a comparative analysis of the different cases’ strategies for funding in the digital era. In the second article – *The national policy article* – I narrow the scope and apply the same method in a comparison of the cases’ internet activities, questioning how this key area of public service revitalization has developed under, and been tackled by, different national policy regimes. Article three – *The supranational policy article* – continues to scrutinize the regulation of internet services. It studies the development and implication of EU policy. Together, these empirically based articles analyze how the interplay between technological possibilities, expected social needs, and political restraints has impinged on the development of public broadcasters’ internet services. In so doing, the analyses compare cases to understand similarities and differences, and discuss how public service broadcasting policy is changing.

Insight from these discussions then forms the basis for an explicit coupling with political theory to investigate the potentially democratic role of public service media online. Stepping away from the comparative design, article four – *The dissemination and dialogue article* – explores a theoretical argument for transferring the ideas behind public service broadcasting online. Based on a normative public sphere concept, I make a case for public service media on the internet seeking to acknowledge the inherent potential online for diverse forms of both one- and two-way communication. In the final article – *The marginal services article* – I test this scheme empirically on some existing activities initiated by the institutions. I point to concrete possible ways in which public broadcasters’ online activities could move closer to what I argue is a consistent concept of public service media online.

Although the analyses in the five articles all deal with the issue of public broadcasters online, and build on each other’s arguments and findings, they have different foci and employ different analytical tools. This is in line with the thesis’ ambition. I aim to both provide new empirically based knowledge and to contribute to theoretical appropriation and development. The first three articles are case-oriented comparative policy studies, based on qualitative analyses of data gathered from different written sources. The fourth – *The dissemination and dialogue article* – is a

critical exploration of the concept of public service media based on operationalization of abstract public sphere theory. Lastly, *The marginal services article* involves these insights in an examination drawing on strategies from textual-analytical practices characteristic of the humanities.

In the different articles I describe, systematize, and contextualize, but I also evaluate. That is, my approach is normative. Not only in the sense that my values and interests guide the project, or that my participation in a social context rules out any ambitions of being a neutral observer; I explicitly assess the development of public service broadcasting policy according to certain norms (see Skogerbø 1996). These norms are based on public sphere theory.

The purpose of a normative theory is to set standards for critical assessment of an existing situation by explicating ideal conditions (e.g. Benhabib 2002, 134; Knapskog 2001, 128; Peters 1994, 70ff; 2000, 290). Normative political theories can be ascribed an important heuristic role for empirical research. They might serve as interpretative hypotheses for analyses of everyday communication. Or, the theories have potential to form the basis for new research questions, and help illuminate structures and relations hitherto obscured for the researcher. This is also the case for media and communication research: a public sphere ideal does not only function to demonstrate that all communication is imperfect. It moreover lets us discuss the degree of imperfection. A normative democratic theory may contribute to “inform an analysis of particular political cultures, to ground a critique of democratic institutions and to reveal the normative content of extant constitutional procedures and the law” (Blaug 1997, 111). Normative theories put forward ideal types distanced from everyday practices. Demonstrating all the obstacles or limitations the normative ideals face when tested on the empirical world might be considered an argument against the usefulness of such theories. I, on the other hand, hold the normative notions valuable precisely for their ability to point to the inadequacy of existing practises. When studying media policy, the gap between actual institutionalizations and the normative ideal does not constitute a crisis as such. Rather, it can be used to discuss a potential.

Importantly, I do not claim to carry out an explicitly normative study through and through (cf. Skogerbø 1996, 41ff; Storsul 2002, 35ff for discussions of different strategies). Given the project’s explorative quality, the first three articles inform a theoretical discussion – undertaken in *The dissemination and dialogue article* – which translates the norms



into concepts fit to be applied in empirical analyses. *The marginal services article* is such an application of a normative case for public service media online on concrete empirical instances.

In sum, the study takes an eclectic methodological and theoretical approach. In the different parts, I benefit to varying degrees from contributions from a range of media research traditions, and related fields like political philosophy, cultural studies, economics, law, and political science. One tradition does, however, provide a prominent source of inspiration: critical political economy of communication.

Political economy is interested in how political institutions, the political environment, and the economic system influence each other. According to Robert W. McChesney (2000, 110; also Calabrese 2004, 2), the study of the political economy of communication incorporates two dimensions. First, it addresses the relationships between media systems and the broader social structures of society with a particular interest in the influences of economic factors. Second, it has special interest in how ownership, varied support mechanisms and policies affect the media. In analyses, structural factors are emphasized. Such studies are critical in the sense of drawing on a theoretically informed critique of the social order in which communications are being studied. Peter Golding and Graham Murdock define the difference from mainstream economics in terms of four aspects: critical political economy is holistic; historical; “concerned with the balance between capitalist enterprise and public intervention”; and engages “with basic moral questions of justice, equity and the public good” (1991, 17-8). Scholars taking this approach, which David Hesmondhalgh (2007, 35) calls the “cultural industries approach” of political economy, have produced substantial research on broadcasting policy, including public service arrangements and performances.<sup>10</sup> In particular, many of the early contributions to the third strand of research on public service broadcasting stem from this tradition.

My study’s lack of one overarching, general approach could be perceived as a weakness. Conversely, I hold it as vital. The combination of empirical, historically grounded, comparative policy analyses; explorative, theoretical discussions; and scrutiny of specific media services is valuable. It aids our understanding of public service broadcasting’s on-

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<sup>10</sup> See Mosco (1996) for a further discussion of different approaches to the political economy of communication, and McChesney (2007, 37-98) for a more personal account.

going transformation, and helps us to critically consider the potential democratic value of online communication. This is not to say that the design is without challenging aspects, or that my perspective is uncontested. One issue, often raised as criticism against critical political economy, concerns the relationship between democracy and different organizational forms of broadcasting.

### **Public versus commercial?**

One particularly relevant pitfall of critical political economy is the tendency to regard commercial broadcasters as *a priori* inferior – “as anti-democratic simply by virtue of the fact that they are commercial ventures” (Christensen 2003, 91; also Collins 2004, 46). Concretely, research on the societal role of public service media has often implicitly or explicitly applied a strict division between publicly and commercially funded media (particularly television), and between public and private ownership. According to critics, that opposition “misrepresents the fact that various forms of television often display more similarities than differences” (Syvertsen 2003, 156). This point needs to be addressed.

Public service broadcasting has diverging organizational forms. For instance, the Norwegian TV2, like the British ITV, is privately owned and advertising-funded, with a public service broadcasting remit. The British Channel 4, on the other hand, is publicly owned but funded by advertising sales. While the funding scheme for non-commercial public service broadcasting free them from market logics, commercial public service broadcasters are required by law to adhere to some remit, and thus restricted from acting on a strict market basis. Now, the absence of market-based income streams should not be seen as a guaranty for good practices. All kinds of broadcasting, regardless of public service status, can contribute to the construction of identities – as well as to public debate – in a democracy. The question is what kind of identities and what kind of public debate. I will argue that there is a basic upside to public service alternatives. They approach their users differently than purely commercial actors. Commercial broadcasters see their users as consumers. Public service broadcasters should see the users as interested in and capable of acting as citizens in their society.

Empirical research has repeatedly shown that differences exist between television in its commercial advertising-funded and public

forms (see Moe and Syvertsen forthcoming). Based on a simple comparison of different content categories, Raymond Williams (1975, 78ff) demonstrated how the British public service broadcasting system differed substantially from the US commercially-dominated system. Of the two, the former offered much more news and factual programming, as well as more varied entertainment, to much bigger audience groups. In a more recent study, Heikki Hellmann and Tuomi Sauri (1994) revitalized the method used by Williams to gauge the extent to which programming on commercial and public broadcasters were converging. Based on a longitudinal Finnish study, Hellmann and Sauri found that while the overall composition of programming remained quite distinct, public and commercial broadcasters were clearly becoming more similar in prime time. Prime time “has become a set of rules”, they concluded (Hellmann and Sauri 1994, 63). Public broadcasters had adopted scheduling principles similar to commercial competitors, while continuing to show more factual, cultural and serious programming. Such results were also found in other countries where public broadcasters enjoyed comparatively better arrangements (e.g. Edin 2000 on Sweden; Krüger 1992; Meier 2003; Baringhorst 2006 on Germany; Syvertsen 1997 on Norway; Søndergaard 1994 on Denmark), while institutions subject to “savage deregulation” were forced to move closer to the commercial actors (Traquina 1998 on Portugal; also Hibberd 2001 on Italy; see Jakubowicz 2007, 179-87 for recent a European overview).

The finding that public broadcasters have changed, while still remaining distinct from purely commercial services, has also permeated studies of individual programme genres. Comparative studies of journalism, for example, have shown that competition led to more human interest stories, less foreign news, more crime and sport, shorter news stories and more formats mixing news and entertainment. Even so, as Stig Hjarvard (1999, 253-8) summarizes after reviewing comparative news studies from several countries, differences remain in content and style between commercial and public service broadcasters. Such differences are also found in other genres, including fiction. As Jostein Gripsrud (2002, 278) argues, commercialism tends to marginalize anything regarded as “demanding” or “boring”. Syvertsen might be right when she, as quoted above, states that “various forms of television often display more similarities than differences” (2003, 156). Yet, I hold the differences between purely commercial and public service alternatives to be qualitatively important. Either by shielding the broadcaster from

commercial logics or by hindering such logics to be played out, public service arrangements facilitates a different approach to the users, and thus different programming. This does not mean we should disregard all market-based offers. Rather, to guarantee pluralism – both within channels’ schedules and between channels – a mixed system of public service and strictly for-profit actors is preferable (e.g. Collins 2002b, 78; Keane 1991).

To some extent, the downside of purely commercial actors might be explained by reference to broadcasting economy. To maximize profit, advertising-funded radio and television has traditionally targeted the biggest possible audience groups by scheduling for the highest common denominator of audience tastes (see Collins 2002b, 74). Still, the upside of public service arrangements, I will argue, is not limited to broadcast media. As citizens, we have other interests than as consumers. As citizens, “we are interested in broad knowledge of the world and our place in it; we care about perspectives on, and debates about, our conditions and the larger contexts of our everyday lives” (Gripsrud 2002, 276). These interests clearly relate to the need for a well-functioning public sphere: it should in the best way possible control the effects of politics, and make sure decisions of societal consequence are informed by a public debate accessible to all. Thus, in terms of the media, citizens’ interests clearly extend beyond broadcast radio and television. Left alone, I will argue in this thesis, commercial actors online are inclined to promote enclosure rather than openness, and more generally fail to support the tasks ascribed to the media in a democracy.

Public service arrangements – whether publicly or commercially funded – do not represent a magic formula which solves all problems. But in an environment together with commercial actors, such arrangements can be employed to make actual practices move closer to an ideal public sphere. Therefore, I argue, it is not so much a question of public versus commercial. Rather, in looking at strategies and policies for digital media, including the internet, I will contend that we are well served by facilitating publicly funded media actors also on new platforms. These not only complement, and provide an alternative to, the initiatives based on purely commercial interests. Public service actors can also help ensure an overall sounder media system in and for the public sphere, thus having positive effects beyond the specific actor’s individual activities.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has placed the present thesis in the context of three strands of public service broadcasting research; policy studies, institutional studies, and studies of public service broadcasting and democracy. Reviewing recent contributions to the field across these strands, I have argued that a historically grounded, comparative policy study of public broadcasters' meeting with the internet is required if we want to grasp the current situation and critically assess the public service potential of online communication. For the latter task, I have argued, an explorative interest is crucial – one that employs normative public sphere theory, and also engages in analyses of specific existing services. On this basis, I have laid out the approach of the present study as necessarily eclectic, but with critical political economy of communication as a main inspiration. I have also discussed the relation between public and commercial media, and democratic functions. I presume that there are certain advantages with retaining media actors not based on purely commercial logics, also on the internet. This basic view underlies my interest in the publicly owned and mainly publicly funded institutions chosen as cases for the study. Additionally, I subscribe to the idea that public service media may serve central democratic functions in society. These features of my perspective are elaborated on through the varied discussions in both parts of this thesis. To start with, I explore them in the next chapter.



## **Chapter 3: Broadcasting and democracy**

In this chapter, I investigate ideas about democratic functions ascribed to broadcast media. First, via scholarly work on connections between radio and television as broadcasting on the one side, and modern societies on the other; second, in arguments behind broadcasting regulation; and third, in the history of the birth of public service broadcasting institutions in the UK, Norway, and Germany. On this basis, I then look at how media researchers have dealt with the problem of defining public service broadcasting.

A thorough discussion of links between democracy and broadcasting at different levels, in different places, and at different times, is in my view a prerequisite for understanding how public service relates to democracy when moving to the internet. Thus, this chapter serves to explore general ideas underlying all the discussions in my thesis. Specifically, it should clarify my view on the role of public service broadcasting in democratic society, and present basic historical background information on the thesis' cases.

### **Broadcast media and modern society**

Many saw radio as a wireless telegraph, a way to communicate point-to-point over large distances. Similarly, in the 1930s, TV-amateurs in the US built television sets capable of communicating two ways. In 1932, German poet, playwright, and theatre director Bertolt Brecht advocated his much referred to vision that radio could be “the finest possible communication apparatus in public life [...] if it knew how to receive as well as to transmit” (in Silberman 2000, 42). Despite initiatives like

Brecht's, the overwhelmingly dominant way to use both technologies became one-way from a central sender to a scattered mass of anonymous recipients – as broadcasting. Technical inventions and strong economic interests, represented by the consumer electronics industries, were clearly imperative for this development (e.g. Allen 1983, 114ff). Yet, the process, as in the case of every new medium, is best understood as a complex interplay of diverse forces (e.g. Flichy 1995, 99ff; Gripsrud 2002, 263ff; Winston 1998, 67ff). To fully understand the quick and massive growth of broadcast radio from the 1920s, and later television, we need to examine certain characteristics of modern society.

Broadcasting answered to a latent social need. Gripsrud (1998, 20-1; 2002, 266-7) points to examples of how visions of broadcasting flourished in both the media and the arts in the Western World already in the 1880s. Drawings published by the French artist Robida in 1882 showed transmission of moving pictures – content-wise covering arts, entertainment, advertising, education, and news – straight into people's living rooms. This corresponds well to the practice some 50 years later. In an analogous example from 1891, the Norwegian writer Arne Garborg let a character representing positivistic belief in the future in his novel *Trøtte mænd* [*Tired Men*] predict how religious services, political debate, cultural content and entertainment would be distributed to screens at home. That same year, Thomas A. Edison announced that a device for transmitting pictures from real events directly to homes would be ready within months. Such examples may help explain the immense success of broadcast media. Gripsrud stresses how “transmission to private homes from some central unit was simply in keeping with both socio-economic structures and the dominant ways of life, in modern and modernizing societies” (1998, 21). This contrasts Raymond Williams' thesis that “it is not only that the supply of broadcasting facilities preceded the demand; it is that the means of communications preceded their content” (1975, 25). The interesting question, then, is what constituted the societal basis for the latent need.

Williams identified two features underlying broadcasting as a cultural form. First, he introduced the concept of mobile privatization (Williams 1975, 26-7). The social organization went from extended families in stable local communities to nuclear families in big cities. This concerns both geographical and social mobility: capitalism let inhabitants leave traditional settings, or forced them to. At the same time, the basis was in place for shifts between social groups. Households became more



self-contained and closed – i.e. more private. In this situation, social coherence and identities had to rely on new sources. Broadcast media were well fit to deliver, directly into the living room. Second, Williams pointed to a general centralization of powers and resources, both within public and private sectors. While the inhabitants left their familiar surroundings, the state was growing, and capital got concentrated in larger corporations. A closer look at the term broadcasting helps us see why this specific organizational form was useful for authorities in such a situation.

Originally, “broadcasting” referred to the sowing of seeds. John Durham Peters eloquently lays out the implied meanings by way of Christ’s parable of the sower:

A sower, [Jesus] says, goes forth to sow, broadcasting seed everywhere, so that it lands on all kinds of ground. Most of the seeds never bear fruit. Some sprout quickly [...] only to be scorched by the sun or overcome by weeds. Others sprout but get eaten by birds or trampled by travellers. Only a rare few land on receptive soil, take root, and bring forth fruit abundantly, variously yielding a hundredfold, sixtyfold, or thirtyfold (in Peters 1999, 51).

Broadcasting is “not only an agricultural metaphor, it is also one of optimistic modernism. It is about planning growth in the widest possible circles, the production, if the conditions are right, of a rich harvest” (Gripsrud 1998, 20). Firstly, then, authorities could use broadcast media to spread important information and cultural or educational content efficiently to all. Even though some did not even receive the transmission, and many interpretations of the message deviated from the sender’s intention, it could contribute to the project of Enlightenment through the use of yet others (Peters 1999, 53).

Through its distribution to all, broadcasting served a second function for authorities. Broadcast media were well suited as a means to cultivate a common identity in a population (Williams 1975, 28ff). Primarily, this identity was placed on a national level, as identification and loyalty was transferred from local communities to the nation state. The idea of a nation as an “imagined community” depends, among other factors, on the contribution of national mass media (Anderson [1983] 1996, 19ff, 43ff). The press in particular gave the impression of a body of national citizens constituting a shared, synchronous experience. Broad-

cast media intensified such feelings – not least through qualities of “liveness” – and were thus central in the construction and maintenance of “imagined communities” (e.g. Johansen 1999, 225ff).

In addition to the economic interests of the budding consumer electronics industry, then, broadcasting fitted well with authorities’ needs in modern societies. But one more crucial factor must be considered, although not stressed by Williams (1975): broadcasting is “one-way and unconditional and for anyone and everyone anywhere anytime” (Scannell 2005, 131). Broadcast media provided a new kind of input on culture and society for people to base their more or less informed opinions on (Gripsrud 2002, 271). The simultaneous dissemination to all meant that broadcast media could facilitate citizens of a nation to contribute to the construction of public opinion in the public sphere.

Claiming the first social function ascribed to broadcasting – the spreading of information to all – is quite straightforward. Across the Western World, institutions were set up to serve a national territory, from the centre to the periphery. The second social function, pertaining to constructions of national identities, has been the subject of substantial attention from media scholars (e.g. Löfgren 1990, 100ff on the Swedish case; Orgeret 2006 on the South-African; Padovani 2007 on the Jamaican; Van den Bulck 2001 on the Flemish). To credit broadcasting a role in relation to the public sphere may appear more problematic.<sup>11</sup> The role is a democratic function of a certain kind. The one-way scattering from a few to many seems to contrast with visions of radio and television as dialogic instruments, as proposed by for instance Brecht.

This contrast between one- and two-way public communication runs through the history of broadcasting. It also surfaces in discussions of the democratic functions of the internet. In *The dissemination and dialogue article*, I use the contrast to problematize functions ascribed to broadcasting and online communication, respectively. I argue that while broadcasting may mimic dialogue, online communication can serve disseminating functions. I contend that dissemination has a normative po-

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<sup>11</sup> As Nick Couldry and Mark Langham remind us in a recent article, broadcasting’s functions relating to national identity building and the public sphere also need to be explored empirically (2008, 7; also Couldry, Livingstone and Markham 2007). Doing just that, and with a standing in media phenomenology, they argue for a differentiated view of people’s public orientation, which also accounts for withdrawal and disengagement.

tential in the public sphere that should be included in a sound concept of public service media online. This does, importantly, not disregard the need for mediated public dialogue among citizens. Rather, it means I hold the potential democratic functions ascribed to disseminating forms to be valuable in facilitating public opinion formation. The theorization of broadcast media in modern society outlined here substantiates this perspective. Scrutiny of actual broadcasting policy further serves to do so: on a fundamental level, all approaches to broadcasting regulation rest on the idea of its democratic value.

### **The rationale behind broadcasting regulations**

Radio and television have been subject to an exceptional regulatory regime compared to other mass media. While anyone is free to start a newspaper or take up book publishing in the world's modern democracies, this is not the case for broadcasting. Some kind of licence has been required everywhere, and in many societies the state got directly involved in running broadcasting operations. The standard legitimization of broadcasting regulation rests on the scarcity argument. Both radio and television were from the outset sent via radio waves through the air's electromagnetic spectrum, later to be called terrestrial distribution. A certain portion of the frequency spectrum is suited for this kind of signal. As a consequence, there was scarcity of a resource needed for broadcasting; frequencies for distribution. If there are many users of the same or neighbouring frequencies, signals are hard to separate and decipher. To prevent impossible user conditions, some kind of organization of the frequency resources is needed. From the 1920s, state apparatuses across Western Europe and North America took it upon themselves to do so. The idea was that the public owned the electromagnetic spectrum. Those who wished to make use of it had to ask the people – represented by the government – for permission.

The scarcity argument has proved remarkably resilient. After radio it was employed in the case of broadcast television as well. When the role of terrestrial distribution diminished during the 1980s in the face of satellites and varied cabled technologies, the argument still remained central as the rationale for regulations. On the threshold of the digital era a decade later, calls for the abandonment of traditional broadcast regulation increased in strength with reference to new technological possibili-

ties. Still, the scarcity argument retained importance for regulators in different polities (Gibbons 1998, 77ff; Moe 2003, 42; Röhl 1996, 244ff; Søndergaard 1998, 27). Importantly, the scarcity argument is supposed to provide legitimacy free of value judgements. It does not refer to any perceived effects of broadcasting that need to be prevented or encouraged. Thus, the rationale might seem like a dead-end in a search for regulatory expressions of, or assumptions about, the democratic role of broadcasting. To show that this is not the case, consider arguments against broadcasting's special regulatory status.

Market liberalists have persistently attacked the scarcity argument. Building on the ideas of British economist R. H. Coase, then-Chairman of the US Federal Communication Commission (FCC) Mark S. Fowler and his legal assistant Daniel L. Brenner set out this criticism in a much-quoted 1982 article. All markets, they claim, face lack of resources. Commercial broadcasters should have to compete for frequencies just like they compete for every other component they need – equipment, building facilities, and skilled labour – and like they compete with other businesses for attractive land (Fowler and Brenner 1982, 211). The key scarcity in broadcasting is not “megahertz”, but advertising money (Fowler and Brenner 1982, 223). Anyone should be free to start a new radio or television channel, as long as they have the funds to get sole rights to a necessary frequency spectrum. The market alone should control such rights. The state just needs to prevent misuse. Thus, broadcasting is likened to the market for newspapers – or consumer sports utilities, for that matter.

The market liberalist approach does entail some difficulties (Gripsrud 2002, 275ff; Keane 1991, 64ff). Firstly, it is expensive to produce attractive radio and television programmes, construct them into a continuous schedule, and then broadcast them. This is very different from printing an issue of a journal, for instance, and trying to sell it in local shops. Consequently, even in the digital era, relatively few actors are able to compete in the first place. Secondly, controversy would certainly arise if authorities now decided to shift to a market liberalist approach. Those privileged by today's regime may not welcome increased competition. Market liberalists also acknowledge these points (Fowler and Brenner 1982, 242ff). Notwithstanding such more practical challenges to a market liberalist alternative, the scarcity argument can indeed be dismissed as vicarious. Already in 1983, Nicholas Garnham (1983, 13), for instance, called it “simply untrue”, and pointed to social and

economic reasons for broadcasting regulations – not technical. “Spectrum scarcity can be seen in retrospect as an excuse for, rather than the real reason behind, content regulation” (McGougan 1999, 184; also Gibbons 1998, 75; Hoffmann-Riem 1996, 331; Marsden and Ariño 2005, 14). If so, what is then the “real reason”?

Mainstream economic science, the theoretical basis for a market liberalist perspective, provides a cue. The fundamental assumption of mainstream economic science is consumer sovereignty. It holds the free market as the basic way to organize the production, transaction and consumption of goods in society. Regulation of broadcasting shields it from the market, thereby representing an exception from the general rule. From the perspective of economic theory this may be explained with reference to some basic characteristics of broadcasting. Firstly, my use of a broadcast radio or television programme does not reduce the amount of that programme available for anyone else. Secondly, it seems hard to exclude someone from using a programme – once it is broadcast, everyone within its signal reach can in principle consume it. Economists call these features non-rivalry and non-excludability. A pure public good is one that has these characteristics (Rosen 1992, 67ff).<sup>12</sup>

The market is poorly equipped to provide public goods since it is difficult to get paid for them. The result is market failure. A typical example is a lighthouse. Once it is built and functions, it may be used by anyone, and it is hard to collect a fee from each user. As a result, commercial interests will not offer lighthouse services. Basically, even pure public goods must be needed to deserve state intervention. If no one finds the good in question necessary, there is no problem. A society with no coastline, for example, has no need for a lighthouse service. If, on the other hand, a good is deemed necessary, society may intervene to correct the market failure in line with presumed public demand.

A newspaper is not a public good. If I consume one – physically hold it and read it – my “rivals” are hindered from doing the same. And it is easy to exclude those who cannot pay for one. Broadcasting, on the other hand, is often referred to as a public good in an effort to explain the legitimacy of its regulatory position (e.g. Fraser 1996, 111; Gibbons 1998, 76; see Rolland 2005, 12ff for a discussion). Though it shares

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<sup>12</sup> Within public finance theory, non-rivalry is sometimes used as the only defining characteristic of a public good (Rosen 1992, 66; Stewart et al. 2004, 346ff; also Fraser 1996 who calls broadcasting “an excludable public good”).

some of its characteristics, broadcasting today does not qualify as a pure public good according to the definition I apply. While broadcasting signals may be non-rivalry, more and more efficient arrangements are developed and enforced to exclude non-payers, from licence fees on television sets, via encryption of signals, to pay-per-view programmes. Those interested in broadcasting as a business have always strived to change it into narrowcasting (Scannell 2005, 131). However, economists also have concepts for such bordering cases – “tainted” public goods prone to market failure, which are viewed as central for a working society.

Merit goods are goods deemed socially valuable for people to consume, independently of actual demand. Consumption of merit goods serves the public interest. The originator of the term, Richard A. Musgrave, defines it as goods “considered so meritorious that their satisfaction is provided for through the public budget, over and above what is provided for through the market and paid for by private buyers” (Musgrave [1959] 1961, 13). Market failure is still the starting point: there is a perceived under-consumption of the good if left to the market. But in contrast to public goods, the provision of merit goods is not based on presumed consumer desire. Rather, some authority interferes with consumer preferences. The reverse is demerit goods, which would be over-consumed if left to the free market. Alcohol and tobacco are typical representatives. A main feature of (de)merit goods, then, is their moral justification (see Ver Eecke 2003).<sup>13</sup> The label is not based on technical characteristics, but on value judgements.

A prime example is the city park. For commercial real estate development, land is worth more for other purposes. Authorities expropriate grounds and build city parks because they consider it valuable for the inhabitants, i.e. in the interest of the public. The use of parks may for instance be seen to improve physical or mental health.<sup>14</sup> Such effects are

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<sup>13</sup> The concept of merit goods is controversial in some strands of mainstream economic science. It creates a paradox since it on the one hand is an epistemologically necessary concept, while it on the other hand contradicts the basic assumption of consumer sovereignty. Arguing for its worth in an interesting article, W. Ver Eecke (2003, 709) shows how even Adam Smith operated with an (unconceptualized) idea of merit goods. See also Ronald Dworkin’s (1985, 221-33) lucid discussion of the legitimacy of a liberal state’s support of the arts.

<sup>14</sup> See Concetta M. Stewart et al. (2004) for a brief history of the “park movements” in the UK and the US, and a further discussion of political aims behind the emergence of city parks.

hard to measure, and rest on an assessment where authorities find it worth to infringe in the market. City parks are merit goods. Broadcast radio and television can also be seen as merit goods (e.g. Graham 1999, 27). Even the most eager supporters of a market liberalist approach would agree: Fowler and Brenner (1982, 252-5) admit that the market will fail to fulfil some kinds of broadcasting services. They liken such services with city parks. In their view, channels outside the market could provide local news and cultural content. These are programme genres Fowler and Brenner consider important for a society, but not commercially viable.

Resting on an idea of the public interest served by broadcasting, merit good arguments prescribe a democratic task for radio and television, linked to their disseminating characteristics. The scope of this task, however, varies. Fowler and Brenner represent a restrictive version. Existing US rules give a limited number of commercial providers generous leeway, subject to merely minimal content regulations. Still, an idea of broadcasting serving the public interest underpins the approach (e.g. FRC 1928; FCC chairman Newton N. Minow 1961), not only in regards to pluralism of content and genres, but also as regards educational aims (see Price 1995, 153ff for a critical discussion).

Merit good arguments are a way to understand broadcasting's special regulatory status in modern democratic societies. These arguments show how a value-based assessment of radio and television's democratic functions underlies all regulation. Yet, merit good arguments do not provide a satisfactory understanding of the role ascribed to public service. In Western European countries, a markedly different approach was taken than in the US, with a more expansive idea of the public interest which broadcasting should serve. This approach does not apply market failure as the starting point. Instead, it prescribes a role for broadcast media which is broader than as a strict merit good. These ideas were sought embodied in public broadcasting institutions.

### **The birth of public service broadcasting**

American broadcaster and entrepreneur David Sarnoff was possibly the first to speak of broadcast radio as a public service. In 1922, he claimed that "broadcasting represents a job of entertaining, informing and educating the nation, and should therefore be regarded as a public service"

(quoted in Briggs, 1985, 18; see MacDonnell (ed.) 1991, 1). Sarnoff listed the core aspects – entertain, inform and educate – which have dominated public service broadcasting policy debates and strategy documents alike till this day. He also demarcated the service to the nation. The public service concept invoked by Sarnoff was widely used to describe a kind of provision deemed vital for every member of society, regardless of spending power, educational level, social standing, geographical location, or gender. At different times in different polities, varied services have been part of this category, from infrastructure like roads or telephone lines, via health care, to education. Sarnoff's suggestion was to add broadcasting to the list in the 1920s USA. His call was not heard. Instead, it was the approach taken across the Atlantic which became defining for public service broadcasting.

John Reith was the first to give public service broadcasting an institutional form. As Director-General of the privately owned *British Broadcasting Company* (BBC) from 1922, he laid down four components of broadcasting as a public service (Briggs 1961, 214-8). Firstly, it should be protected from commercial pressure. Secondly, it should serve the whole nation. Thirdly, it should be a monopoly. Fourthly, it should have high programme standards. In 1927, the BBC was renamed the *British Broadcasting Corporation*, and got a Royal Charter as a public monopoly. Reith's ideas about broadcasting – later to be dubbed “Reithianism” – can be seen as a response to proponents of market-based radio. In a famous book from 1924, Reith criticized claims that radio should just give people “what they want”. Few know what they want, and very few what they need, Reith declared. Thus;

our responsibility is to carry into the greatest possible number of homes everything that is best in every human department of knowledge, endeavour and achievement, and to avoid the things which are, or may be hurtful (1924, 34).

Reith identified a social function for broadcasting as a unifying tool, particularly through dissemination of great national ceremonies. But, he also stressed the “immense potential for helping in the creation of an informed and enlightened democracy” (Scannell and Cardiff 1991, 7). Indeed, broadcasting gave citizens access to something from which most had been excluded: radio helped people “make up their own minds on



many matters of vital moment” (Reith 1924, 19). As a result, Reith envisioned “a new and mighty weight of public opinion” (1924, 19). Here, the idea about broadcasting’s role in and for a public sphere is explicit.

Importantly, Reith did not construct British broadcasting policy alone. In Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff’s reading, “the definition of broadcasting as a public utility to be developed as a national service in the public interest came from the state” (1991, 6). Reith was a key figure in interpreting this definition. He assigned an explicitly democratic function to broadcasting, institutionalized as the BBC. In her comparative and historical analysis of the BBC and the NRK, Trine Syvertsen also grants Reith a pivotal role as an ideologist (1992, 67ff). His “positive commitment” was “crucial for what became the final outcome” (1992, 80). Asa Briggs, dedicating his history of UK broadcasting to Reith, states that “Reith did not make broadcasting, but he made the BBC” (1961, 4).

After a tenacious political process incorporating proposals from three different governments, Norway also ended up with a public radio monopoly in the shape of *Norsk Rikskringkasting* (NRK) in 1933. Although ideas corresponding to Reith’s can be found among representatives of civil society, he had no counterpart in Norway (Syvertsen 1992, 79). Rather, throughout the political process, “the *problems* connected with the private broadcasting structure and the economic and social constraints, played a more dominant role” (Syvertsen 1992, 80-1, emphasis in original). Syvertsen argues that Norwegian decision-makers had only elementary knowledge of the British solution. Thus, Norway and the UK ended up with structurally similar institutions after quite different discussions and processes.

Syvertsen (1992) does not stress ideas of broadcasting as facilitating the construction of public opinion among the weightiest arguments in the public debate about public service arrangements. Hans Fredrik Dahl (1999), meanwhile, in his history of Norwegian broadcasting, identifies such arguments already in the early debates. In 1923, for instance, the Telegraph Board [*Telegrafstyret*] pointed to three interests in broadcasting: the public wanted the best and cheapest service possible for all; the industry sought profit; while the state wanted to ensure that social aspects were brought to the forefront – that broadcasting catered to the public interest (in Dahl 1999, 50). More concretely, in 1928 the periodical *Norsk radio* [*Norwegian Radio*] gave voice to visions grounded in discontent with the existing system. As Brecht advocated some years later,

broadcast radio could let impulses travel from the periphery of society to its centre: “[broadcasting] will be able to uphold the old healthy tradition which the political mass meetings [*folkemøtene*] stood for in their time” (quoted in Dahl 1999, 133).<sup>15</sup> This is an explicit reference to the medium in service of the public sphere, albeit one focused on its potential for grassroots initiatives. Still, no prominent proponents spelled out such functions, and no function in or for the public sphere was formally included in the regulations. The birth of public service broadcasting in Germany provides an example of the latter.

Like the British, German broadcasting history may be told with one man’s work as a starting point. Hans Bredow had an “overwhelming influence” on German broadcasting in the pre-WWII years, according to Peter J. Humphreys (1994, 125). In the Weimar Republic (1919-33), the state took control of broadcasting. Especially from 1926 on, Bredow’s position was indisputable as Broadcasting Commissioner of the Imperial Post Minister [*Rundfunkkommissar des Reichpostministers*]. Contemporaries hailed him as the creator of German broadcasting (Kümmel and Löffler 2002, 231; also Dussel 2004, 28-40). Although broadcasters just showed arts and entertainment programmes, a kind of public service ethos was still central to their function. Bredow was “imbued” with this ethos, and “steeped in a Hegelian concept of the civilising mission of the state” (Humphreys 1994, 125). This was a paternalistic top-down approach, which left little room for broadcasting serving public opinion formation.

After *Stunde Null* in 1945, each of the Allied occupants set up broadcasting services in their respective sectors of West Germany.<sup>16</sup> The occupants all sought to steer radio and television away from the clasp of private actors, state, politicians, and other sectional interests; they were all influenced by the British model; and they all decided on a decentralised solution in keeping with the general administrative and economic structure they were imposing (Humphreys 1994, 128-9; Lucht 2006, 96ff).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> All translations from Danish, German, Norwegian, and Swedish are my own.

<sup>16</sup> See Uricchio (1989) for an interesting analysis of Nazi television, including its motivation and remarkable system of public screening rooms. Humphreys (1994, 126ff; also Dussel 2004, 81ff) further shows connections between the Weimar Republic’s approach to broadcasting and that of the Third Reich. For the history of broadcasting policy in the DDR, see Altendorfer (2001, 39ff) and Dussel (2004, 131ff).

<sup>17</sup> See Burns and van der Will (2003) for a historical overview of the federally devolved structure of German cultural policy, and a discussion of the importance of regional sovereignty.

The remaining characteristics varied between the different sectors, and were often traceable back to the respective occupier's broadcasting system. For instance, every institution got a broadcasting council [*Rundfunkrat*] with public representation to secure public accountability and control. The composition and election process of these councils, however, varied (see Altendorfer 2001, 25ff; Dussel 2004, 187ff for further discussions).

By 1948, every broadcaster was returned to public ownership in West Germany, and in 1950 the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (ARD) was founded to represent the regional institutions' common interests.<sup>18</sup> By then, the function of broadcasting for the public sphere had been formally established: the Basic Law [*Grundgesetz*] of 1949 provided freedom of opinion and information. And the lawmakers "bore witness to the extraordinary power of broadcasting over the formation of public opinion" (Humphreys 1994, 132; also Porter and Hasselbach 1991, 4-6; Dussel 2004, 191ff). "By common understanding", Humphreys continues, West-German public service broadcasting was obligated to "help the public to make full use of its constitutional right of having an important say in the management of the new state" (1994, 133). German public service broadcasting was formally ascribed a role in and for the public sphere from its inception.

The approach taken in these short glimpses of the birth of public service broadcasting can be criticized. In a "reappraisal" of the establishment of the BBC and the NRK, Asle Rolland (2005) provides a refreshing example of such criticism. Rolland employs public choice theory, assuming "that people are motivated by self-interest" (Rolland 2005, 7). And, he remarks, this also goes for "directors of public broadcasting companies" (Rolland 2005, 7). His starting point is an attack on how earlier works – predominately Syvertsen's (1992) – present nationwide broadcasting as something that was taken for granted. According to Rolland, only two stakeholders had strong interests in making broadcasting national: states and radio manufacturers. The latter were driven by economic motives – to sell as many mass produced receivers as possible

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<sup>18</sup> The current ARD member institutions and their territories are listed in appendix 1. *Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen* (ZDF) was established in 1963 to complement the ARD with a national television service. Its basic regulatory status and funding scheme resembles the ARD's.

– while the former were motivated by the need for control (Rolland 2005, 6, 9-10).

In the British case, Rolland opposes Scannell and Cardiff's (1991) analysis by attributing the proposal of national reach to Reith's self-interest. At the outset, Reith sought to get rid of the BBC's private owners in the radio industry to escape the influence of commercial considerations on the programme service (Rolland 2005, 7). Knowing that nationwide broadcasting would not be profitable, he argued for national reach. In 1926, the government-appointed Crawford Committee "swallowed the bait" (Rolland 2005, 7). In that situation, the state could intervene (Rolland 2005, 2). Its motives, accordingly, were to prevent anyone else from using radio contrary to the state's interests. After getting rid of the commercial owners, Reith then had to secure independence from state pressure. Therefore, he stressed the need for freeing the BBC from direct state interference to let the corporation develop its political status as public service (Rolland 2005, 8). In Norway, Rolland (2005, 9) ascribes Reith's dual strategy to two different state actors fighting for power. On the one hand, the Telegraph Board, which reported to the Ministry of Trade, positioned itself as the only legitimate supplier of national broadcasting infrastructure. A main argument was the need to cut the ties between broadcasters and the radio industry to ensure independence. On the other hand, the Ministry of Church and Education linked broadcasting to a "high cultural task", popular enlightenment, and education (Rolland 2005, 9).

For historical and political reasons, a national solution was not chosen in West Germany. The idea of delegating powers and authority to the federal states was essential for the post-war political system. Moreover, the construction of the broadcasters may appear more straightforward than in the other cases. It was clearly based on recent experiences from the Allied authorities' home countries. Thus, the German situation deviates from the Norwegian, not only with the federal system. In Norway, the most direct source of inspiration was negative: the US system (Syvertsen 1992, 67). Still, applying public choice theory would clearly make us question the motives of key pre-WWII figure Bredow. In addition, one could argue that post-war ideas about securing public control of the ruling powers *inter alia* by supporting a public sphere was a means to prevent the future emergence of another despot. Whether or not concerns lay more with German citizens' actual quality of life, or with international political power balances, would still remain disputable.

Rolland's perspective is useful in reminding us that we should not disregard self-interest when studying public service broadcasting. Public choice theory can undoubtedly explain much behaviour. There is no need to think that Reith, Bredow, and Norwegian state bureaucrats, or politicians then and later, have acted on purely altruistic motives. However, Rolland does not seem to deny the idea that broadcasting may actually serve the public sphere, nor that Reith wanted and actively lobbied for such a function. It is the interests behind, the motivation for building such a service, Rolland questions. For the present study, it is not imperative to try, for instance, to figure out if Reith really believed in empowering the general public to better their political control, or if his actions are best understood as directed at gaining control over issues affecting his personal interests. Both explanations may acknowledge a role for broadcasting in and for the public sphere – as cultivating and facilitating an arena where people can get access to information and exchange views with the intent to inform the rule of society.

The founders of public service broadcasting, then, had ideas about how to describe it, giving it an explicit and expansive task of serving citizens in a democracy. The idea was not tied up to a market failure argument. Trying to define public service broadcasting now – approximately 80 years later – from the perspective of media research, seems more challenging.

### **Defining public service broadcasting**

“I know it when I see it”, stated Justice Potter Stewart in a famous attempt to evade the task of defining a controversial concept in a 1964 US Supreme Court decision (US Supreme Court 1964, n.p.). Stewart was talking about pornography. 35 years later, Gavyn Davies chaired a review panel, appointed by the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS), on the BBC's future funding. In the foreword to the panel's report, he (presumably unintentionally) paraphrased Justice Stewart: “We decided that we may not be able to offer a tight new definition of public service broadcasting, but we nevertheless each felt that we knew it when we saw it” (DCMS 1999, 10). Pornography and public service broadcast-

ing have little in common, but they are both slippery concepts, constantly changing, and hard to pinpoint when we get down to specifics.<sup>19</sup>

This feature has attracted scholarly interest. Problematically, some have argued against its appeal, rather than acknowledging the inherently contested nature of the term. “Defining public service broadcasting is by now a favourite pastime”, commented Karol Jakubowicz in 2003, “so much so that ultimately that definition, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder” (Jakubowicz 2003a, 153). A few years earlier, he stated that “there isn’t any” definition of public service broadcasting (2000, 1; also Feintuck, 1999, 66-7; Raboy 1996, 6ff). The standpoint was related to a much-cited argument made by Trine Syvertsen. Scrutinizing both politicians’ and media researchers’ uses of the concept in the 1980s, she collected over 30 different criteria, none of which were shared by all definitions, and several of which were contradictory (Syvertsen 1990, 191-2; 1992, 17-8). Further, she found that public service broadcasting described both a national system as a whole; certain institutions; and a mixture of programmes. By the end of the decade, Syvertsen revisited the matter. In 1990, she had found the concept to be “highly elastic, not to say amorphous” (in Syvertsen 1999a, 6). Developments in Norwegian media policy in the years that had followed, related to the advent of commercial public service actors, made her reach for an even stronger description. She now perceived the expansion of uses as so extensive that it “in practice entails emptying the concept of meaning” (Syvertsen 1999b, 10, my translation). The fruitful way forward, she declared, was to

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<sup>19</sup> In fact, neither scholars nor policy actors seem to even agree to stick to one term. “Public service broadcasting” is often used interchangeably with “public broadcasting”. For instance, one EU key document is titled “Protocol on the system of public broadcasting in the Member States” (EC 1997), but talks about “funding of public service broadcasting”. The concepts used in other languages also differ. The German *öffentlich-rechtlicher Rundfunk* translates as “public-legal broadcasting”, whereas the Norwegian *allmennkringkasting* translates as “common/universal broadcasting”. These nuances can be seen as consequences of different political cultures and historical legacies. Such differences, and their implications on today’s situation, are under scrutiny in this thesis. In both countries, however, public service broadcasting is commonly used as a translation of the native terms. Therefore, I do the same here. I use the term public broadcasting in a restricted sense related to specific publicly owned organizations like the BBC, the NRK, the ARD, and the ZDF. Such institutions I concurrently label public broadcasters. Public service broadcasting, then, is a wider term, encompassing a range of organizational forms and institutional practices (see Syvertsen 1990, 183ff for further discussion; Humphreys 1994, 124ff for a discussion of the German version).

avoid “expansion ad absurdum”, and rather let public service broadcasting signify “a set of ideals and norms that imbued all media and cultural institutions in a historic era in the years around mid-[twentieth] century, but which ebbed out slowly starting in the 1970s and 1980s” (Syvertsen 1999a, 11).

It is not hard to see that a search for the one true meaning of public service broadcasting is bound to be futile. The term was coined a long time ago in a specific political, technological, and social context. As public service broadcasting has travelled in time and space, it has changed. However, rather than reject the concept for this reason, we should realize that change is a given. Public service broadcasting “has been overlaid by new layers of meaning, so that the nature of the concept has changed even though it retains important elements of its original meaning” (Søndergaard 1999, 21). Despite different operationalizations and alterations in changing contexts, it is in my view possible to identify basic values imbedded in the concept – across borders and outlasting specific technologies and regimes. Though it seems to contradict her argument that the public service broadcasting concept was being emptied “of meaning” (Syvertsen 1999b, 10, my translation), even Syvertsen refers to “a set of ideals and norms” for public service (1999a, 11). She refers this set to a certain time period. Still, the ideals and norms have to be identifiable. I hold that shared core values of public service broadcasting remain not only identifiable, but also relevant. At this point, Syvertsen’s and my view diverge (see Moe and Syvertsen forthcoming, note 2).

In identifying such values, some choose to rely on one specific definition. Underlining different profiles in different countries, but maintaining that “public service broadcasting in Europe has had many features in common”, Gripsrud finds the elements of the basic idea in the Council of Europe’s “authoritative nine-point definition” from 1994 (Gripsrud 2002, 271-2). The list requires public service broadcasting to be a common reference point for all; a broad public forum; to offer impartial news; have pluralistic, innovative, and varied programming both for wide audience groups and minorities; reflect ideas and beliefs in multi-ethnic and multicultural societies; be attentive to national and European cultural heritage; use independent producers; as well as extend user choice by also supplementing commercial alternatives.

Others obtain core values from inspection of several sources. A comprehensive survey of recent studies reveals for Georgina Born and

Tony Prosser “an overlapping consensus on certain core normative criteria for public service broadcasting” (2001, 671). They distil these criteria into three central principles, where the latter two are derived from the first:

- a) *Citizenship*: enhancing, developing and serving social, political, and cultural citizenship,
  - b) *Universality*, and
  - c) *Quality* of services and of output
- (Born and Prosser 2001, 671, italics in original).

Jakubowicz (2000, 3) takes a similar approach. He discusses different scholars’ and authorities’ contributions, and concludes: “in short, then, public service broadcasting aims to satisfy the democratic, social and cultural needs of society, providing content audience members want and objectively need” (2000, 4).

Already the definition preferred by Gripsrud operates on a quite general level. The two others prescribe even more abstract terms. Even if we settle on such values, a problem clearly remains in applying them (see Harrison and Woods 2007, 31-40; Raboy 1996, 7). Still, I find it both possible and valuable to identify core principles embedded in public service broadcasting. The list from the Council of Europe – which condenses policy definitions from countries across the continent – does spell out the basic tasks public service arrangements should adhere to, also beyond broadcasting: with a generally high quality service, it should serve all as citizens, and support their social, cultural, and democratic needs.

I acknowledge that discussing how such values are translated into existing institutionalizations and new practices is a key challenge for media research. This thesis takes up this challenge. The analysis in *The contexts and strategies article* is partly organized around the concept of enclosure linked to the principle of universality. The article also takes up the issue of commercial funding in relation to public service remits. The discussions in *The national policy article* and *The supranational policy article* are about whether or not and how national and supranational regulators, respectively, perceive that public broadcasters’ online activities may contribute to the democratic, social, and cultural needs of their societies. Lastly, the basic view laid out here forms the foundation for *The dissemination and dialogue article* and *The marginal services article*, as I formulate and test a scheme for public service media online.



To further see the public service broadcasting concept's relevance for media policy studies, it is helpful to separate different kinds of uses. Firstly, public service broadcasting is employed "as a tactical weapon" (Søndergaard 1999, 21) in the fight for legitimacy. In these instances, users are predominantly broadcasters who have or want some privilege, and the meaning of the concept is often rather loosely defined, if at all (see Bolin 2004 for an illuminating discussion). This kind of use points directly to a second.

Public service broadcasting is valuable for media actors seeking legitimacy because it exists (and in a hypothetical future situation – because it has existed) as a concept of actual media policy. This is the second form of use: the concept has retained its central position in European national and supranational regulations. Here, it has specific, and by default different, definitions depending on the status and function of the text in question, and the political, technological, and societal context. Since the 1990s, the development following general trends related to New Public Management have resulted in ever more specified criteria, measurements, and audits in connection to this kind of use of the public service broadcasting concept. The result is new and more concrete lists, seeking to make all parts of the services assessable in detail (e.g. Born 2003a; 2004, 213ff on the BBC; Eifert 2002 on Germany; Syvertsen 2004a, 179ff on Norway; Coppens and Saeys 2006; Jakubowicz 2003a; 2003b; Svendsen 2002 for European overviews).

The third kind of use is as an analytical concept – as a category for studies of media policy, institutions or content. Crucially, analysts must be aware of both of the two first kinds of uses. As an implication thereof, researchers should stay clear of attempts at overtly detailed definitions, ignorant of concrete arrangements and institutionalizations. This is also a key point for Syvertsen (1990, 191ff; 1999a). In my view, we should not reject the concept altogether. We should rather make clear how we conceive of it when we embark on analysis.

I see public service broadcasting as a media policy tool. With common basic values, it is employed differently in different contexts. In this study, I am not striving for a new, final definition. Rather, I am interested in how the concept is changing in a digital era. I am scrutinizing what some institutions are doing, and are allowed to do, under the label public service broadcasting – that is how the tool is put to use in specific instances. Moreover, I am interested in discussing similarities and differences among these uses, and look for ways to understand them. I

analyze if and, in such case, how basic ideas behind the concept are translated from broadcasting to the internet, how the ideas are applied in new circumstances. In addition, I offer my own reasoned suggestions on how this might be done.

The presumed bond between public service broadcasting and democracy – that public service broadcasting can serve a public of citizens – is central to my approach. As should be clear by now, it is in no way uncontroversial. Some question the very idea that broadcasting addresses citizens, claiming that from the inception broadcasters did not so much speak to the public as to families in private homes (e.g. Peters 1999, 217-25). More specifically, Syvertsen (1990, 183-4) has linked three different meanings of public service broadcasting to three time-periods. During its early years, public service was most often referred to as a public utility, focusing on universality. In Syvertsen's view, this meaning was gradually replaced by a second one: public service as for citizens in the public sphere. The third meaning sees public service as serving individual consumers. According to Syvertsen (1999b, 9-10), strong forces fought from the 1990s onwards to strengthen the use of the latter meaning at the expense of the second. She finds this shift also within public broadcaster organizations: the notion that they should serve the public as citizens was dominant "during the early days" (Syvertsen 2004b, 375). Competition brought the third notion – that of serving the consumer – to the forefront (Syvertsen 2004b, 363).

I hold that not only does it make sense to think of broadcasting as having addressed citizens, I maintain that such a position remains relevant even in a digital era, as public service broadcasters venture beyond radio and television. Thus, the policy issues in question are not only academically relevant, but also socially pertinent. This is the motivation for my interest in both empirically studying policy, and in fleshing out what public service media online could look like.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have first built on theoretical work on the connections between broadcast media and modern societies to argue that radio and television were fit to play an important role in the public sphere, linked to disseminating features of broadcasting. Second, I have showed that a detour through economic science illustrates how broadcasting's actual

regulatory status across the Western World rests on an idea of the public interest, giving radio and television a democratic task. Third, I have argued that the birth of public service broadcasting in the UK, Norway, and Germany in different ways and to different degrees show how the founders formulated an expansive task of serving public life. Lastly, through a critical discussion of media scholars' definitions of public service broadcasting, I have laid out my use of the concept: public service broadcasting is a tool for media policy applied differently in different contexts, but with certain shared characteristics. From this perspective, I study how the concept and the basic ideas behind it are translated beyond broadcasting.

Before discussing more article-specific issues, one further historically based contextualization is required. The next chapter follows the public broadcasters' move from broadcasting towards the internet.



## **Chapter 4: From broadcasting to the internet**

In this chapter, I first elaborate on public broadcasters' earlier supplementary activities. Thereby I relate the development of online activities to its historical context, and – with reference to key findings from the articles in part II – I argue why the online activities stand out. I next discuss categorizations of public broadcasters' different internet services, outlining the scope of my cases' offers. I also explain what kind of internet services I deal with. I then go on to discuss opposing positions on online communication's contribution to the public sphere, and link this issue to policy, in particular to public service as a media policy tool.

This chapter serves to further lay out my understanding of the issues at hand in this thesis, and to concretize the object under scrutiny in all the articles of part II.

### **The history of public broadcasters' auxiliary activities**

This thesis looks at what happens when public broadcasters venture onto the internet. I study to what extent this is considered to be different from broadcasting in different contexts. Furthermore, I discuss the consequences for public service media as a policy tool. I also offer my own thoughts on this issue. However, the alleged newness of the ongoing developments could be questioned: public broadcasters have always operated outside their core activity.

The Western Allied occupants, who ran German public broadcasting in the wake of the WWII, all wanted programme information to be spread widely. For that purpose, and considering the acute paper shortage, they issued licences for printing programmes listing magazines

in their respective sectors.<sup>20</sup> All those private actors. In the British sector of the occupied country, the licence went to a young entrepreneur who saw great potential in broadcasting-related businesses: Axel Springer (Seegers 2001, 151-9). Titled *Hörzu* [*Listen*], the first issue of his magazine was published in December 1946. It met competition from other publishers in other sectors. Through the 1950s, however, Springer developed *Hörzu* into the dominating national outlet (Seegers 2001, 191ff). It remains the leading magazine of its kind in Germany.

Contrasting the German situation, the Norwegian programme-listing magazine *Hallo! Hallo!* [*Hello! Hello!*], published from 1925, was included in the bargain when the NRK got established as a broadcasting monopoly in 1933. Re-launched as *Programbladet* [*The Programme Magazine*] in 1946, the NRK continued to publish it weekly until selling it to a commercial media company in 1989. For the NRK, a programme-listing magazine was on the one hand seen as a necessary evil – it was expensive. At various times before and after the war the NRK tried to find alternative solutions, either by selling the magazine, by advertising-funding it, or by getting newspapers to print programme information for free (Dahl 1999, 334ff; Dahl and Bastiansen 1999, 33). On the other hand, it was crucial to provide an overview of and information about programmes to facilitate ideal listener behaviour: planned, aimed at specific programmes of interest. Without programme listings, one could risk people turning on the radio on a whim, only to be disappointed by the lack of (interesting) programmes (Dahl and Bastiansen 1999, 34). In short, a programme listing magazine was required to support the core activity of broadcasting.

The first issue of *Radio Times*, containing radio listing for one week, was published in the UK in 1923. The BBC made the magazine in cooperation with a commercial publisher as a response to newspapers' boycott of free radio listings. By 1926, the broadcaster had taken complete editorial control of *Radio Times* (Currie 2001, 17). Three years later, the BBC launched another publication, called *The Listener*. Its objective, stated on the front cover of the first issue, was to act as “a medium for intelligent reception of broadcast programmes by way of amplification and explanation of those features which cannot now be dealt with in the editorial columns of the *Radio Times*” (in Currie 2001, 27). The News-

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<sup>20</sup> For the history of German pre-WWII programme listing magazines, see Seegers (2001, 87-151) and Dussel (2004, 50).

paper Proprietors Association protested, calling the second periodical “an illegitimate stretching of official activity” (in Currie 2001, 27). The parties compromised: advertising in *The Listener* should only be sold to cover costs, and editorial material “not related to broadcasting” should be restricted to maximum 10 % of the content. To evade the latter limitation, the editors printed for instance a lengthy feature on witchcraft to complement a broadcast adaptation of Shaw’s play *Saint Joan* (Currie 2001, 28). Meanwhile, the circulation of *Radio Times* grew steadily. An elaborate special issue on the Crowning of King George VI in 1937 – the first ever Coronation to be broadcast – sold over 3,5 million copies. During the 1950s, circulation numbers rose to 7-8 million per week. By the late 1990s, well over 1,5 million copies were still sold of each issue (Currie 2001, 242). While *The Listener* ceased publication in 1991, *Radio Times* lives on. 2008, then, marks the BBC’s 85th year in the programme guide business.

After WWII, the ARD started to build its own terrestrial distribution network for radio, and later for television. The broadcasting organization continued to do so even as the *Reichpost* took up the same activity. Only in 1961 was the whole network structure incorporated under the federal *Reichpost* following a Constitutional Court decision dividing responsibility for production and distribution between separate bodies (Altendorfer 2001, 129-30; ARD 2008). In the UK, the two public institutions, the BBC and the General Post Office, cooperated better. The latter was in charge of building infrastructure (as it was for the competing Independent Television Authority (ITA)). The BBC, however, owned its network, and sold it in 1997 to the commercial Crown Castle (later renamed National Grid Wireless) (National Grid Wireless 2008).

Up until WWII, the Norwegian telegraph and telecommunications authority was in charge of all technical aspects of broadcasting, including distribution networks. During the war, it was all transferred to the NRK by the Nazi government. Post-war, a longwinded fight between the two institutions ended only in 1948 with a compromise. The NRK was to control all technical activities, except distribution networks. Terrestrial radio, and later television, networks were to be built by *Telegrafverket*, but financed through, and owned by, the NRK (Dahl and Bastiansen 1999, 75ff; Skoe et al. 1999, 125ff). During the whole arduous process of covering hilly and rural Norway with broadcasting signals, then, the public broadcaster was used as the public body to manage distribution. As late as 1996, well after the introduction of commercial

broadcasting, the NRK sold a 60 % share of its terrestrial network to public telecom Telenor. The rest was sold off three years later. Though some argued it was imperative for a public broadcaster to both produce and distribute its own programmes, the institution urgently needed fresh revenue to stand its ground against commercial competitors in television (e.g. Moe 2003; Rossavik 2007, 329).

By the early 1970s, broadcasters across Europe were experimenting with ways to transmit extra information – such as subtitles – to television audiences. From these trails grew teletext services, offering a range of text-based information, typically including national, international and sporting news, weather and television schedules. The BBC presented its *Ceefax* service to the public in 1972. The NRK introduced *Tekst-TV* in 1983 (e.g. Vestbø 2002). In West Germany, the ARD and the ZDF collaborated to get political approval for a teletext service in the early 1970s, arguing that it constituted a new, additional information channel for broadcasters. Teletext was defined by the federal states as broadcasting in 1976. The national association of newspaper publishers filed a formal protest. They saw the new service as an “on-screen newspaper” [*“Bildschirmzeitung”*], and therefore as an activity for the press (Buchwald 1999, 356). In the years that followed, the public broadcasters and the newspaper publishers fought a battle to control teletext. If the former should find understanding among politicians for their claim that teletext was “an additional broadcasting service”, the latter argued that such a service at least had to withstand from news provision (Buchwald 1999, 357-8). When German teletext finally was launched in 1980 as a 75-page service, it was a joint effort from the two public broadcasters including 15 pages from the newspaper publishers (Buchwald 1999, 357).<sup>21</sup>

In the first article of part II – *The contexts and strategies article* – I discuss recent examples of the cases’ auxiliary initiatives facing digitalization. I find the scope of such activities to be strikingly wide; ranging from merchandize sales, via commercial mobile phone services, to theme parks. The three examples outlined here illustrate how public service broadcasting has always been about more than producing radio and television programmes, and offering them as part of a planned schedule. Not only have different institutions embarked on different kinds of auxiliary activities to support or promote core activities at different points in

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<sup>21</sup> The joint ARD and ZDF teletext service ended as late as in 2000, when the ZDF finally launched its own.



time. These institutions have also been employed as policy tools for things other than broadcasting. And all along, as I argue in *the context and strategies article*, competing forces have protested against expansion of the institutions' fields of activities.

In one sense, then, the internet activities represent just another step in a trailed direction. However, there are also clear differences from earlier developments. The broadcasters, competitors, and other policy actors all act as if more is at stake with the expansion to the internet than with any previous auxiliary activity. In fact, a key finding from *The national policy article* is that the BBC, the NRK, the ARD, and the ZDF all at different points in time have considered the internet not as auxiliary, but rather as an autonomous platform for public service. As I show in the article, the degree of political support for this view has varied. Nevertheless, online services do stand out also on other levels. For one thing, they are actual media productions – not technical equipment necessary for distribution of these productions, like television networks. Furthermore, the internet facilitates a variety of communicative forms far surpassing the potential of earlier extra outlets like radio listing magazines. In addition, the potential number, and geographical and demographical spread, of different users are much higher for internet services than teletext. Lastly, the range of different services make the internet ventures seem harder to grasp than previous initiatives. With this in mind, I now turn to tentative categorizations.

### **Categorizing public broadcasters' internet services**

Broadcasters have employed the internet for a range of purposes. Generally and unsurprisingly, big actors with strong market positions tend to have the most developed services. Further, purely commercial actors without any public service remits are inclined to offer a more limited range of activities. In an attempt to systematize different strategies, Mihály Gálík (2006, 120; also Cardoso and Espanha 2006, 141) suggests a typology of six models of television broadcasters' approaches to the web:<sup>22</sup> (1) *internet news* has a predominantly informational function, with an identity customary to online newsrooms; (2) *complementary informational*

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<sup>22</sup> The two texts use slightly different labels for some of the six models. My summary is an amalgamation.

supplements broadcast programmes, and provides in-depth information; (3) *enhanced electronic programme guide* promotes broadcast programmes – the object is to get more viewers to the broadcast; (4) *television content portal* is primarily an archive of searchable audiovisual content; (5) *institutional portal* provides institutional information, also regarding programmes; and (6) *networked interactivity* offers diverse innovative services including news, chats, and games – the objective is to create interactivity with broadcast programmes and their audiences.

Such a typology is more valuable as an overview of different services than as categories fit for specific institutions' strategies – especially when dealing with public broadcasters like my cases. Although he admits to the problem with such placements, Gálik (2006, 121-2) relates the BBC (somewhat confusingly focusing on BBC News) and the ARD to the first model, and the ZDF to the second. This, I will claim, is not a fair description, at least not of the situation by 2008. A snapshot of the cases' main website front pages illustrate why.<sup>23</sup>

The ard.de's front page (see appendix 2, figure 1) is basically organized according to six main categories:<sup>24</sup> news, sports, financial news, consumer advise [*Ratgeber*], entertainment [*Boulevard*], and culture. These categories are first presented in a top header, along with links to radio, television, institutional information, and a children's sub site. Then, the categories reappear in a wide mid-column, each with one top story and links to subsequent stories. Television and radio programme promotions – and links to online audio and audiovisual content – fill a narrow left column, while the third column to the far right is more varied; it includes links to feature stories, podcast provision as well as the latest draw of the national lottery. The footer is set aside for the logos of all ARD member institutions plus the auxiliary television channels the organization is involved in. All these logos are links to quite comprehensive websites provided by each member. In sum, though the ARD site focuses on news provision in different categories, it encompasses both features of

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<sup>23</sup> I do not undertake a complete analysis of the websites, but use their front pages to give an impression of their layout and scope.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.ard.de>. The following refers to the site as of February 13, 2008. Web information company Alexa estimated that 0,04 % of global internet users visited ard.de on an average day during spring 2008. Approximately 85 % stemmed from Germany, and 2,3 % from Austria (Alexa 2008). For discussion of some problematic issues with Alexa's methods and statistics, see for instance Avengate (2008).

an institutional portal, a television content portal, and networked interactivity.

The top header of the [zdf.de](http://www.zdf.de) front page (see appendix 2, figure 2) hosts three different horizontal navigation bars:<sup>25</sup> one serving help, contact and institutional information; a second with links to web-TV, content overview, and search functions; and a third offering shortcuts to thematic sub sites for news, sports, and the weather. The remaining front page is basically a two-column design, almost solely organized around ZDF television programmes. The upper half is dominated by three “top stories” directly linked to specific upcoming programmes of diverse genres. Further, the ZDF schedule of the day is featured to the left. All this could add up to an impression that the site primarily serves as cross-promotion of television programmes (Gálik 2006, 123). Still, around the middle of the page follows a Flash-based presentation of the web-TV service ZDFmediathek, and new links to sub sites for news and sports. Finally, the bottom-half features three additional programme teasers, and a list of top news. At the very bottom are search functions, plus links to a videotext service, a children’s programme sub site, and user-generated internet services under the heading “chats and forums”. Like with the ARD front page, the footer is set aside for the logos of the ZDF’s auxiliary television channels. In sum, though apparently linked to television programming, the ZDF’s web portal incorporates news, television archive material, and interactive services.

Nrk.no stands out as more comprehensive than [zdf.de](http://www.zdf.de). The front page (see appendix 2, figure 3) is also the far most extensive among the cases.<sup>26</sup> Divided into three columns, it shares characteristics with news sites, and is less tied to specific television and radio programmes. Below the front page’s top advertising banner, a horizontal navigation bar provides links to web-TV and -radio, and several sub sites: sports and news services; “magazine”, encompassing entertainment news; nature and wildlife; music; youth (under the youth radio channel P3 brand); and

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.zdf.de>. The following refers to the site as of February 13, 2008. Alexa estimated that 0,04 % of global internet users visited [zdf.de](http://www.zdf.de) on an average day during spring 2008. Approximately 86 % stemmed from Germany, and 3,2 % from Austria (Alexa 2008).

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.nrk.no>. The following refers to the site as of February 13, 2008. Alexa estimated that 0,02 % of global internet users visited [nrk.no](http://www.nrk.no) on an average day during spring 2008. Approximately 85 % stemmed from Norway, and 2,3 % from USA (Alexa 2008).

children. The different categories are more or less repeated in a vertical menu on the left of the front page. Here, a link also provides a register of over 50 different discussion forums held on the website. The front page has markedly more objects than the ZDF's. In a wide mid-column, one main news story is presented first, followed by a list of the subsequent stories from news and sports. More stories – with pictures, introductions, and links – fill up the rest of the column, only interrupted by advertising banners. The complete main menu is repeated at the very bottom. A narrower right column presents colourful self-promotions of selected programmes and services. It also houses a basic television schedule and links to regional news services. In sum, the front page presents NRK web provision as including news, complementary information, programme guides, television content, and networked interactivity.

As a website, [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) is even more comprehensive than its Norwegian counterpart. Still, the front page (see appendix 2, figure 4) is leaner and more compact.<sup>27</sup> The very top header includes links to sub sites for television, radio, user-generated content, local sites, an index, and search functions. A more advanced search function is also placed below in the left column. An extended main menu for browsing the site fills the rest of this column. The wide right column first presents the “top story”: a promotion for BBC “audio description for television” (free narration service for the hearing impaired). Below is a banner link to the online audiovisual content service iPlayer. The remaining portions of the page are made up of links to main categories like news, sports, television and radio, plus children’s sub sites, whereas the right margin holds a sophisticated localized news and weather service. Despite an almost modest appearance, the [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) front page reveals that the British broadcaster’s online presence far exceeds any one of the categories suggested by Gálik (2006).

There certainly are differences between broadcasters’ web activities. Juxtaposed to, say, new commercial actors in small markets, the big mass and wide scope of all my cases’ web presence are evident. As I argue in *The contexts and strategies article* and *The national policy article*, there

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk>. The following refers to the UK version of the site as of February 13, 2008. The international version of the front page is more comprehensive, sharing more characteristics with news portals. Alexa estimated that 1,92 % of global internet users visited [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) on an average day during spring 2008. Approximately 38 % stemmed from the UK, 20 % from the USA, and 3 % from India (Alexa 2008).

are also substantial differences among my cases' respective approaches. Here, my point is that the wealth of diverse and changing activities complicates simple, static categorization. The overview of my four cases' main site front pages illustrates that they all provide text-based news reports and institutional information; complementary in-depth programme content and different audiovisual material; as well as more experimental and participatory initiatives. And each of these services has been developed ever since their introduction. Basic news items are now often accompanied by videos. "Complementary in-depth programme content" spans from basic textual background information for a documentary, to elaborate programme sub sites with discussion forums, deleted scenes, competitions – even coupled with live transmitted follow-up Q&A-sessions hosted by programme creators after initial broadcast.<sup>28</sup> This impression of a complex and fluid universe – and of differences between the cases – is strengthened by the broadcasters' tendency to offer internet services outside their main portals.

A first type of such services is supplementary websites provided by the broadcasters, named and branded independently of the main portals. This includes the now-defunct commercial BBC site beeb.com, and the site for commercial subsidiary BBC Worldwide.<sup>29</sup> The BBC also holds several commercial websites to promote offline auxiliary ventures like its magazine business.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the ZDF has a separate site for merchandising sale.<sup>31</sup> Another instance is ARD member WDR's *Liebesalarm*, an independently branded youth website.<sup>32</sup> A second, related type of such peripheral services is websites offered in cooperation with external actors. Here, yr.no, a weather forecast site made in a joint venture between the NRK and The Norwegian Meteorological Institute, is a recent example.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> In a recent experimental instance, the NRK employed peer-to-peer technology to distribute the live audiovisual feed of an online "after party show" for a popular television comedy series (*Uti vår hage 2*) (NRK 2008a).

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.bbcworldwide.com> (accessed May 20, 2008).

<sup>30</sup> E.g. <http://www.radiotimes.com>; <http://www.bbcmagazines.com> (accessed May 20, 2008).

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.zdfshop.de> (accessed May 20, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.liebesalarm.de> (accessed May 20, 2008). The case of *Liebesalarm* is discussed in *The supranational policy article*.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.yr.no> (accessed May 20, 2008).

A third type is services embodied in other actors' outlets. This is currently done most aggressively in relation to different large audiovisual databases and social networking sites. In 2008, the ZDF, the NRK and the BBC (via commercial subsidiary BBC Worldwide) all provided audiovisual content through their respective "channel" on the web-based video database YouTube.<sup>34</sup> The BBC also made a deal to do something similar on the Rupert Murdoch-owned social networking site MySpace (Sweney 2008b).<sup>35</sup> In a more ephemeral experiment, the NRK built a profile on social networking service Facebook for the main character of a fictional pilot television series made for mobile phone distribution (see Sundet 2008 for a useful analysis).<sup>36</sup> A borderline case is activities in on-line virtual worlds like *Second Life*.<sup>37</sup> A fourth kind of peripheral services is "unofficial" web channels for communication – currently in the form of blogs – between those developing online services within the organizations and members of the public with a special interest in new services and issues of technology.<sup>38</sup> Both the BBC and the NRK maintain such services.<sup>39</sup>

It is not easy to grasp this wealth of constantly changing offers. One purpose of the present thesis is to discuss precisely their diverse developments over the last decade in relation to media policy issues. To clarify my main interest and limit the scope of the analysis, I make do with a quite simple, tentative distinction. This distinction sorts different services according to their apparent closeness or likeliness in form or content to the traditional activities of radio and television broadcasters. For instance, the majority of web-TV content provided by the public broadcasters have this far consisted of mere re-distribution of existing television programmes. Thus, it is in a sense an activity close to the tradi-

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/user/zdf>; <http://www.youtube.com/user/nrk>; <http://www.youtube.com/user/bbcworldwide> (accessed May 20, 2008).

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.myspace.com> (accessed May 20, 2008).

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.facebook.com> (accessed May 20, 2008).

<sup>37</sup> These virtual worlds are not based on the world wide web, but are built on the same basic technical protocols (TCP/IP), and employ the same structure of communication (client-server). I discuss this kind of services in *The marginal services article*.

<sup>38</sup> A blog (short for weblog) is a frequently updated, mainly text-based, website typically published by individuals in a personal style, consisting of chronologically dated entries in reverse order.

<sup>39</sup> E.g. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/bbcinternet>; <http://www.nrkbeta.no> (accessed May 20, 2008).

tional business of a broadcaster. Programme information, and to a lesser extent complementary in-depth content, may also be seen as support, carefully related to the public broadcasters' core activity of programme provision. In contrast, autonomous text-based news reporting; maintenance of discussion forums; construction of online games; facilitation of user-generated audiovisual content production – these are services that seem further removed from public service broadcasting, that make use of novel communicative forms, and simultaneously exploit novel potentials of online communication.

Throughout the discussions in part II, it is the latter kind of services I pay most attention to. My motivation is threefold. Firstly, these services are the most controversial in the context of public broadcasters' online activities and media policy. Secondly, they serve as valuable examples for a more theoretical problematization of the perceived communicative similarities and dissimilarities between broadcasting and internet services – a problematization which also affects my own tentative distinction between different services. Thirdly, this kind of services is consistently highlighted in public and scholarly debates about the internet and dimensions of democracy, specifically the workings of the public sphere.

### **The internet and the public sphere**

The internet carries both grave scares and lofty promises for democracy. For some, it represents a global, mediated consumer culture, threatening national identifications deemed necessary for participation in a democratic polity. For others, it facilitates e-democracy, either through electronic voting, or in the form of direct contact between the citizenry and their representatives. Such polar views also flourish in debates about the internet and the public sphere.

Both stands take as their starting point the mediated dialogue facilitated by internet technology. From there, the stands interpret the result for the workings of the public sphere quite differently. Echoing advocates of grassroots two-way radio and television in the 1930s, optimists hold online communication to facilitate a revolution for public lay participation. For the first time it is practically possible for anyone to reach out across the world with their opinions in conversation between equals. The role of speaker is no longer reserved for the expert few. The

result is a more democratic public life, where novel voices are let out (e.g. Kline and Burstein 2005). Others interpret the situation more pessimistically. According to commentator Andrew Keen, we are witnessing a praising of amateurs, which has dangerous effects:

The cult of the amateur has made it increasingly difficult to determine the difference between reader and writer, between artist and spin doctor, between art and advertisement, between amateur and expert. The result? The decline of the quality and reliability of the information we receive, thereby distorting, if not outrightly corrupting, our national civic conversation (Keen 2007, 27).

Even if we take a step away from such hyperbolic diagnoses, the pessimistic and optimistic stands remain evident. Two recent books by leading American legal scholars – both subscribing to deliberative democratic theory – may represent the opposing views.

In *Republic.com 2.0*, Cass R. Sunstein (2007) refers to Nicholas Negroponte's vision of a near future where everyone has a "DailyMe" – a completely personalized composition of information sources and all kinds of cultural content.<sup>40</sup> Sunstein labels this prophecy "not nearly ambitious enough" (2007, 4). In exploring what is required from a well-functioning system of free expression, he points to two key features. First, people must be exposed to expressions, opinions, and perspectives they would not have chosen in advance; and, second, "many or most citizens should have a range of common experiences" (Sunstein 2007, 5-6). Sunstein's argument rests on evidence that groups of like-minded are inclined to end up in an extreme version of their view after discussing among themselves. Thus, dissenting voices are crucial for a healthy public sphere (see Sunstein 2003). And, he asserts, though it clearly has its merits, internet communication often contributes to the segmentation of the public sphere, with dangerous fragmentation and extremism as the potential outcome.

Bloggers, for instance, surely have had some success in breaking through to large publics with previously ignored insight, and by occasionally providing indispensable control of mainstream media. Though the blogosphere increases the range of available information and per-

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<sup>40</sup> As its title signals, the book is a revision of an earlier, seminal work (Sunstein 2001).



spectives, especially linking practices show less encouraging trends: links are most commonly provided to like-minded with little quality control. “For many people, blunders, confusion, and extremism are highly likely, not in spite of the blogosphere but because of it” (Sunstein 2007, 150). Accordingly, we need a regulatory system that maintains the functions of “general interest intermediaries” – like the large newspapers and the nationwide broadcasters – also in the digital era.

Yochai Benkler has a markedly more positive view of the impact of internet-based communication on the workings of the public sphere. In *The Wealth of Networks* (2006) he takes stock with pessimists like Sunstein, and offers a thorough discussion of how different web-based applications contribute to changing democratic rule by facilitating a networked public sphere. According to his argument, individuals do not use their ability to control the flow of information to isolate themselves in homogenous groups. Benkler assesses several studies of online behaviour, and presents analyses of how internet services – from peer-to-peer networks to personal blogs and grassroots news providers – have been utilized, often in combination, with a vitalizing outcome.

Granted, he goes on, diverse mechanisms for filtering, accreditation, and synthesis do rely on “clustering of communities of interest and association and highlighting of certain sites” (2006, 271). Still, the same mechanisms provide “tremendous redundancy of paths for expression and accreditation” (2006, 271). Benkler’s conclusion is almost celebratory:

the network allows all citizens to change their relationship to the public sphere. They no longer need be consumers and passive spectators. They can become creators and primary subjects. It is in this sense that the internet democratizes (2006, 272).

As both Sunstein and Benkler are well aware, their empirical evidence is limited. Naturally, relatively few studies exist of these new phenomena. This might also help explain the diverging diagnoses they make based on similar theoretical positions (see Dahlberg 2007a, 832ff). Further, it is worth noting that both Sunstein and Benkler write from the USA. Thus, traditions for regulatory control, the existing media policy regime, and the media system itself differ quite fundamentally from Western European ones. When Sunstein calls for stricter regulations to secure “general

interest intermediaries” in the digital era, it is with the liberal American level of impingement as a point of reference. Similarly, Benkler’s description of the positive force in new online enterprises must be understood in relation to the existing mainstream US media. For him it is very much a case of non-commercial grassroots initiatives versus big, commercial conglomerates.

Benkler’s discussion also suffers from a somewhat crude description of media users: they have been “mere readers, viewers and listeners” (2006, 273), “mostly passive recipients of mediated information who occasionally can vote their preferences” (2006, 220). Thanks to the internet, they are now allowed to “see themselves as potential contributors to discourse and as potential actors in political arenas” (2006, 220). Benkler certainly has a point. The internet does facilitate more receivers to become senders in a potential dialogue. Still, we should be careful not to overemphasize the passive/active dichotomy related to off/online. It could lead to an unwarranted devaluation of a range of communicative forms – broadcasting included. Media use, whether of newspapers or radio programmes, is not passivity. Thus, it may be more useful to talk about different kinds or levels of activity.

The two contributions sketch out the landscape in which this thesis’ discussions take place. The first three articles of part II analyze how different actors at different points in time have dealt with prospects for keeping public broadcasters as “general interest intermediaries”, to adopt Sunstein’s term, in a digital media system – specifically through a potential transfer of their remit to the internet. The last two articles elaborate on my ideas about how we might think of public broadcasters’ functions online: as countering processes of enclosure and connecting more or less isolated parts of the public sphere by offering a comprehensive service, with internet activities as an autonomous part. In the articles, I also problematize dichotomies, as exemplified by Benkler, between broadcasting and online communication. By utilizing the concepts of dissemination and dialogue, I argue that there is a potential in online communication not only for two-way communication in small groups, but also for one-way spreading of information widely.

My discussion is partly based on characterizations of specific genres of web services. I argue that many widely used types are fit, and actually often used, for dissemination one way from one to many, just as they are used for dialogue between equals. The blog is a prime example. As illustrated above, it is often heralded as a democratizing tool enabling

an interconnected blogosphere of eagerly debating active citizens. I argue that blogs may as well function as more isolated outlets for personal expression, with little hope of, or wish for, reciprocity. Recent contributions to research on blog use seem to support this claim (e.g. Singer 2006, 23; cf. Hirzalla 2007). One interesting empirical study of practices of linking in the blogosphere – concentrating on randomly selected blogs, rather than the popular “A-list blogs” – finds that in the sample, “a majority of blogs link sparsely or not at all to other blogs” (Herring et al. 2005, 1). Moreover, much linking is one-way. “The blogosphere is partially connected and sporadically conversational”, the authors suggest (Herring et al. 2005, 1).

Awaiting further empirical research, I remain unconvinced by the most optimistic prophesies of the novel democratic contributions of blogs and similar genres of web services. Still, the point is not to disregard the dialogical potential of web applications. Rather, the aim is to question the strict division between broadcasting as one-way and online communication as necessarily two-way. Developing this argument in the two last articles of part II, I stress the potential of both disseminating and dialogic forms for public service media.

Discussions about the internet and the public sphere have a very pragmatic and concrete component. It is about how we may arrange for the internet to support certain structures, to facilitate wanted practices. It is, in short, about policy. And, in the present case, it is about whether or not and how public broadcasters are employed as media policy tools in these arrangements.

### **The internet, policy, and public broadcasters**

Like for all other communication technologies, uses of the internet are shaped by different political, social, and economic factors. If we compare it to broadcasting, the internet has been characterized by openness and an absence of dominant commercial actors for a longer period. While professional interests quickly monopolized broadcast networks, the internet has remained neutral to any sender, amateurs included. Still, tensions between different visions for the internet have been present from day one. Building on the work of Manuel Castells, Rasmussen (2007, 11ff) describes four contrasting idealized “techno-political cultures” useful to systematize different visions. *Innovators*, like the inventors

behind the basic internet technologies, advocate free and open research; *hackers* share the innovators' basic attitude, but often operate outside formal institutions. They work against big commercial actors. In contrast, *entrepreneurs* consider the internet as an arena for the free market – and commercial interests as a motor for progress. Lastly, *bureaucrats*, chiefly within institutions like the UN, the EU, and national governments, work to make the internet subject to institutionalized democratic rule. On the pertinent issue of network neutrality, for instance, innovators and hackers fight for continued openness and equal treatment of any communicator transmitting data online, while entrepreneurs claim the way forward is differentiation based on free market mechanisms.<sup>41</sup> Bureaucrats strive to formulate and enforce regulations on the issue grounded in different policy institutions.

It is common to think of the internet as something unruly. Controversial or illegal content distributed online – from bomb recipes and terrorist manifestos, via copyrighted material, to child pornography – remains at the centre of public attention. The internet appears hard to control. Yet, it has always been managed by different powers. Self-regulatory bodies have led the development of technical standards and protocols, overseen allocation of addresses, and formulated policy recommendations (see Rasmussen 2007, 126ff for a historical overview). Proponents have largely belonged to the techno-political cultures of innovators and hackers. The same bodies have also fought against attempts by national public authorities and commercial interests to pose restrictions. The internet, in a sense, is just uncontrollable from the viewpoint of the bureaucrats and entrepreneurs.

As policy actors struggle to gain ground on their opponents and fulfil their diverging ideas for the internet, different policy aims are contrasted with each other: industry, trade and competition concerns; consumer protection; defence and state security considerations; and educational and cultural aims. In practice, as in traditional media policy, some mix of all these concerns makes up the actual policies in different contexts. Fundamentally, then, discussions of internet policy do incorporate some thoughts about cultural, social, and democratic functions.

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<sup>41</sup> A network free of restrictions on the types of equipment that may be attached and the modes of communication allowed, where communication is not unreasonably degraded by other communication streams, is considered neutral (e.g. Rasmussen 2007, 97ff).

In chapter 2 above I argued that all broadcasting policy regimes are founded on an idea of the public interest in radio and television, but that formulations and scopes have differed. Similarly, all the four idealized techno-political cultures identified by Rasmussen (2007) can be linked to different concepts of the public interest in internet communication. Clearly, the two first would operate with the most expansive idea. Innovators have focused on how information technologies and the internet facilitate public research. Hackers understand the internet as a commons, where information should be freely available. In both cases, the internet is first and foremost, if not only, sought constructed according to perceived cultural, social, and democratic functions. Other policy concerns would consequently be secondary. For entrepreneurs, a thriving commercial life online is the main objective. As a result, trade and business concerns are given precedence over cultural policy aims. Bureaucrats, finally, may ideally strive for some balance between these polar views – with defence and state security considerations added to the mix – inside established political institutions.

With a standpoint in mainstream economic theory, I have demonstrated that broadcasting, like the city park, can be seen as a merit good. Concetta M. Stewart et al. (2004) use the latter as a reference for thinking about the internet as another example. They propose an approach to global policy making on the internet: “public spaces in cities have been created and maintained out of necessity, as resources for communication, collective interaction, civic engagement, recreation and ornate and/or public health” (Stewart et al. 2004, 346). On the internet, we find a “virtual inexistence of state-supported spaces” which could provide open access to a plenitude of resources, and facilitate “spontaneous processes of ‘re-appropriation’” of online communication as a cohesive entity (Stewart et al. 2004, 350, 354). Stewart et al. further discuss the possibilities of “buffer spaces” online to mediate between “commercial and non-commercial, individual and collective, and private and public spheres of activity” (2004, 356). Concretely, they envision a collectively or publicly supported search engine that steers clear of the

commercial motivations of existing alternatives.<sup>42</sup> In effect, they define navigation between online content as the merit good a state should make sure is provided for its citizens.

As Stewart et al. (2004, 350) also realize, such goods may be provided from the bottom-up, without state involvement. Wikipedia – the immensely popular collaborative, free online encyclopaedia – is one relevant example (e.g. Tambini 2001; Cammaerts and Carpentier (eds) 2007, section 2 for discussions of other examples).<sup>43</sup> The internet, one might claim, brings out the potential of civil society involvement and facilitates novel ways to organize creative activities, content production, and public debate outside the market and without state attachments. Further, the list of failed initiatives by state authorities at so-called e-government, or at enabling the internet as a democratic arena, is getting long (e.g. Coleman 2004, 92). Public broadcasters' endeavours online can be seen to represent another attempt along this line, another top-down plan by old, bureaucratic state institutions. On the other hand, considering the traditions and practices of public service broadcasting, their attempts might be regarded as something else – something potentially well suited to bridge periphery and centre, to counter commercially motivated enclosure, and to help facilitate a thriving democratic public life. In short, as a media policy tool, public service may serve a public of citizens, also online.

Picking up on the findings in the first article in part II of this thesis, the second one (*The national policy article*) looks into the extent to which, and how, different national policy actors have conceived of this possibility – and what ambitions they have had. Based on the analysis, I describe the Norwegian policy approach as the most dynamic and open-ended, and simultaneously least clarified. It has acknowledged a potential in online communication and given the NRK generous leeway. While the German public broadcasters strongly advocated the idea of the internet as a “third pillar” for public service beyond radio and television, the

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<sup>42</sup> E.g. <http://www.google.com>; <http://www.yahoo.com> (accessed May 20, 2008). One could add that the motives of directly state-funded alternatives may also lead to disturbing results. For instance, during spring of 2008, Popline, a search engine for a database of reproductive health literature, funded by the US Agency for International Development, started blocking searches on “abortion” (Stirland 2008; <http://db.jhuccp.org/ics-wpd/popweb> (accessed May 20, 2008)).

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.wikipedia.org> (accessed May 20, 2008).

German regime quickly laid such an idea to rest. In contrast, the idea has resonated better with British authorities. In article three (*The supranational policy article*) I also discuss how traditional balances between different policy concerns are played out in the new context of public service media online. I find the emerging EU policy approach, although not ignorant of cultural policy aims, to be fundamentally based on a competition law logic. This approach seems, I argue, to permeate other policy actors' arguments, including public broadcasters and – to different degrees – national regulators.

Taken together, these analyses offer fresh input to our understanding of media policy and public broadcasters on the internet. I show how the dominant policy regime does not acknowledge the internet as an autonomous platform for public service; how individual online services are assessed in isolation from overall public service remits; and how public broadcasters are merely supposed to supplement commercial actors on the internet. The latter tendency illustrates how the dominant policy regime builds on a market failure argument when conceiving the scope and form of public service media online. Like for Stewart et al. (2004), this approach puts individual services in focus. It entails, I argue in *the supranational article*, a break with the ideas behind public service broadcasting: in transferring public service arrangements to the internet, a competition law inspired approach seeks to reduce the “free zone” of public service outside the market by imposing strict measurements of specific initiatives. In sum, the dominant policy regime neglects individual online services' place in the overall remit, and simultaneously fails to grasp the potential public service value of diverse online communication.

## Conclusion

By relating the public broadcasters' online ventures to the history of their earlier auxiliary activities, I have in this chapter first argued that while current processes should not be seen in isolation, they represent a more fundamental move beyond broadcasting. Second, through a discussion of the cases' online presences, I have specified my interest in the services that at the outset appear furthest removed from traditional radio and television. Third, I have described the terrain in which the discussions in this thesis take place by laying out opposing stands on the question of online communication's impact on the public sphere. Lastly, by

relating this question to the level of policy, and to public service as a policy tool, I have presented insight from the empirical discussions in the articles of part II. Based on these points, I argue, we need to think more fundamentally about the potential inherent in public service media online – the potential of public broadcasters’ as policy tools employed to serve a public interest on the internet. Thus, the findings in the empirical articles lead me to undertake an exploration building on normative public sphere theory. The next chapter turns to discuss this theory, and its value as an analytical tool.



## Chapter 5: Theorizing public service and democracy

In chapter 3, I traced ideas about public service broadcasting's democratic role historically, and in the rationale behind actual arrangements. In chapter 4, I contextualized the broadcasters' internet ventures and elaborated on the issue of the internet, the public sphere, and policy. I now take the investigation into abstract theory. This chapter first discusses the development of the strand of research focused on public service broadcasting and democracy, concentrating on its theoretical foundation in Habermasian public sphere theory. Next, I lay out this theory's strengths and weaknesses, especially through a discussion of the challenges raised by a radical pluralist alternative. I argue for an approach based on Habermasian theory, which acknowledges the democratic value of mediated communication far removed from deliberation in a strict sense. Lastly, I consider the implications for the present study.

The insights discussed here permeate the thesis as a whole. The theoretical ideas about relations between public service broadcasting and democracy guide all my analyses, including the empirical ones. On a general level, then, the chapter serves to clarify the basis for my overall interest. On a more specific level, the chapter's discussions present the analytical tool of normative theory in *The dissemination and dialogue article* (article 4) and, by extension, *The marginal services article* (article 5). Given the focus on the organization and structure of public service media, I do not go into details in these articles about how we should think of the functions of different communication more or less removed from the ideal form (see Peters 1994, 46ff). This is compensated for here. The chapter allows me to take up concrete issues related to the form of communication in the public sphere. As such, this chapter is both a cru-

cial ingredient in the thesis's foundation, and an elaboration on the specific analytical approach taken in two of the articles.

### **The origins of research on public service broadcasting and democracy**

The roots of the strand of research focused on public service broadcasting's relations to democracy – the third strand identified in chapter 2 – can be found in criticism of the broadcasters set forth by Marxist theorists and radical activists, especially in the UK, in the late 1970s.<sup>44</sup> Inspired by Marxist thought on ideology and Gramsci's concept of hegemony, scholars like Cultural studies pioneer Stuart Hall attacked the idea that public service broadcasting represented a neutral force in society. Hall contended that, along with other media, public service radio and television performed “the critical ideological work of ‘classifying the world’ within the discourses of the dominant ideologies” (1977, 346). Such arguments reverberated in the work of among others Nicholas Garnham. In 1978, he called for a restructuring of British broadcasting, and warned that the BBC and the ITV “manipulate the public in the interest of [the] power elite” (Garnham 1978, 16; cf. Curran 2004, 17ff). By the early 1980s, however, a new situation had arisen. Liberalist governments and growing commercial media actors made public service broadcasting a main target of criticism. Radical critics, in turn, began more explicitly to defend public service arrangements.

Garnham was, and remains, a key figure in the strand of research that emerged. He wanted to change the situation whereby the Left had merely provided “mealy-mouthed support” for public service (1986, 40). In so doing, he confronted a view commonly held by Leftists of public service broadcasting as either a “smokescreen” for “the coercive or hegemonic nature of state power”, or as “occupied from within by commercial forces” (Garnham 1986, 40). As an alternative, he set out to reformulate public service broadcasting's value base by way of public sphere theory.

In *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* ([1962] 1990), philosopher and social theorist Jürgen Habermas offers an account of the historical rise

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<sup>44</sup> Parts of this subsection build on Moe and Syvertsen (forthcoming, 12-5). The discussion has been revised and expanded on.

and fall of a bourgeois public sphere in Western Europe from the mid-18th century. The ideal public sphere is here described as rational, open for all, free of domination, and separated from both state and market.<sup>45</sup> Drawing on Immanuel Kant, Habermas pictures it as the sphere for the exercise of public reason, in turn grounding the freedom of personal autonomy. The concept thereby mobilizes the distinction between private and public. In the ideal public sphere informed citizens deliberate freely on an equal basis over politically relevant issues. Aiming at consensus, they collectively determine which way they wish to see their society develop. The media, accordingly, should provide an arena for debates, and reconstitute private citizens as a public body in the form of public opinion.

This account came to serve as the main conceptual formation for the strand of research on public service broadcasting and democracy. Importantly, elaborate German studies of television's role in the public sphere, building on Habermas' work, dates back at least to the late 1970s (e.g. Mast 1978; Rust 1977). But it was Garnham who introduced the theory to Anglo-American media research in 1986 – a few years before Habermas' original study was published in English.<sup>46</sup> In Garnham's reading, the public sphere was a "space for rational and universalistic politics" (1986, 41). This space had been corrupted by the state becoming an active participant in society, making severe interventions in the private

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<sup>45</sup> The translation of *öffentlichkeit* into what Peter U. Hohendahl calls the "decidedly artificial term" public sphere entails some connotations worth noting (2000, 1, my translation). The most obvious is the spatial dimension. *Öffentlichkeit* directly translates as "publicness", and describes a state or condition rather than a space (e.g. Sandvoss 2007, 63). Some argue that "openness" would have been a better translation since it underlines the process of opening up and making accessible (Kleinsteuber 2001, 96-98). Further, it is worth noting that Habermas builds on a very rich German academic tradition of work reflecting on the characteristics of, and normative requirements for, a public sphere. The theoretical links between political communication and democracy is "as old as the idea of democracy itself" (Skogerbø 1996, 11), and the term *öffentlichkeit* has been in use for over 200 years. Habermas' book did spark an intensive debate in Germany after its initial publication. According to one commentator, however, Habermas' theory of the public sphere was "no longer in fashion" in his homeland by the turn of the millennium (Kleinsteuber 2001, 96).

<sup>46</sup> Habermas' theory of the public sphere had been presented in English in a brief 1974 essay (Habermas 1974). Still, it was through Garnham's contribution the theory got the attention from the wider Anglo-American media research field (see Collins 2004; Scannell 2007, 255-7).

sphere, and by the development of a capitalist economy, especially the commercialization of the media. Garnham reached for the concept as an ideal. He utilized this ideal to “judge existing social arrangements”, and attempted to embody it in “concrete institutions in the light of the reigning historical circumstances” (Garnham 1986, 43). In re-evaluating the public service model on this basis, Garnham wanted to “build upon the potential of its rational core” (1986, 53). He pointed to the need for professionalized journalistic training, better practices of accountability, and more direct public participation – to let more voices be heard. With such measures, he argued, public service broadcasting could remain a vital antidote to commercial media.

Garnham’s defence should be understood in the context of a concerted political and industrial attack on public service broadcasting. The same backdrop is essential to understand the contribution of another key figure; Paddy Scannell. His interests lay in the history of broadcast radio and television and in the role of these media in everyday life. Like Garnham, Scannell attacked representatives of the Left who devalued broadcasting as “a form of social control, or of cultural standardization or of ideological (mis)representation” (1989, 136). Building on Habermas, Scannell argued that radio and television had made available a new kind of access to the public sphere for all citizens. “By placing political, religious, civic, cultural events, and entertainment in a common domain, public life was equalized in a way that had never before been possible” (Scannell 1989, 140). Broadcasting had profoundly contributed to democratization from its inception, he contended. Scannell held public service broadcasting as “perhaps the only means” to maintain common knowledge in a shared public life as a social good for all (1989, 164). “As such”, he concluded, public service broadcasting “should be defended against its enemies” (1989, 164).

These seminal contributions significantly influenced both broadcasting research and political thought. By introducing public sphere theory, they helped bridge the gap between Anglo-American media research and political philosophy. Although critical to the actual execution of the remit, these contributions subscribe to the idea that disseminating forms are vital for public communication. As such, they provided an outspoken defence for public service and impacted on actual policy discussions in a period of tremendous change (see Prott 1986 for a parallel German example). By extension, these early contributions yielded a line of elaborate and sophisticated studies in the years that followed, several of which

scrutinized media outside broadcasting (e.g. Blumler (ed.) 1992; Curran 2002; Garnham 1992; Keane 1991; Price 1995). However, despite the valuable and varied contributions of these works, there are problematic sides to the strand's approach.

### Criticism and revision

In its original form, Habermas' notion of the public sphere is highly disputed. Here, I concentrate on four interconnected lines of criticism pertinent for the present discussion.<sup>47</sup>

A first difficulty is the essentially dialogical conception of the public sphere. Concentrating on face-to-face conversation in a shared locale makes the theory inadequate for discussions of mass media (e.g. Peters 1993; Thomson 1993). Secondly, critics argue that Habermas is stuck in the 18th century. An analysis of the connections between media and democracy has to recognise the complexity of modern political systems' institutional forms. Today, "people are represented primarily through political parties, interest groups and the myriad structures of civil society" (Curran 2002, 233). Third, a long line of critics has attacked the description of the public sphere as single and more or less uniform. Scholars have argued convincingly for different notions of multiple public spheres (e.g. Fraser 1992; Gitlin 1998).

A fourth kind of criticism claims the theory labels communication a too serious affair. "A more catholic conception of (mass) communication, appreciative of its gloriously raucous as well as soberly informative qualities, might make Habermas' theory of communication even more useful" (Peters 1993, 567; also Kunelius and Sparks 2001). A limiting focus on rational discourse could lead us to neglect the importance of other forms and modes of communication, and make the approach seem "at times oddly removed from the everyday sociological realities" (Dahlgren 2004, 16; also 1995, 98ff). Fundamentally, this ties in with objections to the lack of weight given to issues of control and exclusion: plebeians and women, among others, played no part in the bourgeois public sphere. The dichotomy private/public, it is argued, is a cultural

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<sup>47</sup> I deal with criticism related to processes of globalization in chapter 6. See Roberts and Crossley (2004) for a recent more general overview, and Scannell (2007, 233ff) for a recent reading from the perspective of media studies.

classification used rhetorically to exclude certain interests, views, and themes (e.g. Fraser 1992, 131; McAfee 2000; Young 1996; see Morley 2000, 105ff for a cogent discussion related to broadcasting).

These lines of criticism point both to problematic sides of the early Habermasian concept as an ideal type, and to challenges with employing a public sphere concept derived from a historical analysis on studies of advanced media. Consequently, the objections pose challenges for research on public service broadcasting seeking analytical support from public sphere theory.

To different extents, the problematic sides also appear in the early contributions from the strand of research on public service broadcasting and democracy. For one thing, the application of abstract theory to actual media practices is a daunting task. The leap requires an operationalization of the ideal that was not always given appropriate attention in early studies. Rather, early contributions tended to portray public service broadcasting as the “institutional guarantor and instrument of the modern public sphere”, in the words of Richard Collins (2002b, 66). But practices of public service broadcasting have historically never corresponded to the ideal public sphere, nor do they automatically fit a future realization or approximation. Crucially, in a related tendency, studies perceived the market and public service as incompatible principles of organization. Especially early works by British scholars stressed market organization as irreconcilable with democracy (see Collins 2002b, 69; Curran 2004). Such a stark dismissal is problematic.

Criticism was also voiced from within broadcasting studies: in an article titled “Which Public, Whose Service”, for instance, Hall argued that the united national public had always been a construct, and that public service could only survive if it adapted by “pluralising and diversifying its own interior worlds” (1992, 34). Broadcasting needed to be turned into “the open space, the ‘theatre’ in which this cultural diversity is produced, displayed and represented” (Hall 1992, 36). Hall subscribed to the basic idea that policy could be employed to make broadcasting serve citizens in modern polities. Still, contributions like his discussed the fragmented and pluralistic nature of the audience, and the failure of traditional public service broadcasters to address it fully and adequately. As such, they demonstrated shortcomings not only with applying public sphere theory in media studies, but also with the theory itself. Revisions were clearly needed.

Hohendahl has a point when he, somewhat sarcastically, notes how both supporters and foes seem to agree that the “real Habermas” emerges after 1970 (Hohendahl 1992, 100). Habermas’ roots in the Frankfurt School, and the heavily criticized early theory, are often downplayed. Still, at least within media and communication studies, the now almost 50-years old book on the public sphere continues to function as a primary reference (e.g. in McKee 2005). Meanwhile, Habermas has both responded to criticism (Habermas [1962] 1990, 11-51; 1992), and further developed his public sphere theory. A thoroughly reconsidered public sphere concept now has a central place in deliberative democratic theory, in what Habermas calls a discourse theory of democracy and law, which prescribes an ideal method for deliberation and decision-making (Habermas [1992] 1996; 2006).

The public sphere is here described as a network that “branches out into a multitude of overlapping international, national, regional, local, and subcultural arenas” (Habermas [1992] 1996, 373). Based on points of reference such as functional specifications, thematic foci, and policy fields the public sphere is differentiated into for example feminist, literary, or artistic publics. The public sphere can also, according to Habermas ([1992] 1996, 374), be separated into levels: episodic publics found in taverns and on the streets, occasional publics like rock concerts or party assemblies, and “abstract public spheres” where isolated individuals are brought together through the mass media. An organized form of civil society is essential for this model. Made up of non-governmental and non-economic associations, movements, and organisations, it should both prevent the public sphere from being subverted by power and make sure social problems get listened to (e.g. Eder 2001 for a perceptive discussion). The media, in turn, assist the institutions of civil society by transmitting concerns from the periphery of society, generating public debate, and mounting pressure for the political system to respond.

As a normative ideal, the public sphere is “a sounding board for problems”, a “warning system with sensors” spread throughout society (Habermas [1992] 1996, 359). Following Bernhard Peters, another metaphor is introduced: sluices. Binding decisions “must be steered by communication flows that start at the periphery and pass through the sluices of democratic and constitutional procedures situated at the entrance to the parliamentary complex or the courts” (Habermas [1992] 1996, 356). The public sphere, then, does not solve problems by itself. It cannot rule,

but instead guides decision-making and oversees the further processes at the core of the political system. Nevertheless, a well-functioning public sphere is the central empirical condition for a discourse theory of democracy.

We may now return to the four lines of criticism of early public sphere theory outlined above. The first, pointing to the unwarranted focus on face-to-face communication, is to a large degree answered in the revised version, especially by the weight given to different forms of communication through electronic media. It can be argued that the same applies to the second kind of criticism, labelling the theory unfit for complex societies of today. The comprehensive democratic theory in which the revised concept now is placed, definitely fits better with the reality of early 21st century, for example when it comes to the mediated representation of citizens and the role of civil society. The impression of a uniform, single public sphere has also given way to a much more complex account, thus countering the third line of criticism. Differentiation based on themes, structures, and levels are identified. “The one text of ‘the’ public sphere, a text continually extrapolated and extending radially in all directions, is divided by internal boundaries into arbitrarily small texts for which everything else is context” (Habermas [1992] 1996, 374). Crucially, these boundaries are porous.

The fourth line of criticism calls for more elaborate discussions. For one thing, it is not clearly answered by the revised theory. More specifically, to understand the media’s role in society, it is significant to grasp issues of exclusion and control, and the importance of a wide range of communicative forms in and for the political public sphere. Given the present project’s focus, in *The dissemination and dialogue article*, I concentrate on aspects of public communication’s organization and structure. As a result, issues of the discourse of communication are left out (see Peters 1994, 46ff; Wessler 2008, 1-7). I now grant some space for discussing these issues, working towards my take on grasping them. The starting point is a proposed theoretical alternative to understanding the democratic functions of the media; that of a radical pluralist approach.

### **Against a limiting view of politically relevant communication**

From what we might call a postmodern perspective, the Habermasian approach fails to adequately theorize pluralism and power, despite claim-



ing to make room for difference.<sup>48</sup> Drawing on theorists like Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard, critics object that emphasizing communicative reason leads inevitably to support existing exclusions and inequalities: it fails to acknowledge the normalizing tendencies involved in the designation of a particular form of communication as the rational, democratically legitimate norm (see Villa 1992 for overview). The general thrust of deliberative democracy is thus seen as too dependent on the view that a benign social order is grounded in an ideal of consensus.

This is also a starting point for Chantal Mouffe's contribution (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Mouffe 1993; 2000; 2005). Her radical pluralist theory of agonistic democracy provides one of the most prominent alternative approaches in current democratic theory. Mouffe repudiates "the search for a final rational resolution" (2000, 93). Her theoretical model places questions of power at the very centre of politics, in contrast to a public sphere concept where these processes ideally are eradicated. According to her, civil society is not harmonious or unitary, but characterized by conflicts of interest and an irreducible pluralism of values. Consequently, any search for rational consensus is not only utopian, but also dangerous and necessarily exclusionary. Each consensus should rather be taken as merely a passing result of temporary hegemony, or as a momentary stabilization of power.

"The task for democratic theorists and politicians", states Mouffe "should be to envisage the creation of a vibrant 'agonistic' public sphere of contestation where different hegemonic political projects can be confronted" (2005, 3). The public sphere should provide channels for the expression of collective passions, and allow for possibilities of collective identification. It should construct opponents as adversaries – not enemies – thereby transforming antagonism to agonism. For Mouffe, then, democratic politics should not remove passions from the public sphere. Passions must rather be mobilized towards democratic designs. As such, the theory does not represent naïve pluralism, but has a clear normative force. It prescribes public communication, also in the media, to be geared at agonistic confrontation (Karpinen 2007; also Dahlberg 2007b; Moe 2006, 164-5).

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<sup>48</sup> Parts of this and the following subsection expand on Karpinen et al. (forthcoming). See also Moe and Syvertsen (forthcoming) where we point to "postmodern approaches" as a tentative label for an emerging strand of public service broadcasting research.

Such an alternative indeed sheds light on often-overlooked dimensions of the workings of the public sphere. The immense literature following Habermas' work overwhelmingly focuses on a narrow range of communicative forms. In an astute work on public debate, Bernhard Peters, to choose one, claims deliberation is taking place when

empirical statements, descriptions or reports, explanations, interpretations, proposals, prescriptions, normative judgments or evaluations are supported by some kind of justification, by some argumentative backing, or by some presentation of evidence (2004, 4).

Such a demarcation excludes all fiction, poetry and satire, and even factual statements or reports given without argumentative support – in sum almost everything offered by the mass media. Elsewhere, Peters (1994, 65) identifies “expressive” communication, including music, film, and other major parts of popular culture, as constraints on the discursive structure of the public sphere. This bias is not only found within political science or sociology. Also in certain traditions of media studies, critical political economy included, analyses of news and current affairs have dominated (see Garnham 2000, 183; McGuigan 2005 for discussions). Written communication is preferred to visual, and narratives and rhetorical forms are given a low priority. This is problematic.

Broadcasting, public service included, has always been entertaining, in addition to informing and educating. Talk radio, popular music, television short films, soaps, reality shows, transmitted football matches, music videos, and children's programmes – and different forms of communication about them – clearly matter. Uses of new media platforms surely add to this impression. We cannot grasp the media's significance for the formation of identities, feelings of togetherness or alienation, and the construction of autonomous citizens if we exclude such large portions of their output. Individuals' and groups' self-defining and self-reflexive processes take place not only in the world of politics in a strict sense, but to a large extent in the form of social regulation achieved through shared understandings of what is and what is not acceptable social behaviour. Media entertainment plays a crucial part when these understandings are debated, affirmed, or rejected.

James Curran (2002; also Gentikow 2007, 282-3; Gripsrud 2007, 483) makes further observations even more directly related to the work-

ings of the public sphere supporting this view: firstly, media fiction offers “cognitive maps of reality, and furnishes social understandings which have political implications” (Curran 2002, 238). Secondly, entertainment is tied to discussions of social values and identities, which in turn are tightly bound to political positions and allegiances. Thirdly, entertainment also offers discussions of disputed issues like race and gender relations, religion, or sexual minorities’ rights. One example is the emotionally charged ethical lessons taught by melodrama (Gripsrud 1992). Fourthly, popular music (e.g. rap music) may provide disempowered groups with an outlet for their opposition to prevailing social structures and ideologies. Similar features can be attributed to other forms of popular culture (e.g. Lunt and Stenner 2005 on *The Jerry Springer Show*; Sandvoss 2007 on spectator sport and sports fandom).

Further, taking part in deliberation implies willingness to let go of one’s own view and adopt another. Each must proceed with fairness when meeting others’ claims and opinions. This presupposes empathy. We have to be able to comprehend what it is like to be someone else and understand how they came to feel like they do. By widening or deepening the audience’s imagination, fiction may contribute to the formation of an individual’s moral abilities, including skills vital for empathic feelings (Nussbaum 1997, 99ff; also McAfee 2000; Murdock 2005). In sum, these insights render necessary an acknowledgement of a wide range of genres and communicative modes in the public sphere. We need to recognize the importance of a cultural public sphere for the “articulation of politics, public and private, as a contested terrain through affective (aesthetic and emotional) modes of communication” (McGuigan 2005, 435).

This means I subscribe to the objective of the agonistic democracy model. However, I question the incommensurability of Habermas’ and Mouffe’s models, persistently stressed not least by Mouffe herself (in Moe 2006, 159ff; also Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006). I will argue that recognition of the contributions of wider communicative modes is compatible with a Habermasian public sphere theory.

### **Meeting the challenge raised by the model of agonistic democracy**

One way to approach the challenge is by looking at the role Habermasian theory ascribes to aesthetic expressions and different modes of meaning-

making. Though he already in 1962 described the public sphere as consisting of a political and a literary part, Habermas tends to focus on the political aspects. For example, he claims that the significance of the emerging literary public sphere by the end of the 18th century “lay more with its organizational forms than with its manifest functions” (1992, 423). Structures and procedures are the focal points, not content and subjects. Interpreting the approach as implying unassailable divisions between culture and politics might lead to an impression of an impoverished theory. This is, however, not the only possible outcome.

Pieter Duvenage (2003) shows how Habermas in his early work regarded art, literature and culture as vital for the enlightenment of a public, but that his “linguistic turn” in the 1970s led him to ascribe a less important role to aesthetic experiences. Consequently, “the inherent potential of a concept such as the literary public sphere fell by the wayside” (Duvenage 2003, 27). Aesthetic rationality became, according to Duvenage, merely a subcategory of communicative rationality, tied to an understanding of artistic expression as purely subjective. However, Habermas does provide openings – also in his later work – for ascribing importance to aesthetic expressions in the public sphere. His account of the concept of life world, for example, leaves room for assigning potentially significant functions to artistic and cultural experiences in the processes leading to the reproduction of the life world’s structural components (Habermas [1981] 1987, 113ff, 140ff; also Dahlgren 1995, 101).

Albrecht Wellmer gives input to prescribe a more advanced role for aesthetics (Duvenage 2003, 115-7, 135ff). He criticises the subordination of aesthetic-expressive rationality. Wellmer maintains that aesthetics are important for processes of individuation, and emphasizes

the interrelatedness of validity spheres, the importance of interpretations and judgements of all kinds, and the need for a horizon where plural values and needs can become part of rational arguments and discourse ethics (in Duvenage 2003, 116).

For Duvenage, these suggestions, together with the concept of world disclosure, guides the way to an alternative fate for aesthetics in Habermas’ theory. World disclosure is here described as a meaning-creating process where one is capable of making, unmaking and remaking worlds through innovative thinking. It is, Duvenage maintains, not “the other of

reason” but “another voice of reason” (2003, 138). This leads him to state that “democratic politics should be open to the disclosing power of the different voices of reason – a position that should be equally sensitive to reason giving and aesthetic world disclosure” (2003, 139).

Peter Dahlgren (1995, 98ff; also 2006, 278ff) seeks a similar objective by way of the unconscious and what he calls the “arational”. The latter concept is constructed to avoid the either/or of rational/irrational. Arational modes of meaning-making appear in “metaphoric and poetic forms of speech and text, as well as in non-verbal forms of communication such as images and music” (Dahlgren 1995, 101). They can also be related to “tacit, intuitive and unconscious processes of reasoning” (Dahlgren 1995, 101). Habermas’ project is identified as striving to make the unconscious conscious, giving no room for the arational. In contrast, Dahlgren emphasizes an understanding of the unconscious as a realm that includes and reproduces components of social power like desires and fears. Thus, a concept of the unconscious is necessary to understand how for instance much television evades rational discourse (Dahlgren 1995, 111-2).

These two outlined suggestions both have their pitfalls. In the latter case, Dahlgren himself admits that his discussion is in danger of plummeting us “into the various interpretations and schools of psychoanalysis and analytic psychology” (Dahlgren 1995, 106).<sup>49</sup> My point is that both proposals illustrate how a theoretical approach following Habermas may appreciate a broad range of communicative modes in the public sphere.

It can in fact be argued that much of the criticism from a postmodernism-inspired alternative is based on a rather simplified reading of deliberative democratic theories. John S. Brady (2004) claims that agonistic theories, including Mouffe’s, fail to offer a viable alternative. Habermas’ model *does* incorporate issues of difference and power in the public sphere, it is just more comprehensive, avoiding the one-dimensional reductionist depiction of politics as simply a power game

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<sup>49</sup> Since the early 2000s, Dahlgren has taken up the concept of “civic culture” to conceptualize “the cultural factors that can impinge on the actions and communication of people in their roles as (multifarious) citizens” (Dahlgren 2003, 152; also 2001). In this understanding, civic culture – a term used in a more restricted sense in political science of the mid-1900s – points to the features “that constitute pre-conditions for people’s actual participation in the public sphere” (Dahlgren 2003, 154).

(Brady 2004, 341). Brady contends that Habermas' theory "facilitates the agonistic approach" by opening up "a space for democratic reflection and democratic action, a space that necessarily contains room for a consideration of agonistic politics" (2004, 348). In sum, it provides more powerful tools for empirical analysis of politics. In a similar vein, Andres Knops (2007, 116ff) argues that Mouffe's theory is reliant on the notion of rational consensus on the values of liberty and equality. In fact, her agonistic theory is deliberative, he claims, since her argument for it is based on – precisely – rational arguments.

Concentrating less on who rejects who, Lincoln Dahlberg shows how a Habermasian approach is capable of accommodating "'aesthetic-affective' styles of expression, which include multiple modes of everyday communication such as rhetoric, myth, metaphor, theatre, and ceremony" (2005, 113-4; also 2007a; 2007b). Dahlberg refers to Dahlgren's concept of the arational. In addition, he builds on contributions of theorists like Seyla Benhabib (1996; 2002), Nancy Fraser (1992), and Iris M. Young (2000). As noted, they all stress the need for viewing public spheres as multiple and overlapping networks of publicity, where different types of communication take place. Further, Dahlberg argues, deliberative democracy does not assume that power is separated from communication, but rather accounts for both positive and negative forms of power, also in the public sphere (2005, 121ff). Lastly, he claims that rather than prescribing the end-point of consensus, the approach promotes the process (2005, 125ff).<sup>50</sup>

The public sphere is an arena for articulating expressions of both solidarity and difference. Consensus and conflict are co-existing impulses of political communication and political life. The question is not which one is the essence of democracy. Humans are incomplete without social order; a common language, institutional settings, sets of traditions, and political forums for articulating public purposes are indispensable to the acquisition of an identity and the commonalities essential to life

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<sup>50</sup> This connects with specific revisions of the status of consensus in deliberative democratic theories. John Dryzek and Simon Niemeyer (2006; also Dryzek 2000), for instance, hold that liberating individuals do not have to reach a final agreement, as long as they acknowledge each other and the legitimacy of their diverging opinions. This is called meta-consensus (also Wessler 2008, 5ff). See also Sunstein (2006) for a somewhat different take on the issue: a thorough critique of the merits of deliberation compared to other ways of organizing public communication, such as prediction markets and wikis.

(Connolly 1991, 94). But every form of social order also contains subjugations. Politics, then, is where these ambiguities can be engaged and confronted. It is where common purposes are crystallized, but also where they can be contested, exposed and unsettled (Connolly 1991, 94). I subscribe to such an understanding, and contend that a Habermasian approach is capable of meeting – partly by answering and partly by accommodating – the challenge raised by the model of agonistic democracy. This has implications for my study.

### **Implications for the present study**

Recent studies of public service broadcasting inspired by postmodern approaches enter straight into the debates about the application and advantages of public sphere theories. Michael Bailey (2007) for instance, starts his analysis of the birth of the BBC by lauding the contributions of neo-Habermasians. Still, he prefers Foucauldian governmentality theory to show the formation of public service broadcasting as “a civilising mission whose political rationality was to render the listening public more amendable to techniques of cultural governance and particular regimes of citizenship” (Bailey 2007, 97). While he subscribes to the idea that public service broadcasting may spread cultural and educational content and values to a constructed national public, Bailey stresses the task of instructing, disciplining, and regulating the public rather than serving processes of opinion formation (2007, 107). His contribution exemplifies how approaches inspired by postmodern thought are used as oppositional discourses or tools in criticizing perceived biases of critical political economy (see Nolan 2006 for another recent example). On the other hand, these approaches rarely mobilize coherent normative theories of media structure and policy. In fact, there seems to be a lack of institutional proposals or interest in specific political questions among the proponents of postmodernism-inspired approaches (McLennan 1995, 85; also Blaug 1995, 55ff; Dahlgren 2004, 15ff). When such interests surface, at least in public service broadcasting research, the criticism tends to linger with an early Habermasian ideal.

Elisabeth Jacka (2003) is a case in point. She seeks support in Mouffe’s theory of agonistic democracy when attacking a “modern” defence of public service, calling it unnecessarily pessimistic and one-dimensional. Jacka focuses on Garnham’s work, claiming it is based on

an outdated and indefensible theoretical ideal of a unitary public sphere with little relevance in today's society. She describes Garnham's position as combining "a classic position on liberal democracy and an enlightenment view of the formation of public opinion" (Jacka 2003, 179). This argument is identified as too focused on the superiority of state- over private-owned broadcasting, and as favouring the primacy of journalism in the media mix. The contributions made by privately owned media to the functions of broadcasting in a democracy – such as distribution of information, fostering of identities, and provision of arenas for public debate – are found to be neglected.

Jacka brings attention to a tendency to prioritize "high modern" journalism, and correspondingly to disregard for instance fictional genres. As noted, the majority of Habermas-inspired studies have analyzed factual content. However, this does not mean representatives of this strand of research are unaware of the importance of other communicative modes – entertainment content included (e.g. Garnham 1992, 374; Murdock 2005). In fact, Jacka's criticism is turned around by neo-Habermasians. Replying to Jacka, Garnham (2003) invokes classical divisions between critical political economy and cultural studies (e.g. Golding and Murdock 1997, xvii) and attacks postmodern thinkers' focus on discourse, identity, and cultural citizenship. Though often grounded in an understandable discontent with how existing representative politics deal with these issues, such a focus leads to an evacuation of the "central fields of political power, the exercise of the monopoly of force, and the distribution of resources" (Garnham 2003, 195). Following deliberative democratic theory, political discourse is a means to an end: the exercise of a just and legitimate rule. The question of democracy, then, is the question of how to ensure that the people in the best way possible control the decisions made – the effect of politics. "In polities of the size and complexity of modern polities, the best you can hope for [...] is that such decisions are taken within a structure of representative democracy informed by a widely accessible public debate" (Garnham 2003, 196).

In my view, such an understanding of politics is useful for analyzing the relationship between media and democracy on one important condition: it must include a well-founded notion of the role of everything that does not fit a strict definition of public deliberation, yet makes crucial contributions to opinion-formation. Accordingly, Jacka's contribution is helpful in bringing attention to under-researched areas, chiefly related to entertainment. As a critique of deliberative democratic theory's



public sphere concept, however, her argument suffers on two critical points.

First, as Garnham (2003) stresses in his reply, although newer contributions are referred to, the key works she addresses are almost 20 years old. And the theoretical ideals they build on are even older. Jacka does not take into account the revised, more comprehensive conceptualizations of the media and the public sphere I have laid out here. This would at least somewhat diminish the force of her criticism. Second, Jacka does not ascribe any normative force to Mouffe's theory. Indeed, Jacka seems sceptical of any use of ideals when dealing with democracy. She objects to a notion of democracy as an "essence", and prefers to see it as "fluid and evolving" (2003, 181, 183). This is contrasted with an ideal view, which leads one to "inevitably see any departure from it as a crisis" (Jacka 2003, 183). As I have underlined, the theory of agonistic democracy does have normative force. It prescribes agonistic confrontation as the ideal form of communication in the public sphere. Thus, it is highly problematic to use Mouffe's contribution to support a dismissal of normative ideals in media and communication research. Taking the normative potential seriously, in contrast, opens up new possibilities for conceptualizing the role of public service.

It is possible to defend the ideals of public service broadcasting by drawing on a radical pluralist theory of agonistic democracy. Geoffrey Craig offers a valuable step in this direction. Establishing that the Australian public service institution ABC exists in a state of perpetual crisis, he suggests "we need to embrace the conflicts" as the best defence (1999, 105). Public life is also always made up of difference and an ongoing crisis. Consequently, public service broadcasters could be the arena and medium for these to be played out (Craig 1999, 112ff). Public service broadcasting is thus located within a heterogeneous public life which rejects the erasure of difference occurring in the constitution of social unity. In a political and cultural environment promoting difference, arguments for public service broadcasting also need to consider more fully the issues of pluralism and conflict. Such an understanding of the democratic role of the media provides an alternative to both the singular proliferation of private media outlets and outmoded views of public service broadcasting (Craig 1999, 112).

Craig's argument is explicitly located within a model of agonistic democracy, and according to him incompatible with deliberative democratic theory (1999, 108ff). I argue that such a rejection is neither needed

nor desirable. An agonistic model might raise our attention to ever-present issues of exclusion, as well as the need for a richer understanding of the range of relevant communicative modes in the public sphere. Still, as I have demonstrated, neither unity nor consensus is treated as a prerequisite in current deliberative theory. It is possible to think of public service broadcasting as a meeting point for conflicting ideas and perspectives also from a deliberative theoretical standpoint.

Public service broadcasting represents an institutional compromise that reflects the necessity to reconcile the needs for unity and difference. Understood as a media policy tool, it is employable for differently conceived functions based on different social and cultural aims. To theorize this role, we can benefit from both Habermas' and Mouffe's contributions. They are resources for conceptualizing the different functions which media in general, and public service versions in particular, may have in democratic polities. To grasp the potential role of public service broadcasters in and for the public sphere, we must show openness to, and understanding of, a wide range of communicative modes. Taking into consideration the concerns raised by Mouffe, I hold it possible to take such a perspective based on Habermasian theory.

Adhering to their task for the public sphere, public service arrangements should encompass not only news and factual genres, but also entertainment genres of diverse kinds. As a media policy tool, public service should not only seek to converge, but also to spell out divergence in the public sphere. Compared to a remit developed with a basis in a market failure argument, this entails a wider remit. It is open to a broad range of communicative forms and genres, and gives due attention to the context, not just to each specific programme or service.

This understanding – this theoretical framing – permeates my analyses throughout this thesis when I look at how the ideas behind public service broadcasting are transferred to online media. In the first three articles of part II, the concepts and the functions prescribed here remain in the background, as theoretical inspiration or grounding. In the last two articles – *The dissemination and dialogue article* and *The marginal services article* – the theoretical insights are mobilized more directly as I develop and test a scheme for public service media beyond broadcasting. In doing the latter, I choose online services representing fiction or entertainment categories: a game, a discussion forum about the weather, and a virtual world service. Behind my interest in investigating their public service value lies an explicit assumption that such diverse forms of

communication have a democratic potential, despite seemingly trivial forms or obvious lack of proper deliberative discourse aimed at consensus. This assumption guides the analysis.

For instance, in *The marginal services article*, I discuss the *Mujaffa* online game offered by the NRK, a simple so-called casual game trying to humorously thematize immigration and integration issues. When I analyze the game, I explore its potential value in a comprehensive public service media remit. Consequently, I do not provide an exhaustive discussion of rhetoric, narrative structure, or its relation to game genre developments. Relevant more game-specific studies do, however, exist. In an astute analysis of *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!*, a role-playing game built to re-enact the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School, Rune Klevjer asks whether gaming can “combine with the working through of real tragedy” (forthcoming, 4). He answers by mobilizing computer game theory and looking at what kind of role-playing the game offers. Klevjer holds the game, “in spite of its sensitive topic and provocative approach”, to be “sharp and original without being speculative or inappropriate” (forthcoming, 24). His main criticism is political rather than ethical, as he points to a kind of mirroring of the shooters’ ideological message in the game itself.<sup>51</sup> On a general level, such studies can support the idea that computer games may afford new perspectives on political issues, a claim I also make based on the analysis of *Mujaffa*. And the assumption that underlies such a claim – that diverse forms of communication have a democratic potential for the public sphere – is distinctive for all the discussions of this thesis.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have traced the strand of research on public service broadcasting and democracy, and its theoretical foundation in normative public sphere theory. Considering shortcomings, challenges, and needed revisions, I have argued for the continued relevance of Habermasian

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<sup>51</sup> See e.g. Bogost (2006; 2007, 67-145) for another relevant example focused on rhetorical qualities; Skartveit (2007, 114ff) for a lengthy discussion of different “serious games” representations of reality; and Coleman and Dyer-Witheford (2007) for the history of commons-based game culture in and against the global information capitalism.

theory. The chapter has served to elaborate on my basic understanding: when supporting the practices of citizens in modern polities, public service should encompass a broad range of communicative modes and media genres. Such an approach illustrates the lacks of a market failure argument – one that defines isolated services as merit goods. The discussions in this chapter have furthermore served to present the analytical tool of normative public sphere theory as employed in the two last articles of part II. In addition, I have shown how the basic understanding laid out here characterizes also the three first articles – *the context and strategies article*, *The national policy article*, and *The supranational policy article*. I now turn to elaborate on issues specifically pertaining to the approach and analyses undertaken in these three.

## Chapter 6: Comparing media policy

Comparative approaches are not new in media studies. In subfields like political communication, comparisons have gone from infancy in the mid-1970s (Blumler and Gurevitch 1975), via “late adolescence” in the 1990s (Gurevitch and Blumler 1990, 305), to “maturity”, having “become almost fashionable” today (Gurevitch and Blumler 2004, 325, 327). Even so, media studies does lag behind other disciplines in the social sciences concerning amount and refinement of actual empirical comparative analyses (e.g. Gurevitch and Blumler 2004; Hallin in Moe and Sjøvaag forthcoming, 3). Correspondingly, there is a striking lack of problematizations of fundamental methodological issues. While giving ample room for discussing, say, case study designs, media research methodology textbooks tend to give lower priority to comparative alternatives (e.g. Jensen (ed.) 2002; Lindlof 1995; Priest 1996; Østbye et al. 2007). What is meant by a comparative approach, and what kind of knowledge can it yield? How do different research interests entail different comparative strategies? Such questions concern the social sciences in general, and media scholars should naturally not have sole responsibility for discussing them. Still, a minimum of attention to the basic questions is desirable to avoid reinventing the wheel, or repeating other’s mistakes (see Livingstone 2003, 478).

This chapter takes up these issues, and the challenges with comparative studies, in the context of this thesis’ media policy analyses. The chapter first works towards a definition of comparisons in the social sciences. Next, by distinguishing different research interests I discuss two strategies, and argue for the relevance of the design I have chosen. The chapter then goes on to problematize comparing between nations in a globalized world, before elaborating on the motivation behind my selec-

tion of cases. Lastly, I discuss the characteristics of data sources and analytical methods employed in the comparisons.

Apart from presenting further features of the cases – relevant to the study as a whole – the chapter serves to anchor the design of the first three articles of part II: *The contexts and strategies article*, *The national policy article* and, *The supranational policy article*. By explicating their analytical design in more detail than the article format allows for, I substantiate the approach taken in these analyses, and the relevance of their findings.

### **Comparative analysis: definitions and strategies**

One way to describe the social sciences is to contrast them to the natural sciences. According to the critics of the positivist idea of a common science ideal, social scientists study meaningful phenomena – social action, texts, symbols, or institutions. In Wilhelm Dilthey's famous formulation, this is put down as the division between the natural sciences' aim to explain in terms of cause and effect, and the "human sciences'" aim to understand meaningful phenomena (in Grimen 2003, 65). Max Weber defined sociology as "a science concerning itself with the interpretative understanding of social action and thereby with the causal explanation of its course and consequences" (Weber [1921] 1968, 4; cf. Apel [1979] 1984, 203ff). Thereby, Weber opposed any strict division between the aim of causal explanation, and the social sciences' search for understanding of meaningful phenomena. Rather, the two aims should be mutually dependent. But how do we go about reaching them?

The hermeneutic circle describes relations between the object of study, our preconceptions, and the context. Preconceptions – that we never meet a meaningful phenomenon without suppositions – are necessary to direct our analysis (Gilje and Grimen 1993, 18, 10). The context consists of the object's specific historical and social relations. "All interpretations are made up of continuous movements between parts and the whole, between the object of study and its context, or between the object and our preconceptions" (Gilje and Grimen 1993, 19, my translation). Comparison plays a crucial part in this process: we compare the parts and entirety of a phenomenon, and we compare with the context – i.e. with other phenomena. Therefore, some argue that all analyses in the social sciences are comparative, making the term redundant (e.g. Beniger 1992, 35).

Such an argument can find support for instance within anthropology. Ethnographies always entail implicit comparison between us and the other (e.g. Nader 1994, 93). Representatives from neighbouring disciplines may, on the other hand, object. Political scientist Giovanni Sartori acknowledges that all analysis in the social sciences in a certain sense involves comparison. Nevertheless, a division is needed to rule out “the ‘unconscious comparativist’”, reserving the term for overtly comparative studies (Sartori 1994, 15; also Dogan 2002, 311-2). It is uncontroversial, then, when sociologist Charles C. Ragin (1987, 1ff) claims that practically all empirically based social research entail some form of comparison. And it is not contentious to reserve the term comparative methodology for explicit comparisons.

These comparisons tend to be done across societies, historically or geographically. But the units of analysis do not need to belong on that level. Comparisons can be made between social actions, texts, symbols, or institutions – all kinds of meaningful phenomena (e.g. Dogan 2002, 310; Esser and Pfetsch 2004, 385). The relation to the societal level appears clearer in the use of interpretative and explanatory dimensions. They can be on “the microanalytical actors’ level; the mesoanalytical organizational and institutional level; and on the macroanalytical systemic or cultural level” (Esser and Pfetsch 2004, 385; cf. Ragin 1987, 9). Comparative social science describes studies explicitly comparing meaningful phenomena across historically and geographically defined systems, interpreting them with reference to micro-, meso- and macrosocial dimensions. Their merit is that they make us “notice things we did not notice and therefore had not conceptualized”, and force us “to clarify the scope and applicability of the concepts we do employ” (Hallin and Mancini 2004a, 2-3; also Esser and Pfetsch 2004; Livingstone 2003, 479).

The two complementary epistemological interests in the social sciences – explaining actions causally and understanding them based on cultural norms and social intentions – can tentatively be linked to two different methodological strategies, also within comparative studies. Weber and Emile Durkheim were both concerned with comparative methodology. Both held comparison useful to balance complexity and generalizability. Comparative studies could separate sociology from historical studies’ atheoretical focus on detail, and from social and historical philosophy’s broad-ranging generalizations (Ragin and Zaret 1983, 731ff;

also Dogan 2002, 313ff).<sup>52</sup> Both Weber and Durkheim realized that the complexity of social life entailed a massive challenge for scholars. Their solutions, however, differed. While Weber argued for a qualitative-historical comparative methodology – comparing empirical cases to ideal types – Durkheim argued for copying the lab experiments from the natural sciences. These two approaches have been seen to correspond to a division between qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Now, we should be careful not to build a Chinese wall between different methodological strategies. Combinations in the form of triangulations may yield fruitful results, not least for comparative studies (e.g. Ragin 1998, 164; Livingstone 2003; also Gripsrud 1995, 111ff). Still, the division has remained clear – with obstinate representatives – within comparative social science. Thus, it makes sense to at least heuristically separate between two strategies.

The first strategy – the case-oriented or intensive – shares important characteristics with anthropological approaches. Within sociology, it can be traced back to Weber. The quantitative strategy, often related to Durkheim, is labelled variable-oriented or extensive (Ragin and Zaret 1983). The former is best suited for interpreting historical processes in a handful of cases, the latter for producing broader claims pertaining to larger amounts of data. Here, the researcher may start by defining a problem, identifying relevant variables, and then moving on to find a suitable selection of comparable units. A case-oriented approach more often starts from an interest in specific historical processes and structures – some specific cases. Such a qualitative-historical strategy lacks potential for generalizations, but prioritizes complexity and uniqueness. It is well suited for interpretative analyses aiming at understanding the

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<sup>52</sup> The divisions between sociology and history should not be seen as insurmountable. Rather, it might be argued, the similarities or links are substantial. "The social sciences are, inherently and irreducibly, *historical disciplines*", argues Joseph M. Bryant and John A. Hall, since their shared subject matter is "the transformative movement of history" (2005, xxi, italics in original). C. Wright Mills contends "every well-considered social study [...] requires a historical scope of conception and a full use of historical materials" ([1959] 1967, 145). This also goes for studies with comparative ambitions (Mills [1959] 1967, 150ff; cf. Giddens [1979] 1995, 230ff and Abrams 1980 for different views from the debate on a "convergence" of history and sociology). As I return to below, similarities also pertain to data sources and analytical strategies employed in the present study (see also Postan 1971, 144ff on the history of the historical method in social science; Syvertsen 1992, 14ff for a further discussion in the context of broadcasting policy studies).



phenomena of study (Ragin and Zaret 1983, 740; Ragin 1987, 3). A clear drawback is the number of cases: there are obvious limits to how many which can be handled without succumbing to mere description. This is, on the other hand, the strength of a quantitative, variable-oriented project, which in turn removes its focus from the individual cases.

The present thesis explicitly compares public broadcasting in different geographical systems, and employs meso- and macrosocial dimensions when trying to understand differences and similarities between them.<sup>53</sup> The aim is not to offer generalizations about the state of public service broadcasting. Rather, I want to interpret historical processes that broadcasting institutions face, within the contextual conditions of their respective systems and cultures. Therefore, I follow a case-oriented, intensive strategy of comparative analysis, chiefly based on qualitative data.

Before discussing the relevant criteria for selecting the cases, and elaborating on their characteristics, a basic challenge to comparative studies has to be addressed: the processes of globalization.

### **Comparing across nations in a globalized world**

Whether it is large migration movements, developments in the world's financial markets or the entertainment industry, questions of ecology, or terrorism, processes of globalization in a wide sense permeate many areas of our societies. Our everyday lives are to a large extent influenced by actions taken elsewhere – sometimes on the other side of the globe. Conversely, actions taken locally can have global implications (e.g. Held 2000; Tomlinson 1999 on culture). For the present study, the challenge of globalization could be seen as twofold: firstly, I analyze the development of the democratic role of public broadcasting institutions – de-

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<sup>53</sup> Though it uses specific services from three of my cases as discussion points, *The marginal services article* stands out from the other comparative ones as it does not discuss similarities and differences in relation to meso- and macrosocial dimensions.

signed by national regulations to serve a national citizenry.<sup>54</sup> But if the nation state's political status is weakened, its links to public broadcasters could be weakening as well. Secondly, I set out to compare across national borders. But if national media systems “merge with each other and cease to be autonomous, they can no longer be the objects of comparative analysis” (Esser and Pfetsch 2004, 401; also Blumler et al. 1992, 285-6).

Now, the processes of globalization are far from new. Modern globalization has gone through several phases, for instance since slave trade and colonialism in the 16th century. The (often brutal) development of world capitalism since then has marked today's world – including its political and cultural domains – in a number of ways (e.g. Gripsrud 2001, 5-6). We should not think of nation states' sovereignty as suddenly having been challenged in the late 20th century. Rather, it is a long, continuous but uneven process. Similarly, we should avoid the idea that national media systems have been “autonomous”, and now risk ceasing to be so. Modern mass media and their regulation have always been characterized by direct international concerns and influences. Still, in the current phase, globalization processes are perceived as more extensive, intense and forceful – not least supported by computer-mediated communication. Hence, a discussion of the consequences for the present study is warranted.

If we question the sovereignty of national political systems, we also pose a key problem for conceptualizations of democratic processes. Like democratic theory in general, public sphere theory has at least since Habermas' adumbration “been implicitly informed by a Westphalian political imaginary” (Fraser 2007, 8; also Castells 2008; Peters 2007, 283-

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<sup>54</sup> A nation is a self-defined cultural and social community. When this community forms a sovereign state, we call it a nation state. Norway is a nation state. So is Germany, although it is a federation [*Bund*] of 16 states [*Länder*]. The United Kingdom is also a sovereign state, providing British citizenship. Yet, it is formally a political union. Its parts – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – continue to be called countries. In this thesis, I refer to Norway, Germany and the UK as nation states. This is not to neglect historical and current internal cultural and social differences – the conflict in Northern Ireland being an extreme example. Clearly, navigating such differences is a key challenge for public broadcasters and media policy. Still, the NRK, the ARD, the ZDF, and the BBC exist to serve Norway, Germany, and the UK, respectively. My approach is based on an assumption that their prime context in terms of media policy is on the same level.

98). Consequently, it becomes increasingly difficult to conceptualize the public sphere. Merely “multiplying” the traditional concept is not enough. The problem relates to both the publics and the spheres: it is hard to connect a notion of valid public opinion to partakers who do not represent a political citizenry. And it is complicated to “associate the notion of communicative power with discursive spaces that do not correlate with sovereign states” (Fraser 2007, 8).

According to Habermas, we are experiencing a post-national constellation, which “touches on the most basic functions and legitimacy conditions of democratic nation states” ([1998] 2001, 61). He points to four levels on which the processes of globalization affect the nation state’s democratic processes ([1998] 2001, 68ff). Three of them apply primarily to institutions and practices at the core of the political system. The fourth deals with processes at the periphery, which encompass the public sphere and its components: the idea of a nation of citizens rendered possible through cultural integration, which can be politically mobilized, is threatened by fragmentation. On the one hand, national majority cultures get hardened upon meeting new immigrant cultures. In a worst-case scenario, this ends with subcultures sealed off from each other. On the other hand, global mass consumer culture, while partly levelling out national differences, also fuels the construction of a new array of hybridized cultural forms. These tendencies are strengthening “centrifugal forces within the nation state” (Habermas [1998] 2001, 76). Consequently, the “one text of ‘the’ public sphere” with porous borders (Habermas [1992] 1996, 374), should to a lesser extent be conceptualized as corresponding to a nation state. Also, in some areas, borders get less porous as subcultures get hardened. In other areas, borders get more porous as new, fleeting communities of interests defy existing boundaries.

Importantly, the post-national constellation does not mean a total disempowering of nation states (Habermas [1998] 2001). So we should be careful not to exaggerate the prospects of its suspension. As Oscar Ugarteche states, with recent US foreign policy as a prime example, “not only is the nation state alive and well, but it has sent a rather strong message that it does not plan to pass away in the near future” (2007, 65). So far, nothing indicates the end of nation states as centres of democratic rule. Though its position is changing, the nation state is still indisputably important as a container, as “the main arena for the negotiation of and arbitration between conflicting social groups” (Ellis 2000, 70; also Gold-

ing 2000, 167-8; Schlesinger 2002, 645). Specific publics, arenas, and borders are changing, and changing in importance. It is, however, a process more of complementing than replacing.

In line with this, a transnational public sphere is not thought of as a multiplied national one (Bohman 2004, 139ff; also Langenbucher and Latzer (eds.) 2006). Rather, it can be described as coming into existence when a minimum of two culturally rooted public spheres start to overlap. These public spheres need not be national in scope, but might as well be defined by thematic foci or regional senses of belonging. Defining transnational public spheres in this way presupposes a continued existence of public spheres where we can communicate based on common cultural assumptions. These spheres are still linked to territorial entities, among them nation states. As such, public sphere theory needs to conceptualize both territorial and “aterritorial” communication and spheres. Following this argument the processes of globalization do set the terms for emerging transnational public spheres. As a result, the concepts of public sphere theory need to be complemented by new considerations.

The same attitude – revising and adding instead of discarding – is also needed when comparing national public broadcasters: these institutions remain closely linked to nation states, and nationally defined public spheres. A key finding from *the context and strategies article* and *The national policy article* is that the institutions’ organizations, remits, and political, cultural, and economic contexts are autonomous. These dimensions also vary to a large extent, depending on deep-rooted national histories and political cultures. Therefore, it still makes sense to compare national public service broadcasting policies.

Yet, a primary focus on national factors should not make us blind to other developments (e.g. Aksoy and Robins 2003, 369). I do not deny the potential roles of public broadcaster institutions in supporting for instance a European political project, in facilitating European public spheres. Through different transnational practices – from the actions of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), via channels like Eurosport and Euronews, to programme and channel exports – broadcasting have at least contributed to a, admittedly limited and multilingual, European public sphere (Gripsrud 2007, 491; also Thomass 2006a; cf. Bourdon 2007 for a less optimistic view). The trans- and supranational levels need to be added to the national in analyses of public service broadcasting. Therefore, the comparisons between nation states in *The contexts and strategies article* and *The national policy article* are complemented by a detailed

analysis of the EU's role in *The supranational policy article*. In the latter analysis I find supranational policy to impose a common framework on the different national approaches. To understand how public service broadcasting policy and its actors are changing, scrutiny of supranational processes is important as an addition to comparisons between national contexts. This leads to the next step: the selection of cases.

### Selecting cases

The research questions guide the selection of the cases.<sup>55</sup> To understand how different contexts impinge on the development and regulation of public broadcasters' online services, I am looking for primarily publicly funded institutions with a remit to serve a democratic nation state. Although such exist from the Caribbean (Padovani 2007) to post-Communist Eastern Europe (Jakubowicz 2004b), many are ruled out by the next criterion: a relatively long history of internet activities. Thus, I am roughly left with South Africa, Canada, Western Europe, Oceania, and Japan. I am interested in studying the role of supranational policy actors in the specific question of public service broadcasting policy. Since the EU is a key actor of this kind, it makes sense to choose cases from countries subject to EU policy.

Next, I move on to identify relevant dimensions according to which the cases should differ. Some dimensions are systemic. They describe the contexts for public broadcaster institutions from demography and geography, via media systems and markets, to political cultures – incorporating political histories and systems, as well as specific regulatory

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<sup>55</sup> I refer to the BBC, the NRK, the ARD and the ZDF as my cases, even though I analyze media policy across nations. Related studies sometimes refer to the nations (e.g. Syvertsen 1992, 45) or the policy (e.g. Storsul 2002, 42) as the cases. I could have done the latter – defining “media policy as pertaining to public broadcasting institutions in the UK, Germany, and Norway” as my cases. This would cover the interest I pursue in the first three articles of part II, save for one thing: I start from the institutions' services, strategies, and arguments, and move on to look at their contexts when seeking to understand actual developments, similarities, and differences. Referring to the institutions as cases, then, serves to explicate my assumption that they have been proactive, driving forces in the processes at hand. Furthermore, in the final article – *The marginal services article* – when I discuss some specific online services based on a scheme for public service media online, I again concentrate on the institutions as cases.

regimes for public service broadcasting. A related set of dimensions depicts the institutions themselves. These relate to organizational form including formal status and scope of activities. The idea is to study a manageable number of “comparable” cases – cases that vary concerning these dimensions, but share the basic characteristics outlined above (Lijphart 1971; 1975, 163f).<sup>56</sup>

In proceeding with the selection, categorizations of the relations between the media and political systems are helpful. Several such exist. *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert et al. 1956) might be the most well-known – and discredited (see Nordenstreng 2006 for recent critique). The contribution from Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini (2004a; 2004b) is more current, and nearly as ambitious. They construct three models (Hallin and Mancini 2004a, 89ff): the “North Atlantic or liberal model” (attributed to the USA, the UK, Canada and Ireland) has a media system characterized by strong development of the press; limited political parallelism; non-institutionalized journalistic professionalism; and weak state intervention.<sup>57</sup> The “Mediterranean or polarized pluralistic model” (represented by Southern European countries and France) describes a media system with late and incomplete development of the press; weak professionalization; strong elements of political parallelism; and a strong position of the state. Comprising the Nordic countries (Iceland excluded), Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium and Switzerland, the “North/Central European democratic corporatist model” is characterized by early development of the press; a shift away from political pluralism towards neutral commercial press; strong institutionalized professionalism; and strong state intervention.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> This does not imply that I follow a “most similar system”-strategy, as advocated by Lijphart. By mixing systems, a wider range of comparisons can be made, fit to understand complex phenomena (Frendreis 1983, 267ff; see Storsul 2002, 42 for further discussion).

<sup>57</sup> Political parallelism describes the strength and nature of the links between political parties and the media, or more generally reflection of political divisions in the media (Hallin and Mancini 2004a, 21).

<sup>58</sup> Corporatism may connote undue dominance of business interests – or even totalitarian regimes. In contrast, it is used here to describe “the formal integration of social groups into the political process” (Hallin and Mancini 2004a, 53). This trait has developed in many European states as a way to voluntarily coordinate conflicting objectives through bargaining between interest groups, state bureaucracies, and political parties (Katzenstein in Hallin and Mancini 2004a, 54).

Gerard Vowe (1999; also Esping-Andersen 1995, 26-7; Künzler and Schade 2007) suggests a different trichotomy. He derives the idealized leitmotifs freedom, equality, and security from political philosophies. Vowe employs these leitmotifs as labels for media policy according to their importance for a state's political culture. Liberal political systems, like the American, Australian, and British, emphasize freedom the most. An orientation towards equality is most evident in social democratic systems, such as in the Scandinavian countries. Security – a policy focused on protecting more or less fragile existing social structures against inner and outer threats – historically has its deepest roots in states with a tradition for corporatism, like Austria and Germany.

Such models attempt to take in a big picture. Consequently, in grouping together nations, they may neglect fine-grain differences. Hallin and Mancini's (2004a, 30-2) description of ways to organize public service broadcasting may serve as an illustration. As noted in chapter 3, German broadcasting policy is delegated to the states.<sup>59</sup> The regional ARD member institutions are all organized as non-profit institutions under public law. Their guarantors are the respective states which the institutions serve. The ZDF's guarantor is the 16 states in unison (Altendorfer 2001, 268; Palzer 2007, 40ff). A Director-General [*Intendant*] runs the operations and is responsible for the programming of each institution. She or he is monitored by an administrative board [*Verwaltungsrat*]. A broadcasting council [*Rundfunkrat*] – in the case of the ZDF a television council [*Fernsehrat*] – makes up the third tier in the control structure. Comprising representatives from the government, political parties, and “socially relevant” groups (like religious groups, trade unions, professional associations, and civil society groups), these councils have the last say in all policy matters and control the interpretation of the remits (e.g. Porter and Hasselbach 1991, 53). The ARD Member organizations take turns, through the General Meeting [*Mitgliederversammlung*], to formally administer the cooperation – having their Director-General to act as Chairman of the whole organization.

This structure is very much in line with the country's corporatist traditions. Fittingly, Hallin and Mancini label it “civic” or “corporatist” (2004a, 30-2): control is distributed among various social and political groups, and extended beyond political parties. Hallin and Mancini's cate-

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<sup>59</sup> For an updated overview of the general German media landscape, see Kleinsteuber and Thomass (2007).

gorization of the British and Norwegian case, on the other hand, is too broad for my objectives. Both cases are described as within “the professional model” where the running of public service broadcasting is left to professionals in order to avoid political involvement (Hallin and Mancini 2004a, 31).

The BBC derives its legal power from a Royal Charter, renewed every ten years.<sup>60</sup> The latest version, in force from 2007, introduced a new organizational structure: the BBC Trust (formerly the Board of Governors) – appointed via the Department for Media, Culture and Sport (DMCS) – oversees all activities and chooses the Director-General. She or he is responsible for the editorial and administrative running of the corporation, and also heads the Executive Board, which follows up the framework for operations provided by the BBC Trust (e.g. Prosser 2007, 107). The Trust, then, is set up as a tool to channel the public interest, independent of direct political interference, into the running of the BBC. The Office of Communications (Ofcom), which took over as sole regulatory body for UK broadcasting in 2003, also fits the model. Its “corporate structure” is “based upon a model which is familiar to the commercial sector”, including a Board with a Chairman (Ofcom 2008).

The NRK is constructed differently. It is a state-owned limited company.<sup>61</sup> Its Director-General [*kringkastingsjef*], appointed by the Executive Board [*styret*], is both administratively and editorially in charge. As the representative for the owner, the Minister of Culture alone is the General Assembly. Thus, while sharing the arms-length principle with the British case, the Norwegian government representative is potentially more directly involved – for instance by appointing board members. The NRK does have a broadcasting council [*Kringkastingsrådet*] with members picked by Parliament and the government. But in contrast to Germany, the council has a mere advisory function, typically raising programme-related issues on behalf of listeners and viewers (NRK 2008b). In addition, the Norwegian equivalent to Ofcom, called The Media Authority [*Medietilsynet*], is an administrative body under the Minister of Culture.

Hallin and Mancini do acknowledge differences between the Scandinavian countries and the UK on this matter. They stress that the British case fits better with a “professional model” (Hallin and Mancini

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<sup>60</sup> For an updated overview of the general British media landscape, see Bromley (2007).

<sup>61</sup> For an updated overview of the general Norwegian media landscape, see Østbye (2007).



2004a, 169). My point is that although broad categorizations of relations between the media and political systems may help categorize potential cases, the actual selection requires attention to the specific dimensions relevant for the study at hand (see also Weibull 2007). To account for differences in political cultures, I have taken one case from each of Vowe's categories – liberal, social democratic, and corporatist. From there, I have picked cases from states with relevant differences in demography and geography, as well as market characteristics and organizational traits. This is the reasoning behind my selection of the British BBC, the Norwegian NRK, and the German ARD and ZDF as cases.<sup>62</sup>

Of course, pragmatic concerns also impinge on the selection process. For one thing, I am inclined to include the Norwegian public broadcaster. It is the case I know the best, and it is hard to study for those who do not have good command of a Scandinavian language. This should add to the relevance of my contribution. Limited knowledge of languages also restricts my selection. I understand German, but unfortunately neither for instance French, Spanish, Italian nor Greek. As a result, the prospect for conducting a thorough study is better with the ARD and the ZDF as cases than their southern sister-organizations. Further, as discussed in chapter 3, the BBC was the world's first public service broadcaster. And, as the analyses in this thesis will demonstrate, it has kept its role as pioneer. This also means that the amount of relevant data on the BBC is quite large. In sum, it is an obvious case to include.

I could on the one hand be criticized for having selected too similar cases. They all fall into a category of strong public service broadcasting systems, with broad political interventions (Moe and Syvertsen forthcoming, 1-2). Including one representative from Hallin and

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<sup>62</sup> The international broadcaster *Deutsche Welle* is a member of the ARD. Although it does have a television service (in German, English, Spanish, and Arabic), it is primarily a radio broadcaster, and set up to serve audiences outside Germany. It is funded by a state grant (see Witte 1999 for an account of its history). In business from 1994, *Deutschlandradio* is also a German public broadcaster. It is a kind of radio version of the ZDF, with a remit to provide a national radio service. Funded by a small portion of the licence fee, it is an autonomous institution (e.g. Dussel 2004, 298). As noted, Channel 4 is a British broadcaster with public service obligations, owned by a public body (formerly a subsidiary of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), since 1992 by Channel Four Television Corporation). It is funded by advertising and sponsoring sales (see Born 2003b for a recent study). As none of these three corporations fulfil my criteria, they are not included as cases in the discussions.

Mancini's (2004a) "Mediterranean or polarized pluralistic model" would add a case exposed to higher levels of political parallelism, less settled financial arrangements, and with a marginal market position in a more conflictual political system. It would, on the other hand, entail a wider lens, meaning less attention to detail. The discussions would, for instance, have to dwell on ramifications of "savage deregulation" (e.g. Traquina 1998). On the other hand, I could be criticized for selecting too different cases. Why not include a case from another small size nation, for example Denmark or the Netherlands, more similar to Norway? My cases each represent one of the three identified political cultures or welfare state regimes, with a different leitmotif for their media policy. Adding another representative would, in my opinion, not yield input to warrant the increased difficulties with managing a fourth case in a thorough analysis.<sup>63</sup> A discussion of the data sources and analytical approach, which I now turn to, further substantiates the motives for my selection.

### Sources and their uses

In the comparative articles I aim at understanding the development of public broadcasters' internet services, and the corresponding changes to media policy. The approach taken is qualitative in the sense that the analyses are based on non-standardized techniques, with a focus on detail and context, rather than based on standardized techniques, aimed at explaining, generalizing, and providing overview.<sup>64</sup> The analyses rely on data collected from written sources – a widespread method in broadcast-

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<sup>63</sup> This thesis is not a comparative study through and through, but employs a comparative approach instrumentally in some of its analyses. This also means that not all the cases are scrutinized in detail for every comparative discussion: in *the national article* I leave out the ZDF and look at the German regime for regulating public broadcasters on the internet through the case of the ARD. Correspondingly, *The marginal services article* selects a service from all cases apart from the ARD. As I account for in the analyses in question, the decisions are made by estimating the extra value in adding the fourth case against the required thoroughness given the length-restrictions, as well as considering the scope of the articles.

<sup>64</sup> As noted, the division between qualitative and quantitative approaches should not be over-stated. Qualitative analyses – including the ones in the present thesis – include quantifications of different sorts, while quantitative categorizations presuppose qualitative judgements (e.g. Grønmo 1996, 73ff; Jensen 2002a; Skogerbø 1996, 49-50).

ing history and policy studies (e.g. Humphreys 1994; Porter and Hasselbach 1991; Syvertsen 1992; Collins 2002b). Within the social sciences, such sources are often referred to as documents. Definitions vary. For John Scott, a document is “an artefact which has as its central feature an inscribed text”, where text is used in a narrow sense to describe written expressions (1990, 5). Syvertsen prefers “written or audiovisual remains not produced or generated by the researcher” (2004, 215). Either way, the relation to the discipline of history becomes clear; use of such sources stem from historical research (cf. Dahl 2004, 48ff).<sup>65</sup> Importantly, although it is sometimes downplayed in methodological discussions (e.g. Scott 1990, 6ff; Østbye et al. 2007, 46ff), using documents as sources implies textual content analysis (e.g. Gripsrud 1995, 118ff). But rather than being interested in the documents’ quality as texts in themselves, the interest lies in using them as “sources intended to document a process” (Skogerbø 1996, 50; also Østbye et al. 2007, 47).

I take the former approach in *The marginal services article*, undertaking analyses of structures and features of specific web services as texts (see Schneider and Foot 2004, 117ff; cf. Fagerjord 2006).<sup>66</sup> The latter description fits my objective in the comparative analyses of the first three articles: I rely on written sources to provide relevant information about the social phenomena at hand. By gathering, thematically coding, and systematizing material from them in accordance with the study’s

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<sup>65</sup> “The policy researcher’s task”, comments Collins, “is to be a historian of the present without the assistance time affords ‘real’ historians by winnowing away the chaff of irrelevant data and contingent associations and revealing fundamental structures” (1990, viii; also Mills [1959] 1967, 146).

<sup>66</sup> The two first services I look at in *the marginal services article* constitute parts of websites. Taking stock of theorizations of the web, Niels Brügger (2007) shows how very basic questions about what researchers study seldom are raised, and even more rarely answered in a satisfactory way. Brügger goes against trends in recent conceptualizations that prioritize fragmentation and change. Rather, he argues that “the purpose of a substantial amount of the textual elements on the web is to keep individual web elements – web pages – together” (2007, 87). I agree that the website “has constituted the most prevalent and pregnant form of coherence on the web”, and deserves analytical focus as a phenomenon in its own right (Brügger 2007, 87). However, when I in the article merely provide an outline of the websites, it is not just due to a restricted scope. My aim is to get down to specific parts, to scrutinize them. This does however not mean I ignore their contexts. Rather, when I discuss their (lack of) connections to the other parts of the public broadcaster’s web presence, the relation to the main website is very much a pertinent question.

research questions, I identify chronology, key processes, arguments, and concerns with the different relevant actors at different stages of the period under scrutiny (e.g. Grønmo 1996, 79; Jensen 2002b, 245ff). These findings next inform the comparisons as they are discussed in relation to the relevant analytical dimensions.

Produced as part of the normal business of media and media policy, documents are relatively “naturalistic” or “unobtrusive” (Jensen 2002b, 243). Pragmatically, the use of such sources should be less time-consuming than other forms of data collection (Syvertsen 1992, 54). Consequently, it allows for a wider scope. In the present project it specifically lets me compare across three nations. Still, as with all forms of data collection in the social sciences, this method faces problems with reliability and validity. The researcher could come to repeat invalid and unreliable claims from the sources, which may build on untruthful or inaccurate information (Syvertsen 1992, 54). One way to deal with these problems is by combining different sources – using one to confirm or supplement another. More fundamentally, each source needs to be treated critically. This includes questioning both the authenticity (is the document of indisputable origin?) and the credibility (is it free from error and inaccuracies?) of each source. It also means considering how representative a source is or, alternatively, clarifying how it is atypical (Scott 1990, 6-8; Østbye et al. 2007, 38ff). Further, such criticism entails seeing a source as a social phenomenon – as created under a set of circumstances by specific people, at a certain time and place (Syvertsen 1992, 54). The sources cannot be treated as “pure” or objective. A letter to the editor written by the Director General of the NRK, for instance, does not only answer to a specific polemic situation. The letter also portrays the corporation in a favourable light, selectively choosing facts for presentation of an argument to support its strategic choices. But also a government White Paper has similar characteristics. It is based on implicit assumptions and favours specific interests. Both sources have to be interpreted by reading them in their contexts.

I make use of both primary and secondary sources. The former are institutional, publicly available, external, contemporary documents (see Syvertsen 2004, 216). These include White and Green Papers, committee reports, parliamentary proposals, laws, statutes, guidelines, strategy documents, position papers, press releases, and other institutional communications. The senders include national and regional governments, parliaments, broadcasting institutions, industry lobbyists, interest groups,

and supranational policy entities. Even aside from actual programmes and other productions, public service broadcasting activities and the corresponding media policy practices generate an immense amount of documents. And the pile keeps growing. I concentrate on processes involving the cases from the mid-1990s onwards.<sup>67</sup> I mark off internal communications and seek support in secondary sources. Even so, I need to make selections. These are made based on the research questions, the character of the study, and availability of sources (Syvertsen 1992, 57ff; also Collins 1990, vii). Thus, I have not strived for a statistically representative range of document data, but undertaken a strategic selection of a manageable number of key documents to put under systematic scrutiny.<sup>68</sup>

The secondary sources are “all types of material, in which the data are gathered by others than the researcher, for other projects, and consequently for another purpose” (Skogerbø 1996, 51). Different academic work, industry and press reports, as well as statistical information fall within this category. While most analyses in the social sciences depend on secondary sources at least to provide background, they are used actively here to offer insights into historical and current developments, and to exemplify points in an analysis. Importantly, secondary sources require extra attention to source criticism. It is hard to control their data collection, and difficult to replicate their analyses. Still, secondary sources allow me not only to scrutinize a long period of time; they also ease the analyses in three language areas. I aim to discuss trends across different contexts, provide broad historical descriptions, and grasp amorphous processes. This is the motivation for supplementing primary sources with secondary ones.

The use of sources reflects the dissimilarities between the cases in at least three ways. Firstly, as the broadcasters exist within different political systems, with different regulatory practices, both the types of policy actors and documents differ. Ranging from definitions of remits, via practices of public consultation on government proposals, to the actual relevant policy bodies: the actors vary, and with them the character and status of documents. For instance, since broadcasting policy is delegated to the states, the German federal government takes a less central

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<sup>67</sup> As noted, the different articles of part II were finished at different points in time during the project period.

<sup>68</sup> All the documents in question are listed in the references for each article.

role than in the Norwegian case. In contrast, the exceptional role of the German Constitutional Court – a role I discuss in the articles – means its decisions are crucial sources for the analysis. In the UK, which does not even have a written constitution, I need to look to other sources, like the BBC Charter and related documents.

Secondly, the differences also impinge more directly on the availability of sources in line with different information policies (Syvertsen 1992, 52). On the one hand, Norway has traditionally championed a more liberal policy than the UK. On the other hand, the practices of specific actors may muddle this impression. The BBC is certainly no easy organization to research (e.g. Born 2004, 16ff on the case of ethnography). Still, the British broadcaster, and even more aggressively its regulator Ofcom, has utilized the internet as a means to distribute information of public interest – not least during the recurring “Ofcom review of public service television broadcasting” (see Ofcom 2008). Meanwhile, the NRK has been criticized for a growing lack of openness towards researchers (e.g. Puijk forthcoming, 9). In another instance, Norwegian law grants me as a Norwegian citizen easy access to all correspondence between the NRK/Norwegian authorities and the EU/ESA. Similar source material was harder to obtain from the German case. Though the documents became publicly available, I had to wait for public release dates, and seek out alternative distributors.

Thirdly, the fact that I collect data from three different cultures also has implications for the secondary sources. I have already noted the vast amount of data concerning the BBC. Furthermore, my knowledge of relevant sources on the Norwegian case is obviously better than of the other cases. Additionally, the nature of the secondary sources also differs. This can be illustrated by looking at some – admittedly broad and simplified – characteristics of academic traditions.

Most available work on the BBC has been produced within what we might label media and cultural studies. In a recent stocktaking, James Curran and David Morley (2006, 2) called the two fields “intellectual twins”. This is telling for the bias of the British traditions. Picking up on the long international tradition of “effect”-research, the early 1970s brought new impulses to the study of mass communication and society (e.g. Curran et al. 1977, 2ff). Originating in literary studies, the approaches and perspectives from the interdisciplinary milieu of British cultural studies provided new methods, theories, and analytical insights (e.g. Gripsrud 2002, 56-8; Scannell 2007, 93ff, 198ff). In Britain, cultural

studies' main adversary was not "hard", administrative communication science, but critical political economy. These two traditions shared both a critical approach and a "soft" methodological understanding. Their strait rather concerned reception versus institutional focus, and theories of culture and power.<sup>69</sup> The body of studies of British public service broadcasting relevant as secondary sources for the present study is coloured by these traditions.

In its early years, Norwegian media and communication research was focused on the press and broadcasting, studied from a social science perspective. Pioneers came from political science and sociology. By the early 1980s, however, scholars from the humanities – inspired for instance by British cultural studies – showed a growing interest in studying the media. When the first proper university department for media and communication got established in 1986, it was split into a social science and a humanities part, both formally and in terms of staff members (e.g. Nag 1996, 71ff). Since then, both academic and organizational divisions have become less clear. Still, media studies in Norway remains characterized equally by insights and approaches from the humanities, and by methods and research interests associated with the social sciences. Consequently, the body of research on broadcasting in general, and public service broadcasting specifically, mirrors this broad intake of perspectives and techniques (see Moe and Syvertsen 2007 for a recent overview).

German secondary sources are influenced by other trends, and produced under other circumstances. Research on mass media and public communication was first institutionalized as a university department in Germany in 1916 (as press science [*Zeitungswissenschaft*]). Until the early 1960s, the discipline, re-labelled *Publizistikwissenschaft*, grew within the humanities. It was characterized by "a normative approach and by descriptive historical and philological techniques" (Löblich 2007, 70). Yet, a legitimacy crisis partly stemming from the Nazi regime's embracement of the discipline during the WWII, led to a prolonged debate about its future. The debate mobilized exponents from the humanities on the one

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<sup>69</sup> See e.g. Lawrence Grossberg (1995) for an example of the issues in the debate. Staying with the familial metaphors, cultural studies proponent Grossberg calls the two traditions "cousins" (rather than divorced, presupposing a marriage) (1995, 72). He also subtitles his contribution "is anybody else bored with this debate?" (see e.g. McChesney 2007, 59ff for a discussion in retrospect from a US proponent of political economy).

hand, and “advocates of an empirical social science pleading for the use of quantitative methods” on the other (Löblich 2007, 70). The social science camp won in the sense that *Publizistikwissenschaft* during the early 1970s was placed within social science departments across West Germany. Specifically, cultural studies got “a difficult and ambivalent reception” within German media and communication studies – which has been “impoverishing for the growth of the discipline” (Koivisto and Thomas 2007, 66, 69). “Nowadays, German mass communication research considers itself to be essentially an empirical social science” (Löblich 2007, 70). This does neither mean that insights from the humanities, nor qualitative methods, are absent (see Koivisto and Thomas 2007 for updated statistics of institutionalizations). It does, however, illustrate how the environment for conducting research on public service broadcasting differs compared to the UK and Norway, both according to history and current fronts.

In sum, these differences in relevant actors’ and documents’ status and form, actors’ openness, the availability of documents, and the quantity and character of secondary data may potentially lead to biases in selections and analyses. Still, they are impossible to avoid when comparing across different systems. It is more fruitful to think of the differences as providing a restrictive frame for the study. As such, they need to be kept in mind both when designing the study, when using different sources, and in the specific analyses.

## Conclusion

Starting from a perceived need for fundamental considerations of comparative approaches in media studies, this chapter has worked towards a definition, and provided the reasoning behind the strategy chosen in the comparative parts of the present study. Further, I have considered challenges brought on by strengthened processes of globalization, arguing for adding the supranational level, rather than replacing the national. The chapter has also explained the motivation behind my selection of cases, and discussed features of the data sources and analytical methods employed in the comparisons.

The methodological considerations taken up here should clarify the basis for the analyses in *The contexts and strategies article*, *The national policy article*, and *The supranational policy article*. Together with the historical



## Comparing media policy

contextualization and the elaborate theoretical discussions undertaken in the previous chapters, this chapter constitute the basis for the thesis which the articles, and the conclusions of the study as a whole, rest on.



## **Chapter 7: Conclusions**

With a notion of how democratic society can benefit from public services also online, I compare media policy developments as public broadcaster institutions ventured onto the internet. Based on the findings, I discuss problematic aspects and explore fundamental thinking about what public service media online could look like. In a nutshell, that sums up this thesis. I now offer some overarching conclusions, bringing together the discussions of the six chapters of part I, as well as the findings and arguments from the five articles of part II.

### **Conclusions of the thesis as a whole**

More than a decade after the advent of the world wide web as a cross-media platform, public service arrangements remain central to media policy in the states under scrutiny. And the public broadcasting institutions have taken a proactive role, maintaining a strong position when meeting the digital era. Those two basic assumptions for the study, laid out in the introduction, have been confirmed through my analyses. The review of the research field; the discussions of the general rationale for broadcasting regulations and definitions of public service broadcasting; as well as the categorizations of public broadcasters' internet services in part I substantiate these observations. So do part II's discussions of the specific cases' strategies and legitimacy; as well as the analyses of the actors and their arguments related to internet policy issues. Beyond these general points, the thesis as a whole offers interesting conclusions.

In the introduction, I set out three main research questions. The first concerns how public service broadcasters have seized opportunities

and tackled challenges related to internet activities. Answering it, the thesis has provided both detailed mapping of the cases' activities and strategies over the last decade, and critical comparative discussions – seeking to understand similarities and differences among the cases. I have found that the cases approached the internet in analogous ways, and built impressive portfolios of internet activities. Quite rapidly, however, the developments of their online services were significantly marked by their respective national contexts: the markets and market positions, diverse societal characteristics, and the political cultures. As such, in documenting how the cases grasped new potential and handled challenges brought on by the growth of the internet, I have argued that due attention must be given to the level of national policy. This conclusion is drawn primarily from the first three articles of part II, but also substantiated through the contextualizing and historicizing discussions of part I.

The second main research question set out for the thesis deals with how regulatory regimes and policy actors – both national and supranational – coped with public broadcasters' move online. I find that at the outset, the public broadcasters dealt with vague policy frameworks as they moved onto the internet. National policy actors struggled to fit the budding online activities to existing public service regulations with context-specific, historical roots, closely connected to the organizational form of broadcasting. As the policy frameworks started to get more settled by the early 2000s, they showed two interesting characteristics: firstly, regulations failed to acknowledge the autonomous public service potential of internet communication, instead relying on competition law logics to label online services a mere addition to broadcasting. Secondly, though national policy contexts maintained their distinctive features, the frameworks got more similar across national borders. The impingement of commercial competitors' lobbyists and the EU as a supranational media policy actor are important factors behind the development of both characteristics.

This does not mean that national features are unimportant. Nothing is signalling the end of national public service institutions. When public broadcasters and public service as a media policy tool moved onto the internet, the well-established characteristics of the national dimensions remained important for our understanding of the developments – and their similarities and differences. This is demonstrated throughout the thesis: in part I it is shown in discussions of the relations between broadcast media and modern society; the birth of

## Conclusions

public service broadcasting; and the history of public broadcasters' auxiliary services. The importance of well-established national attributes is furthermore substantiated in part II's analyses. Specifically, I draw the conclusion from the articles dealing with the public broadcasters' general strategies in face of a digital media system, their changing national regulatory frameworks, and the role of the EU as a key policy actor on the issue.

From these articles I also conclude that the emerging policy frameworks lead public broadcasters' online activities to remain underdeveloped in terms of public service possibilities. While the public institutions under scrutiny have established themselves as strong media actors also on the internet, new initiatives' potential for serving public service purposes remain unexploited.

The third main research question posed in the introduction raised the challenge of investigating which democratic functions traditional public broadcasting institutions might have on the internet. Taking up the challenge, I have explored public service media online. The exploration has been based on discussions of research on public service broadcasting and democracy, its critics, its necessary theoretical revisions, as well as its continued relevance – laid out in part I. Employing normative public sphere theory as an analytical tool, I have argued in the two latter articles of part II for the need to acknowledge online communication's disseminating as well as dialogic forms. And I have argued for a policy approach that facilitates employment of both kinds in ways that steadily defy processes of enclosure and balkanization in the public sphere. Herein lie key advantages with maintaining public service media arrangements for actors shielded from pure market logics.

The policy approach, I have argued, should transfer core public service tasks, and extend the use of public service as a media policy tool, to the internet. The approach also needs to take into account the potential value of initiatives making use of innovative genres and diverse communicative modes seemingly far removed from redistribution of traditional public service radio and television content categories, and from deliberation about political issues in a strict sense. This is a way to start grasping what public service media might look like, freed from broadcasting rationales.

The diagnoses, discussions, and conclusions in the thesis neither necessarily apply to public service broadcasting all over the world, nor fit media policy universally. As I maintained in the discussion of compara-

tive approaches, the thesis does not aim at broad generalizations. Rather, by looking at different institutions from states with well-established and strong public service arrangements, my interest has been to interpret in detail processes involving specific cases. Still, by shedding light on the emerging policy issues these concrete institutions face, the thesis does make visible dilemmas, positions, and developments with wider significance. Similarly, though the discussions concentrate on issues surrounding the internet, they should have relevance for studies of regulatory development of other parts of public broadcasters' activities, as well as for our understanding of public service media arrangements in entirety.

The thesis focuses on a certain period of time in the ongoing development of public service broadcasting. As such, its value is in danger of being seen in retrospect as diminishing along with the topicality of the issues under scrutiny. However, I have stressed the importance of situating the processes in their historical contexts, and the need for understanding novel developments with a keen eye for earlier processes, arguments, and positions. Rather than being of ephemeral interest, then, the issues discussed here should be seen as part of the continuous changes of public service as a media policy tool.

I have argued that a case-oriented comparative approach, geared at detailed, historically attentive understanding, is fruitful for analyses of media policy. Different studies – also outside the field of public service media – can benefit from such an approach. Moreover, I have demonstrated, normative public sphere theory is a valuable analytical tool when trying to conceptualize and gauge potential tasks for diverse forms of mediated communication in democratic societies. Like the comparative design, this tool is applicable for a range of analyses, not restricted to Europe, public service actors, or specific policy frameworks.

The thesis has offered input to thinking about the role of online communication in and for the public sphere. It has done so with broadcast media as a starting point. Utilizing public service as an example, I have taken discussions of accustomed ideas about the democratic functions ascribed to radio and television into the realm of the internet. Sound empirical research on the actual uses of novel online applications is needed to move the discussion forward. But a furthering of my exploration would also gain from analyses of other kinds of media policy tools and institutions. This includes not only diverse forms of existing arrangements and well-established media actors, but also incipient possibilities and smaller grassroots-initiatives.

## Conclusions

Considering the issues under scrutiny in this thesis, it can – hopefully – serve a wider purpose: to revitalize discussions about public service as a media policy tool in the digital era, as well as stimulate critical thinking about the functions of media in and for democratic society.





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<sup>70</sup> In this list of references, as well as in the list of references for each article, I have translated non-English titles into English. These translations should not be seen as official. Rather, they are meant to yield a basic understanding of the subject matter of the texts in question.

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## Part II

*The articles*



## Article 1

*The contexts and strategies article*





## **Commercial Services, Enclosure, and Legitimacy: Comparing Contexts and Strategies for Public Service Media Funding and Development\***

European public broadcasters have long since ceased to be solely publicly financed. But the inherently controversial licence fee on television sets has remained a key source of funding. Facing an increasingly complex digital media environment, public service providers have expanded beyond traditional broadcast radio and television to embrace digital technologies and correlated fields of activity. Because the legitimacy of public funding is closely connected to specific characteristics of broadcasting, this development encourages the search for alternative sources of income. The potential transformation from public service broadcasting to public service media thus compels a thorough discussion of institutional funding schemas.

This article concentrates on elements of, and attitudes towards, commercial funding and arrangements that promote enclosure within and across media platforms. In some states commercial funding has traditionally served to demarcate between public service and private commercial broadcasting. In other states this division has not applied. To what extent, and how, have attitudes and regulations about funding changed in the face of new media platforms? Enclosure is significant here and the term, as I use it, covers a range of ways to restrict media content which involve issues of and about control. Familiar enclosure methods today include subscription and pay-per-view services,

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\* This article is single-authored by Hallvard Moe. The final version was submitted in August 2007, and published in January 2008 as pp. 51-69 in Gregory Ferrell Lowe and Jo Bardoel (eds) *From Public Service Broadcasting to Public Service Media. RIPE@2007*. Göteborg: Nordicom. Copyright Hallvard Moe.

encrypting broadcasting channels that require registration and decoders, and the constraints of proprietary software on the internet. Each schema is about erecting walls around content by either technical or economic means, or some combination of the two. Such enclosure is in opposition to the core public service broadcasting values of open access and universality wherein content ought to be available for everyone without geographic, economic, social status, or technical impediment. How are attitudes towards such arrangements playing out in comparative contexts? What are the potential implications for the legitimacy of public service media? Answers to these questions are of keenest importance today and speak to the kind of future we may anticipate.

Relying on a comparative approach, I analyze how the strategies of public service broadcasters in three Western European states correspond to their differing social and political contexts. The selected cases are Germany's ARD and ZDF, the BBC in the UK and Norway's NRK. These companies are all primarily funded by licence fees and are institutions with a domestic public service remit. All four companies face common challenges represented by a globalized broadcasting industry combined with the European Union as a powerful media policy actor (see Holtz-Bacha 2006, ch. 7; Jakubowicz 2004; Lowe and Hujanen 2003; Ward 2003).<sup>2</sup> Yet they are different in relation to relevant analysis variables:<sup>3</sup> they have diverging formal founding and organizational forms, exist within quite different political systems and cultures, and have been subject to dissimilar regulatory arrangements. In addition, their primary and secondary markets – and the competitors they face – also differ.

The approach taken here, then, is based on the observation that public broadcasters and media policy still primarily relate to national frameworks. Actual strategies, public debates, the role of competing

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<sup>2</sup> Norway is bound by all relevant EU regulations and policy decisions pursuant to The European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement.

<sup>3</sup> I have taken a cue from Arend Lijphart (1971) on how to avoid a basic difficulty with qualitative comparative research: the “many variables, small N” problem. One way around it is to select “comparable” cases – meaning cases that are “similar in a large number of important characteristics (variables) which one wants to treat as constants, but dissimilar as far as those variables are concerned which the researcher wants to relate to each other” (Lijphart 1971, 687). The anticipated result should allow the researcher to establish relationships among relatively few variables, while many others are being controlled.

actors, and regulatory regimes have developed over time and continue to vary significantly among different states. The first part of what follows concentrates on how shared challenges related to commercial funding and enclosure have been applied in different national settings from the preparations for the digital era until 2007.<sup>†</sup> Mapping findings across contexts facilitates a discussion of the second main issue raised in this article: what do different strategies imply for the legitimacy of public broadcasters' funding schemas?

### **Strategies and regulatory frameworks**

We begin by scrutinizing the development of case strategies and corresponding regulatory frameworks in relation to commercial funding activities and enclosure arrangements. This discussion is based on analysis of guidelines, strategy and policy documents, letters-to-the-editor, as well as news articles. This produces a needful comparison of differences and similarities that help us understand the cases with keen reference to the contextual features that define each case.

#### *Commercial sources of funding*

The NRK launched a forceful argument for a more efficient organization in response to its first serious national competitors which commenced in the early 1990s.<sup>4</sup> The public broadcaster quickly found that the licence fee, even in combination with cut-backs, could not provide sufficient income to finance its ambitious aims; a difficulty that become ever more obvious in the emerging digital era (NRK 1995, 7; Moe 2003, 114).

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<sup>†</sup> For a brief update, discussing developments until early June 2008 in relation to the findings and arguments made in this article, see the postscript in appendix 3.

<sup>4</sup> The NRK is authorized to pursue broadcasting activities according to the Norwegian Broadcasting Act. Its main services comprise two television channels (with auxiliary ones being introduced late 2007) and three radio channels. The national market is made up of the country's population of about 4 million. TV2 and P4 were rewarded nationwide licences to broadcast advertising funded public service television and radio in 1992 and 1993, respectively.

	<b>NRK</b>	<b>BBC</b>	<b>ARD</b>	<b>ZDF</b>
Licence fee per month (2007) (€)	21,6	16,6	11,9	4,2
Licence fee income (€ mill.) (2005)	426	4570,8	5119	1620,5
Other income (€ mill.) (2005)	23	949	682,3	266,7
Percent of income from licence fee	95 %	78 %	83 %	86 %
Percent of income from commercial sources	5 %	16 %	17 %	14 %

Table 1: 2006 sources of public service broadcasting funding in four cases (NRK 2006; BBC 2006c; BBC Worldwide 2006b; ARD 2006; ZDF 2006). In the "other incomes" category, for the NRK, approximately €12 million comes directly from NRK Aktivum; for the BBC, approximately €270 million comes directly from BBC Worldwide; for the ARD, approximately €132 million comes from advertising – the rest stems from co-productions, co-financing, marketing of programmes; and for the ZDF, approximately €99 million comes from advertising – and the rest stems from co-productions, co-financing, marketing of programmes. The remaining percents of the BBC total income largely stem from a government grant for BBC Worldservice.

The NRK took a proactive approach that "paid off" as Parliament changed the organization from a foundation to a state-owned limited company in 1996. This change of status facilitated subsidiaries to exploit commercial potential while keeping a level of political control. NRK Aktivum was established the following year to take care of all business activities connected to public service broadcasting.<sup>6</sup> After later

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<sup>6</sup> Commercial activities existed also prior to this date, but on a much smaller scale. NRK Aktivum initiated several controversial projects before settling on four main areas: programme sales, interactive services, consumer goods (mainly via a web store on nrk.no) and events (Strømmen 1999, 82; also NRK Aktivum 2006).

liberalizations, the current statutes approve of all “commercial activities the objective of which is to create revenue for public service broadcasting activities” (MCCA 2004, §3-2). On this basis, the broadcaster has actively sought commercial partnerships and revenue in programme production, as well as for teletext and internet service development (Moe 2003, 115); engaged in a failed initiative to commercialize the entire department for educational programmes (Gram 2001); acquired and launched magazines; and planned a theme park based on a children’s programme series (Wekre 2006). Although the percentage of total commercial income remains small (see table 1), the pretensions and scope of activity does not lag behind larger sister-institutions, as we shall see.

Actually the BBC has undertaken commercial activities since its inception.<sup>7</sup> That is not really new. But until the 1980s, the scope of such activities remained modest and was concentrated on programme sales (Briggs 1995, 712). Beginning in the late 1980s the BBC commercial arm expanded robustly, absorbing new businesses and launching new initiatives (Born 2004, 59). Formal permission was in order and the Conservative Government’s 1994 White Paper on the future of the institution was tellingly subtitled *Serving the Nation, Competing Worldwide*. It encouraged the BBC’s development “into an international multi-media enterprise” (quoted in Steemers 2005, 233). Not only would commercial revenue supplement the licence fee, the BBC should thereby bring “a distinctively United Kingdom voice, outlook and culture into the world market” (Steemers 2005, 233).

That same year, the BBC presented its dual approach for the digital era: to add new free services to its publicly funded portfolio while the wholly owned subsidiary, BBC Worldwide, introduced subscription-based thematic channels. Since the BBC lacked resources to implement its own digital strategy, several commercial joint ventures were established during the 1990s, both for broadcasting and online (Steemers 1998, 114). The strategy coincided with internal public management-inspired reorganisation aimed at gaining additional savings to help fund the digital transition (Born 2004). In the new millennium the BBC operates and co-operates over ten subscription television channels, publishes

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<sup>7</sup> The BBC, which faced competition already in 1955 from advertising funded ITV, grounds its operation in a Charter with the state, and offers four main television and five main radio channels. The home market includes viewers in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – together a population of around 60 million.

well over 30 magazine titles, and has large income streams from international programme sales (BBC Worldwide 2006a). The monies generated by such activities are quite large and reflect the global market potential enjoyed by the BBC (see table 1).

Contrasting with the Norwegian and British cases, Germany's ARD and ZDF have been dually funded by advertising and licence fees since their establishment.<sup>8</sup> The deregulation of German broadcasting in 1984 brought competition for viewers and a race for advertising money. A few turbulent years of highly polarized debate over the balance between public and private actors followed (Humphreys 1994, 239). When a balance was struck after 1986, the public side was granted little room for extensive reorganizations or grand commercial initiatives.<sup>9</sup> On the threshold of the digital era, then, these German public broadcasting institutions' prospects were quite different in comparative terms. Their plans were therefore necessarily "more modest" due to "political hostility" to their ambitions for digital expansion (Steeemers 1998, 112).

Still, some commercial initiatives were undertaken by these German companies, and principally by the ZDF which has acted as a "catalyst for discussion and change" (Steeemers 2001, 78). Deutsche Telekom was, for instance, invited to co-operate in promoting a web-based news service. A more peculiar and unrealized project was the ZDF Medienparks initiative that envisioned an amusement park based on popular television formats (Gounalakis 2000).<sup>10</sup> The ZDF still operates programme sales services and a merchandise shop, as does the ARD.

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<sup>8</sup> After the Second World War, broadcasting policy in West Germany was delegated to the different states [*Länder*]. The states now form nine public broadcasters, offering regional radio and television channels. Together they constitute the ARD, which provides altogether nearly 40 regional radio channels, one main nationwide and 5 auxiliary television channels. The ZDF, launched in 1963, offers one main national and several additional television channels. Both organizations find their formal grounding in the Constitutional Court's interpretation of the Basic Law of 1949. What has become Europe's most competitive television market is made up of the German population of over 80 million.

<sup>9</sup> A 1986 Constitutional Court intervention was decisive in setting the balance: the public organizations were to remain the foundation of German broadcasting, and continue to provide a so-called basic service (Humphreys 1994, 255ff).

<sup>10</sup> The ZDF felt it needed a new form of audience contact to make up for its lack of a radio service. This argument has also been used for their proactive online strategy (Eberle 2003, 1), and been put forward more generally as an explanation for their willingness to push for alternative means of funding and partnerships (Steeemers 2001, 78).

Their scope is modest but, interestingly, accounts have not made the clear separation between commercial and public income as is required in the British case.

These differences in strategic scope and regulatory frameworks are also visible in the role of advertising. Apart from a limited amount of sponsoring in television, mainly of large sports events, the NRK has had to keep its radio and television channels advertising-free. On the other hand, adverts appear throughout teletext services and across websites, including on front pages and inside news sections. This quite liberal arrangement is formally grounded in Norway's Broadcasting Act. The BBC has also been constrained from carrying advertising on its main television and radio channels, but in contrast with the Norwegian case the UK ban also covers BBC internet sites and teletext services. A potentially significant break with this policy came as a proposal to start exposing overseas users of *bbc.co.uk* to limited amounts of advertising. The proposal reaped both external and in-house protests (Sweney 2006a). In February 2007, the new BBC Trust moved to defer its decision to either deny or endorse the proposal (Conlan 2007).

Following competition, the amounts collected from advertising by the ARD and the ZDF in Germany remains relatively modest. Regulations prevent these public service broadcasters from taking advantage of increases in advertising expenditure, e.g. by prohibiting ads after 20:00 (Holtz-Bacha 2003, 112; Steemers 1998, 104). Advertising rules are also restricted in terms of platforms. In 1997, a ZDF-initiated co-operative arrangement with Microsoft on the internet triggered a political process resulting in a ban on advertising and sponsorship on new media platforms and teletext services, effectively ending the collaboration before it could fairly begin (Eberle 2003, 7; Steemers 2001, 79).<sup>11</sup> Thus, despite a long tradition for mixed funding and even facing a digital media system, the ARD and the ZDF have been intentionally hindered from developing commercial sources much further. Although the level of non-licence fee income is rather high for both these organizations, most of that stems from programme production-related activities and traditional advertising rather than the innovative initiatives both have sought on new platforms (see Table 1).

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<sup>11</sup> The ban was implemented in the inter-state treaty [*Rundfunkstaatsvertrag*] that regulates the public broadcasters' field of activities in 2000 (see Moe 2008 [*The national policy article*]).

In summary, these cases clearly indicate the role of commercial revenue as a viable stream to support otherwise insufficient funding derived from licence fees. This is needed for the development of non-linear, digital services and platforms. Although the scope of possibilities for such development, and the scale of potential revenues, varies considerably, the trend is apparent and clearly associated with the transition from public service broadcasting to public service media.

*Arrangements promoting enclosure*

NRK broadcast services are at the outset freely available. The institution has protested against a peculiar regulatory exception allowing satellite distributors to encrypt and sell expensive subscriptions for the NRK's publicly funded channels (Eckblad and Seljord 2005). But the NRK strategy is inconsistent because its licence fee funded television channels will remain openly accessible on the digital terrestrial network despite an earlier NRK plan to encrypt and require viewers to register to see public service television (Bernander 2006).<sup>12</sup> The plan, vetoed by the Government, would clearly have facilitated future commercial utilization and entailed greater enclosure in direct contradiction with their core public service values of open access and universality.

On new media platforms, however, the institution has had greater success with its strategy. While extensive web-TV content is freely available on the web at nrk.no, NRK Aktivum sells downloadable audio books over the internet and plans to do the same with television content soon (Kibar 2006). Further, commercial mobile phone services are used to market the potential of public service, according to former Director General John Bernander who said, "if we cannot provide teleco[m]s with extra revenue because we simply hand out free services to all, then they will turn to commercial partners who will give them something back" (Bernander 2005, 4). So not allowing the NRK to "apply commercial logic practices" would marginalize and possibly even exclude

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<sup>12</sup> Digitalization of the terrestrial television network is undertaken by a commercial company – Norges Televisjon – jointly owned by the NRK, TV2 and privatized state telecom Telenor. A separate company (RiksTV) with the same owners will run a pay-tv service on the platform.



it from media markets (Bernander 2005, 4; also Sivertsen 2007).<sup>13</sup> The NRK's attitude to arrangements that promote enclosure seems quite explicit. Presenting the strategy for 2006-12, Bernander maintained that "on new platforms, users must pay both for distribution and for copyright clearance" (quoted in Selsjord 2006a). Importantly, the owner signalled support right away (Selsjord 2006b).

In parallel to its extensive subscription-based services, the BBC portrays itself as promoting unconstrained access across platforms. From 2002 and after the collapse of the subscription-based ITVDigital terrestrial television provider, the BBC (along with BSkyB) backed Freeview as its successor. It offers a bouquet of over 30 channels free to air. Further, a non-encrypted satellite television service – designed to counter BSkyB's enclosed offers – was approved in early 2007 (Tryhorn 2007). Audiovisual clips have been released online under a "creative archive licence" to "provide access to public service audio and video archives" and give "fuel" for the public's "creative endeavours" (BBC 2006a; Sheppard 2006).<sup>14</sup> A software platform for playing audiovisual content (iPlayer) is a recently approved component of this. The BBC does advance open access for licence fee payers on a universal basis and counters arrangements that promote enclosure.

Nevertheless, there are exceptions. News to mobile services, for instance, began as a commercial venture and only later was introduced as a licence fee funded service, and without public debate (Cave et al. 2004, 262). Another move was made in 2006 when a non-exclusive deal was struck with Microsoft. The IT giant's proprietary software and enclosed game consol hardware were deemed a key to reaching audiences without them always "having to come to [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk)" (quoted in Kelly 2006). It seems that future access to BBC content will also feature enclosures.

Preparation for digital television in Germany was marked by several attempts to join public and commercial actors in a co-operative venture for a common satellite platform (see Brockmeyer and Eichholz

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<sup>13</sup> The argument does have some relevance, as illustrated by a recent case where a local internet service provider (ISP) set a maximum limit for transfers from NRK-servers to end-users, since the institution's popular web-TV offer clogged the ISP's network (Lorentsen 2006). The ISP demanded that the NRK should pay for the needed extra capacity. Though the dispute was settled, the result was a temporarily poorer service from the public broadcaster, and an illustrative test of emerging problems with network neutrality.

<sup>14</sup> The pilot was closed down in October 2006 to await formal approval.

1999). When this failed, public service broadcasters concentrated on developing content for both cable and satellite, independent of network providers and commercial interests. From the first pilots in 1997 the ARD Digital and ZDF Vision units have built robust bouquets combining main channels with new and auxiliary ones, and experimenting in interactive services (Zervos 2003, 20). These services are provided free and are not encrypted.

Questions about the encryption of television signals and arrangements for enclosure have been heavily debated in Germany. An extraordinarily high number of free to air public and commercial channels have constituted the non-encrypted provision over the last decade. But facing digitalization, commercial providers now seek new revenue streams by way of enclosure. The ARD and the ZDF have, both individually and together, argued fiercely against this development, claiming it will fundamentally change the German market and create a digital divide in the population. The trend threatens to slow digital development in Germany (ARD and ZDF 2006a, 337).

This attitude applies across platforms: after some controversy, the broadcasters secured that all publicly funded channels will enjoy free availability as IPTV from all providers and via non-proprietary standards (Digital Fernsehen 2006a; Salmen 2006). Correspondingly, audiovisual content for mobile phones are claimed as a timely accommodation to technological developments and also remain openly accessible (ARD and ZDF 2006b, 3; Golem Forum 2005). German public service broadcasting is presented as the antidote to enclosure because it is available to all without extra costs or technical complexities. Thus, the public service values of universality and open access remain front and centre in Germany.

In the transition from public service broadcasting to public service media, the providers are in general still principled supporters of non-enclosure. The ethos of universalism and open access are foundational to legitimacy. Such a stand is clearly a service to the public that pays the bills and therefore deserves access to public service media services. At the same time, however, it is also clear that maintaining a total non-enclosure and non-commercial stance is difficult in the digital era as licence fee revenue is inadequate to fund the mandates entailed in the expanding public service broadcasting remit. This is further complicated by the need for co-operative alliances and partnerships with private commercial firms that in part premise their business strategies on pro-

proprietary standards and enclosure arrangements. This is an area of considerable struggle, serious conflict, and long-term importance for and to the public interest in media in the digitized environment.

*Mapping similarities and differences*

The basis for what has come to be in terms of commercial expansion was already established by the early 1990s. The fundamental frameworks in which the public broadcasters have had to manoeuvre were well in place by then. In fact, the first wave of commercial activities had nothing to do with preparation for digitalization. Rather, the deregulation of analogue broadcasting markets in the 1980s compelled that initial search for alternative revenue sources. When digitalization eventually was firmly on the agenda, a second wave of initiatives emerged and focused on possibilities for exploitation of new forms of content through new channels and platforms. This insight underlines the importance of keeping a certain historical perspective when scrutinizing ongoing processes.

The four cases discussed here can be construed to represent a continuum of the elements, and attitudes about them, characterizing commercial funding and arrangements that promote enclosure. In a relatively forthcoming political climate with generous leeway for launching commercial initiatives, the NRK's commercially and publicly funded services do not always appear to be as clearly separated. Several provisions are made that actually promote enclosure, especially on new media platforms. The BBC seeks to balance a far-reaching commercial arm with a clear focus on public service core tasks. Despite recent deviations that might pave the way for future problems with enclosure, the BBC has a relatively strict and uniform strategy detaching publicly funded domestic services from commercial activities, primarily directed abroad. Facing a digital media system, the ARD and the ZDF have found themselves in a stable regulatory situation that also enforces comparatively strict limitations on the latitude for commercial initiatives, although these are limitations the ZDF has been noticeably more willing to test than the ARD. But both actually have little flexibility to initiate new services that would produce alternative income. While advertising remains an integrated part of their funding schemas overall and historically, it has not been expanded to include new platforms. Thus and despite a less clear separation of commercial and public income streams, as noted earlier, disallow-

ing arrangements that promote enclosure ironically means that the ARD and the ZDF have the most “clean” or “pure” public service broadcasting value-based strategies.

The clearest correspondence in strategy is between the BBC and the NRK, with the former providing inspiration for the latter. Both have developed, and stuck to, explicitly proactive strategies embracing the commercial potential of public service media. But this is not to ignore substantial differences. The NRK appears more willing to apply arrangements of enclosure on a pragmatic basis, as illustrated in the issue of encryption of digital terrestrial television. Moreover, the NRK seems less focused on stressing a rigid division between its commercial and publicly funded parts – a separation the BBC finds crucial. Overall, the British institution comes across as holding a more principled stand, securing a basic level of openness.

Further, the arguments mobilized in support of these two strategies differ significantly. For the BBC it was largely a matter of leveraging commercial potential in international markets to subsidize public services at home (see Birt’s text in BBC 1998, 4).<sup>15</sup> In the Norwegian case, argumentation was instead keyed to stakes in national language and culture. In that scenario the ends justify the means. So if commercial funding makes the public institution stronger, it must be utilized because such is perceived to be in Norway’s best interests (NRK 2000, 7; also Moe 2003). Thus and while the BBC attacks foreign markets for the benefit of Britain, the NRK defends its home land for the benefit of Norway.

To some extent these disparities boil down to differences in markets and economic potential. The BBC operates under more advantageous conditions. Not only is the domestic market thirteen times bigger and with a much wider range of potential customers, the possibilities for export are exceptional given that English is the language of international advantage. This applies both to the market for programme and content sales, and in consumer goods. The NRK lacks both a large home market and any major potential for international sales outside the Nordic region.

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<sup>15</sup> As the name signals, BBC Worldwide primarily directs its attention abroad. This also applied to its predecessor BBC Enterprises, which tellingly was suggested to be named BBC International (Briggs 1995, 713). In 2007, domestic commercial services are sold under different brands (e.g. UKTV), while free services are either offered exclusively for UK audiences, or for foreign users with additional advertising exposure (e.g. planned internet services, including BBC-branded channels on YouTube) or as pay-services (e.g. IPTV for US customers).

In this light similarities in strategies are all the more striking and the Norwegian broadcaster's attitude towards commercial potential appears quite optimistic.

In contrast, the German organizations operate in a much larger language area. Not only does Germany have more than seventeen times the population of Norway, there is also a substantial market in neighbouring countries. To a certain degree, the ARD and the ZDF leverage the size of these markets. The actual amount of licence fee income is high, profits from programme sales and co-productions are stable and substantial, and their share of the advertising market is also worth noting. Yet compared to the BBC and the NRK, their arguments and strategies are clearly less expansive and exploratory – which is not to say that this has always or even mostly been their preference. The development identified by Steemers (1998; 2001) in the late 1990s has continued through 2007. The BBC has taken its commercial expansion further while the ARD and the ZDF have remained moderate. In all these cases, each public broadcasting company has taken the route it was permitted to take, if not also encouraged to accept. As we will discuss later, the latitude of possibility is largely a product of domestic political culture. Thus, the gap between the German and British cases has grown.

The pressing question at this point, especially for public broadcasting managers, is what such differences in strategies imply for the legitimacy of public service.

### **Implications for public service legitimacy**

To defend their privileges – funding schemas included – public service broadcasters must balance their need for legitimacy with respect to three different sets of actors. The first and foremost actor is the public. They are first and foremost because they use and pay for these services and must see the institution and its output as distinctive, independent, and reliable – and therefore worthy of public funding. Secondly, and increasingly important, public service broadcasters need to secure legitimacy among their commercial competitors and partners. The industry must perceive the public institutions' activities as stable, predictable, and reasonably regulated. Thirdly, legitimacy has a political dimension which depends on the extent to which the broadcasters' plans resonate in and for political policy.

Building on the four case companies in their respective contexts, we can now concentrate on the implications of different strategies for these three dimensions of legitimacy. I choose the character of debates about the licence fee to illustrate public broadcasters' public legitimacy. The role of the industry is scrutinized by looking at the level, form and force of protests against public service broadcasters' commercial activities. The third dimension is approached via discussion about the importance of political cultures for our understanding of the dynamics between strategies for funding and public media policy.

*Licence fee debates: the legitimacy of public service media*

Consensus remains strong to keep the NRK as a primarily publicly funded institution with the licence fee as the preferred arrangement. Other solutions have not been thoroughly debated despite the fact that two of the parties represented in Parliament have set abolishment of the licence fee as an aim; the Progress Party (*FrP*) favours commercial funding while the smaller Liberal party (*Venstre*) wants to turn the NRK into a post on the annual state budget. In principle current regulations do not rule out collecting licence fees from PC and mobile phone owners. In 2005, the NRK even suggested this opening should be employed, partly building its argumentation on a newly passed decision in Denmark where a "media licence fee" was introduced (Mossin 2006). Two subsequent coalition Governments have since rejected the idea without much debate or any formal treatment.

In fact, public debates on NRK funding have only emerged sporadically and have seldom touched on anything fundamental. At the time of writing, the latest debate originated in a 2006 plan to change the deadlines for collection of the licence fee to comply with accounting regulations. Depending on which side one chooses to believe, the quite complicated schema would either entail no burden for the licence fee paying public or result in several months of double payment (Alstad 2007; Gabrielsen and Vagstad 2007). Rather than touching basic issues, the debate remained focused on practices of accountancy and personal misrepresentations.

Given their limited possibilities for commercial expansion, a continuance of the licence fee is crucial for the ARD and the ZDF. On this basis a more fundamental debate has taken place: the issue of collecting

licence fees from internet-ready PC's and mobile phones. The question gave rise to substantial protests (see Roth 2006; Digital Fernsehen 2006b), and a correspondingly lengthy political process. Despite opponents' claim that it is equivalent to "forcing deaf people to throw money in the street musician's hat" (Digital Fernsehen 2006c), the licence fee on PC terminals was introduced in January 2007 at a third of the fee amount for television sets. The scheme entails the potential risk of harming the legitimacy of licence fee funding per se: the introduction led to an upsurge in publicity for "refuseniks" and also resulted in protests at the EU level (Bebenburg 2007). Still, the public broadcasters took an at least symbolically important step to validate the traditional licence fee system for new digital platforms.

In even starker contrast to Norway, public debates about alternatives to – and alternative uses of – the licence fee have been numerous and vigorous in the UK. The fact that the BBC itself has commissioned essays to debate the future funding of public service is illustrative. A recent example is a published collection titled *Can the Market Deliver?* (Helm et al. 2005). Ofcom (2007) plans to establish a Public Service Provider by which companies obliged to produce required programmes could direct their bids to what could amount to an expediter (cf. Peacock 2004 and Graham 2005 for the opposing arguments on this issue). Despite such initiatives, and a below-inflation fee agreement set in 2007, the licence fee remains the dominant source of income for the BBC. It will be kept so until 2016, according to the new Charter, but with an evaluation after 5 years (BBC 2006b). Initiatives to introduce a PC licence fee have thus far been left stranded. The BBC holds television sets as "a valid basis on which to raise the licence fee" for another 15 years (BBC 2004, 113).

For the NRK, the rare public debates about their funding schema have not dealt with essential issues. In the UK, on the other hand, much more is at risk: there have been massive public debates questioning the very legitimacy of the licence fee, and the BBC as its beneficiary. The German cases seem to find themselves in a middle position. Recent controversial developments have led to some public scrutiny of the licence fee, but the public funding schema has in the end been expanded and seems far from being realistically threatened.

The Norwegian situation fits with the findings so far – the NRK's generous leeway seems to be reflected in the legitimacy of the institution's licence fee funding. On the other hand, it is not equally easy

to draw parallels regarding the other cases' situation. The BBC's tradition for emphasizing separation of public and commercial parts has not insulated its funding scheme from public criticism. Despite a more moderate strategy, the German broadcasters meet stronger public protests than the NRK. To what extent is this mirrored by the industry?

*Industry protests: opposition to public service media commercial activities*

For the NRK, liberal advertising rules on teletext and websites became a prime focus of attacks from competitors beginning in the late 1990s (Moe 2003; also Selsjord 2006b). The commercial broadcaster TVNorge claimed it suffered a €750,000 loss of income. Similarly, when TV2 warned against a liberalization of NRK regulations, teletext and internet services were singled out as particularly damaging. They must therefore be free of advertising and fulfil the requirements of public service broadcasting. These protests prompted an examination of the schema by European Commission state aid authorities.

In the eyes of the British media industry, the BBC's legitimacy was dealt several blows in the course of preparations for the digital era. Early moves were particularly controversial. They were also, arguably, a bit shaky: even peripheral services like pub games and credit card authorization were introduced in the early 1990s, services which clearly had little to do with broadcasting (Born 2004, 59). Commercial competitors repeatedly objected to these, and later to new services (e.g. Sweney 2006b; Cave et al. 2004; Gibson 2004). They especially argue for a strong and visible link between each commercial service and the core public service remit (Tryhorn 2005). To help settle disputes and strengthen legitimacy, the draft for the new Charter proposed four criteria to guide the activities of BBC Worldwide: (1) they must support or relate to the public service mission; (2) not jeopardize the good reputation of the BBC or its brand values; (3) exhibit commercial efficiency; and (4) comply with Fair Trading guidelines (BBC Worldwide 2006b, 5).

In Germany, the industry's level of tolerance for commercial initiatives seems to correspond to the lowest level of formal freedom. The ARD and the ZDF have, for instance, been criticized for operating expensive call-in services connected to broadcast programmes (Hamann 2004). A perceived lack of separation between commercial and public activities income streams have been another issue for objections. The



lobby for national commercial broadcasters (VPRT) has been particularly active, both in public debates and in lodging formal complaints with regulatory authorities. Thus, a “pure” strategy has not meant an absence of industry opposition: the forms of protests and the arguments put forward by competing actors in Germany resemble those in the other cases.

Public service media legitimacy among both competitors and partners concerns the actual character, scope and regulation of commercial activities. At the outset, the link between what the broadcasters do and are allowed to do, and the attitude of the industry, could be thought to be self evident. And yet the present cases indicate how industrial legitimacy transcends national differences. A prominent similarity emerges across all three contexts: the cases have met corresponding criticism from the industry using nearly identical arguments and advancing clearly shared common interests. It is hard not to see the strong hand of globalization and commercial media lobbies at work here. This seems to indicate a general transnational front against any commercial expansion of public service operators (Mortensen 2006, 76). However, the force of industry arguments, and their success in turning concerns into actual regulatory arrangements has differed. These differences compel us to look at the issue of legitimacy in relation to the foundational dimension of political culture.

*The importance of political cultures: public service media policy and strategy*

As the analysis has shown, all four cases are perceived as legitimate in their respective political settings. They have each so far tackled the turmoil of digitalization without losing their fundamental status, or indeed their strong market positions. The interesting question, then, is not whether they are seen as legitimate by political actors, but rather *how* they have so far kept their legitimacy despite markedly different strategies. Answering that requires examining political culture contexts.

Commercial expansion undertaken by the BBC from the late 1980s can be understood as an answer to political pressure to make the broadcaster more efficient. As part of the legacy of Thatcherism, the institution was explicitly given an industrial role and a leadership character (Born 2004, 58ff). The Blair government, it has been argued, followed a similar path (McGuigan 2004, 19). The NRK is also mandated

to take a pioneering role in exploring new technologies and driving universal uptake. Yet it is regarded as an instrument for social and cultural policy and not, to the same extent, for industrial policy motives. Protection of language and culture has remained at the core of the Norwegian debate. The same policy field, but with different aims, marks the German debate: there the role of public opinion formation necessary for a robust democratic process is the keen focus. So the source of policy legitimizing public service broadcasting, and the policy objectives inscribing the parameters for public service media, vary as a function of broader and more general aims characteristic of political culture and policy ambitions in the three respective states where these companies are located.

Liberal political systems as in Britain have traditionally championed political neutrality in broadcasting. The BBC's regulatory model sets out to protect the public service broadcaster from political control by having the professionals run the operation instead of politicians having management control (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 31). Guided by an ideal freedom, media policy in general is advancing self-regulation, and so all state intervention must be thoroughly, even painstakingly, legitimized (Vowe 1999, 405). Compared to other liberal systems, especially the American and Australian, the UK stands out with a legacy of conservative statism combined with a historically very strong labour movement. Both these factors modify the liberal tradition's imprint on the political culture. As noted by the BBC (2004, 16), both Conservative and Labour governments have encouraged the corporation to pursue global commercial interests while remaining a strong public service provider at home. As long as this division remains potent, and the market impact of publicly funded interference is transparently accounted for, the BBC has been able to keep its dual strategy and maintain legitimacy in the eyes of its political governors.

In Norway, the politicians who hail the NRK as a mainly non-commercial broadcaster simultaneously approve an expansive strategy, thus far without much emphasis on any rigid division between the two aims. This somewhat contradictory situation can be understood with reference to a social democratic political culture. Geared towards equality as a social priority, its media policy should involve as many actors as possible in the decision processes to secure consensus and equal opportunities for all (Vowe 1999, 405). The system has a markedly more elaborate legislative process compared with Britain. Further, there is by tradition high

tolerance for state subsidies of a strong national actor because the small language area corresponds to a market deemed too limited for robust commercial initiatives (Moe 2008 [*The national policy article*]). This partly explains the NRK's status and has lent force to the company's optimistic plans. Since the introduction of commercial broadcasting some fifteen years ago, the overall regulatory process has favoured a liberalized NRK (Moe 2003).

German media policy, in contrast, generally provides greater liberties for private ownership and is geared towards securing a blooming private sector (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 71). On the other hand, the German Constitutional Court's decisions have been fundamental for the development of the nation's broadcasting sector. The Court has repeatedly stressed the importance of publicly funded broadcasting's functions for democratic government and public opinion formation (see Humphreys 1994; also Lucht 2006; Porter and Hasselbach 1991, 16ff). As illustrated, such was also the case when the foundation was laid for strategies to handle digitalization. This role further implies a defence of the ARD and the ZDF as traditional public institutions, but without expansion into commercial areas (Moe 2008 [*The national policy article*]). Here legitimacy is clearly tied to counterbalancing marketization. In a sense, then, industrial policy arguments work against public service broadcasting efforts in Germany to achieve public service media success, and this is in stark contrast with the BBC. German public service providers are restricted from pursuing an expansive strategy and commercial revenues because all of that is so far reserved for private sector companies.

The leitmotif of security is deeply rooted in Germany's political culture. Media policy is expected to provide clear rules with specific possibilities for sanctions. It is in effect a conservative policy (Vowe 1999, 404). In the specific regulation of public broadcasting, authority is assigned beyond the political party system and divided among diverse social or political groups (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 31). The broadcasting system's federal structure means, moreover, that every regional ARD member organization must deal with often differing political conditions coloured by locale politics. The states [*Länder*] have a long history of competing among themselves to attract industry, including private broadcasters. They typically do this on the basis of offering favourable economic conditions. Since the 1980s this has taken the form of "a pattern of competitive deregulations" by the states (Humphreys 1994, 242). Despite operating a nationwide service, the ZDF is also subject to

this regulatory schema. As a result, both organizations have had to do without the strong, unified support from a national government enjoyed by the other case countries.

Striving to retain legitimacy, public service broadcasters thus remain reliant on the specific national political culture at home. The case of the ZDF clearly shows how national variables can create crippling constraints. Many of this German institution's commercial initiatives have been left stranded following regulatory processes initiated by public criticism or industry protests (and more often the latter than the former). In contrast, the BBC's strategy is perceived as quite legitimate because of, and not despite, its commercial explorations (and exploitations). Similarly, the legitimacy of the NRK seems based on the institution's ability to utilize commercial potential, and make use of new technology – despite associations with arrangements that promote enclosure.

Though the link between funding strategies and public service policy is still to a large degree shaped by national characteristics, two generalizable points should be noted. Firstly, a “pure” strategy that clearly advances traditional public service values of open access and universality does strengthen the legitimacy of public broadcasting on a general level even if it limits certain development potential. This makes it rather easy to see how publicly funded offers stand out, and that is important. Similarly, while industry protests seem to be independent of a broadcaster's actual strategy, the impact of protest is by no means independent of that: a “pure” strategy does diminish the political force of industry complaints.

Secondly, following the EU's ongoing assessment of Norwegian policy, which originated in industry complaints, a 2007 white paper is set to define more clearly the do's and don'ts of the NRK. Consequently, while the Norwegian case has stood out following several years of relatively generous leeway, this may be in the process of changing. A parallel process in Germany led the EU to demand clearer separation between commercial and public funds, i.e. greater transparency (EC 2007). This is an increasingly evident trend. These two points should be taken in counterweight against any perspective too focused on purely national explanatory factors.

## **Conclusion**

As public service design and operation move beyond broadcasting to also include new media platforms, dimensions related to concrete historical developments, market characteristics, and political cultures will define similarities and uniqueness in different institutional developments. I have argued that the analyzed cases presented here represent a continuum. On the one end we have the NRK's optimistically expansive strategy wherein commercially and publicly funded services are not always clearly separated. Also, the institution has made several provisions that promote enclosure, especially on new media platforms – and all of this with political consent. On the other hand, the ARD and the ZDF find themselves in a relatively stable regulatory situation albeit with strict constraints on commercial initiatives. In response to the restrictive situation the German public broadcasters have portrayed themselves as clearly opposed to *any* form of enclosure. Located between these comparative extremes is the BBC. Despite recent deviations that might entail future problems with enclosure, the institution seeks to balance a far-reaching international commercial arm with domestic public service tasks, and is encouraged to do so. It will be important to situate other European contexts and public service providers along this continuum in order to find more similarities and differences, and also especially to more deeply excavate the reasons explaining both.

I have further argued in contrast with some opinions that traditional practices of media policy do not suddenly change in the digital era. Rather, conditions facing new platforms have to a large extent been defined within well-established historical frameworks and are dependent on the conditioned legacies of each state's political culture in quite broad terms. Consequently, as public broadcasters seek to keep their legitimacy in a digital era both strategies and arguments, and the level of political support, need to be understood with due attention to national characteristics. There is little that could be more useful for public service broadcasters' strategic managers today than deep assessment of the legacies, conditions, continuities, and dynamics of domestic political culture. That really does establish and define the latitude of possibility.

The German situation is far from universally applicable and we should not expect institutions across Europe to mirror the strategies of the ARD and the ZDF. But the role ascribed to and taken by these broadcasters has important advantages that critics seem too often not to

see or acknowledge. The situation there does clearly emphasize the traditional core public service values of universality and open access, and in doing so demonstrates trade-offs that are probably inherent in securing stability. At the same time, however, that stability very much depends on a shared affirmation (to date) of the crucial importance of public service broadcasting's basic value even in the digital environment. I have stressed how national characteristics impinge on the broadcasters' possibilities. But even so, as public broadcasters across Europe strive to renew their remits beyond broadcasting the core values and traditional ethos underlined by a "pure" strategy are keenly valuable and still worthy of protection and imitation.

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## Article 2

*The national policy article*



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Contact [Hallvard.Moe@infomedia.uib.no](mailto:Hallvard.Moe@infomedia.uib.no) with queries.

Article 2: “Public Service Media Online? Regulating Public Broadcasters’ Internet Services – A Comparative Analysis”. *Television & New Media* 9(3): 220-38.

Final version submitted September 2006 and published May 2008.

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## Article 3

*The supranational policy article*



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Article 3: “Between Supranational Competition and National Culture? Emerging EU Policy and Public Broadcasters’ Online Services”, in Ib Bondebjerg and Peter Madsen (eds) *Media, Democracy and European Culture*. Bristol: Intellect Books.

Final version submitted March 2008 and published winter 2009.

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## Article 4

*The dissemination and dialogue article*



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Article 4: “Dissemination and Dialogue in the Public Sphere: A Case for Public Service Media Online” *Media, Culture & Society* 30(3): 319-36.

Final version submitted June 2007 and published May 2008.

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## Article 5

*The marginal services article*



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Article 5: "Discussion Forums, Games, and Second Life - Exploring the Value of Public Broadcasters' Marginal Online Activities" *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 14(3): 255-70.

Final version submitted December 2007 and published August 2008.

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# Appendices



**Appendix 1:  
The ARD member institutions**

Name	State(s) served
Bayerische Rundfunk (BR)	Bayern
Hessische Rundfunk (hr)	Hessen
Mitteldeutsche Rundfunk (MDR)	Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt and Thüringen
Norddeutsche Rundfunk (NDR)	Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Niedersachsen and Schleswig-Holstein
Radio Bremen	Bremen
Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg (RBB)	Berlin and Brandenburg
Saarländische Rundfunk (SR)	Saarland
Südwestrundfunk (SWR)	Baden-Württemberg and Rheinland-Pfalz
Westdeutsche Rundfunk (WDR)	Nordrhein-Westfalen

The nine regional ARD member institutions and the state(s) they serve, as per 2008.

## Appendix 2: Screen shots: the cases' main website front pages

Figure 1: Complete front page, ard.de, February 13, 2008 (continues on next pages).



## Appendix 2

### Madonna auf den Filmfestspielen



Hoher Besuch: Popstar Madonna wird am Mittwoch auf der Berlinale ihren ersten Spielfilm vorstellen. "Filth And Wisdom" läuft außer Konkurrenz in der Reihe Panorama Special. [rbb]

Festival-Specials: rbb | arte | 3sat | Das Erste

### Sport

#### Badminton

#### Badminton-EM - raus aus der Nische



Das deutsche Badminton-Nationalteam kämpft in den Niederlanden um EM-Titel. Notiz wird davon nur wenig genommen - zum Bedauern von Bundestrainer Postel. [mehr]

Weitere Sport-Themen:

- Radspport: Astana nicht zur Tour de France
- Fußball: Löw schenkt Lehmann weiter Vertrauen
- Boxen: Michalczewski im Mai gegen Ottke

### Börse

#### Drei Tage ohne Ryanair



Der irische Billigflieger schaltet Ende Februar seine Website aus. Was die Firma als notwendige Auszeit für ein Softwareupdate darstellt, ist in Wahrheit die Zwangspause wegen fehlerhafter Preisinformationen. [mehr]

Weitere Börsen-Meldungen:

- Kriegt die IKB Hartz IV?
- Buffetts Strohfeder
- Rohstoffe: Blase oder Einstiegschance?

DAX → MDAX ↗ TECDEX ↓ ESTX50 ↗ EURO/US →

### Kultur

#### Ausstellung: "Architektur im Kreis der Künste"

#### Eine Kunstakademie wird 200



Die Akademie der Bildenden Künste München feiert 200. Geburtstag. Die Pinakothek der Moderne eröffnet den Jubiläumsreigen am 15. Februar mit ihrer Schau "Architektur im Kreis der Künste". [br]

Weitere Kultur-Themen:

- Hollywoods Drehbuchautoren beenden Streik [tagesschau]
- Ausstellung "One Step Beyond" in Frankfurt [hr]
- "Esra"-Urteil: Ex-Freundin bekommt 50.000 Euro [br]

### Boulevard

#### First Ladies - an der Seite der Macht

#### Freud und Leid deutscher Politikergattinnen



Das Leben an der Seite eines mächtigen Mannes ist nicht immer ein Zuckerschlecken. Das mussten auch Kanzlergattinnen wie Loki Schmidt oder Hannelore Kohl erfahren. Deutschlands "First Ladies" zwischen Familie, Beruf und Charity. [galerie]

- Neue "First Lady" in Frankreich [galerie]  
Carla Bruni - Sängerin und Model
- Hillary Clinton - eine Frau steht ihren Mann [galerie]  
Ehemalige First-Lady mochte Präsidentin der USA werden

Weitere Boulevard-Themen:

- Mischa Barton: Vom Teenie-Star zur Stil-Ikone [galerie]
- "Bruce" - Styling-Show mit Bruce Darnell  
Ab 12.2.2008 | Dienstag bis Freitag | 18.55 Uhr | im Ersten
- Modemesse Düsseldorf: Politik gegen dürre Models [wdr]

### Meditative Momente

Mit seinen leuchtenden Farbfeld-Bildern wurde Mark Rothko weltberühmt. Ein Ausschnitt seines Werkes in Bildern. [galerie]

### Diane Krüger



### Schöne Jurorin

Zuerst Hollywood und dann Berlin: Schauspielerin Diane Krüger ist Mitglied der Berlinale-Jury. [galerie]

### Radiokonzertkalender



### Vom Konzertsaal ins Wohnzimmer

Zur aktuellen Radiokonzerte der ARD-Popwellen. [mehr]

### Download :: Podcast



### Wunschprogramm im Abo

"Tagesschau", "Hart aber fair" und Radio-Comedy zum Herunterladen & Mitnehmen: Die ARD-Podcast-Angebote im Überblick. [mehr]

ARD Podcast Mixer

Standort: ARD Home © SWR 2008

BR® hr® NDR® radiobremen® rbb® SR® SWR® WDR®

ARD® arte® E!sat® K&KA® DEUTSCHE WELLE®



# Appendices

Figure 2: Complete front page, zdf.de, February 13, 2008

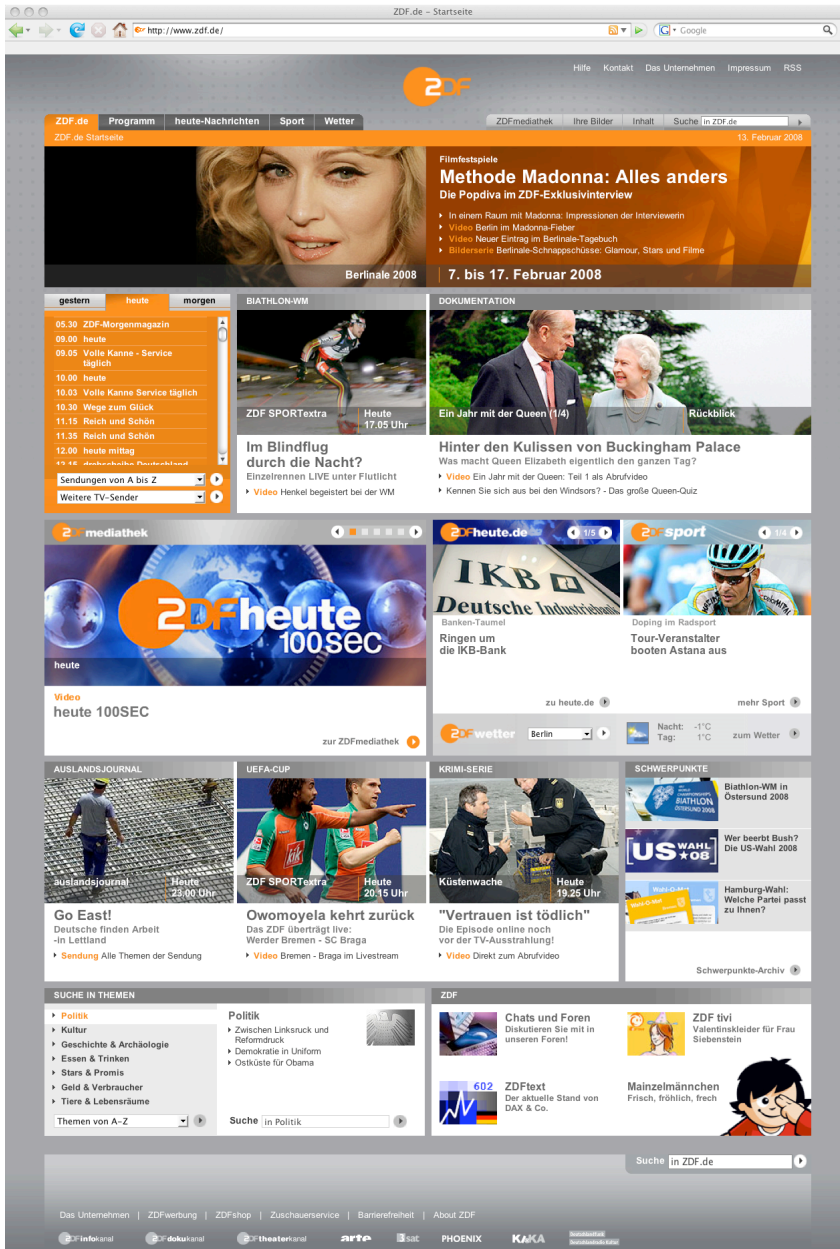


Figure 3: Complete front page, nrk.no, February 13, 2008 (continues on next pages).

The screenshot shows the NRK website interface. At the top, there are navigation links for 'NYHTER', 'SPORT', 'MAGASIN', 'TV', 'RADIO', 'NRK NETT-TV', and 'NRK NETTRADIO'. A search bar is located on the right. The main content area features a large article with the headline '- Hun oppfattes som en løgner' and a sub-headline 'Venstre-leder Lars Sponheim tror ikke lenger på barne- og likestillingsminister Manuella Ramin-Osmundsen.' Below this, there are sections for 'FLERE NYHTER' and 'SPORT'. The bottom section is titled 'Nordmannen alle hatar' with a sub-headline 'HEILE SAKA: Nordmannen alle hatar' and 'LYD: Himmelfarten - verdens mest hata bergensar'. The right sidebar contains a program schedule for NRK1 and NRK2, and various advertisements including 'one.com' and 'KRAFT TAKET'.

# Appendices

The screenshot displays a news website interface with a top navigation bar, a main content area with multiple articles, and a right-hand sidebar with additional news and advertisements.

**Top Navigation:** Includes a logo for "REDAKTOR ANSVAR" and a search bar with the text "Søk i alle artikler og presentasjoner".

**Main Content Area:**

- Potensielle brannfeller:** Article about new tax returns for "våk og på-knapp".
- Årets bikini-dame:** Article about the Sports Illustrated bikini contest.
- one.com:** Advertisement for "3 klikk din egen hjemmeside + blog" with a "Live Chat Support 24/7" badge.
- www.realfinans.no:** Advertisement for "LÅN" with a "SØK HER" button.
- Annonsesjefen:** Article with a quote: "Annonsesjefen har ennå ikke prøvd denne plassent!".
- Irma 1000:** Article about the Irma 1000 podcast.
- Nyheter i nett-TV:** Section for news on net-TV.
- DIN NYE TV-KANAL:** Advertisement for "NRK3" with the text "DETTE ER NRK3".
- NETTRADIO SPORT:** Advertisement for "NRK SPORT" with the text "I Nettradio - hele dagen!".

**Featured Article: Hva vet du om henne?**

Hvor mye vet du om lørdagens gjester i "Den store klassefesten"? Ta Klassefest-quiz her!

**HELE SAKEN: Klassefest-quiz: Torhild Sivertsen**

**Klassefest-quiz: Frode Alnæs**

SE BILDENE: Torhild fotoalbum  
SE BILDENE: Frodes fotoalbum

**Ta tidsreisen tilbake til ditt år!**

**Lur mannen med mms:** Alex Rosen har oppskriften innen mann kan motstå.

**Fant mini-dinosaur:** Hils på en set og tannløs liten dinosaur.

**Bryr seg ikke:** "Jeg girer i når plata kommer, sier Ida Maria.

**Kastrer katten nå!** Det flommer over av katter i Norge.

**Derfor blir menn hekta:** Her er årsaken til at menn blir hekta på videospill.

**- Vi er i et dilemma:** Forsvarer Aker Kværnens engasjement ved Sellafeld.

**Se opp for valentins-virus:** Du bør være ekstra forsiktig på valentinsdagen.

**HELE SAKEN: Se opp for valentins-virus**

**Valentinsgave som krydder**

**Mannens guide til valentinsdagen**

**Valentinspillet**

**Slik overlever du valentin**

Test kjærligheten - ta testen  
Test kjærligheten - hvilken type er du?  
Kort om kjærlighet

**Valentins-nettmøte torsdag kl 12: Send spørsmål til psykolog Frode Thuen.**

**Right-hand Sidebar:** Contains various news snippets and advertisements, including "NRK3" and "NETTRADIO SPORT".

## Appendix 2

### Går minst på bygda

Man blir ikke friskus av å flytte ut by en.

**LES: Går minst på bygda**  
LES: Finn din treningsform



### Frokost-moonwalk

Brita og kokke-Lise prøver seg på Michael Jackson-dans.

**VIDEO: Frokost-moonwalk**  
VIDEO: Thriller 25 år

### For lite sex

Fem-veks gangler i året. Hvordan skal det bli oftere?

**HELE SAKEN: For lite sex**  
Sex-problem?



### Manusstreiken er over

Hollywood er i gang igjen etter tidens arbeidskonflikt.

**VIDEO: Manusstreiken er over**  
Reprise: tv i USA

### Penger på hjernen

Det finnes ikke noe vi krangler mer om.

**VIDEO: Beruflensenspeginge**  
VIDEO: Se fire episoder her



### Nesten bedre enn sex

I London konkurrerte 600 ovmennere i 6 graders vann.

**VIDEO: Ekstremsvømming**



## - Vi krangler mye

Mot designerduen Charlie Selvig og Admir Batlak, vinnerne av årets nåløye som ble delt på Oslo Fashion Weeks åpningsdag.

**VIDEO: Mot årets nåløyepris-vinnere**

VIDEO: Nåløyeprisen delt ut

**VIDEO: Iselin Engan og Ellen Amstad om norsk design**

VIDEO: Åpning av Oslo Fashion Week

### FINN FRAM PÅ NRK.NO

**NYHETER** > Litenikk, Økonomi, Kultur, Værvarsel på yr.no, Nyhetstidsserier, R30, Sammenlagt Oddas, Euroarctic, Nyhetsprogrammer.

**LOKALE NYHETER** > Akershus, Vest-Agder, Buskerud, Finnmark, Hedmark, Hordaland, Møre og Romedal, Nordland, Nord-Trøndelag, Oppland, Oslo, Rogaland, Sogn og Fjordane, San-Trondelag, Telemark, Troms, Vest-Agder, Vestfold, Østfold, Sør-Østfold.

**SPORT** > Fotball, Alpin, Friidrett, Golf, Hopp, Handball, Isøkk, Kampsport, Kombinert, Langrenn, Motorsport, Skiskyting, Skiforret, Snøbrett, Sykkel, Tennis, Ekstremisportveke, Resultater, Sportsprogrammer, R35.

**KULTUR** > Kulturenyheter, Litteratur, Bokanmeldelser, Film- og teateranmeldelser, Kunstanmeldelser, Musikkanmeldelser, Scenearmeldelser, Kulturprogram.

**UNDERHOLDNING** > Alltid mors, Videarkivet, Latterlige lekser, Fotokning, Spiler, Spilguiden, NRK Beta, Underholdningsprogrammer.

**MUSIKK** > Musikknyheter, Artstar, Festivalar, Spilletter, Ustet, Kringkastingskonserter, Fleirkanal 5.1, Musikprogrammer.

**P3** > P3tv, Spill og humor, Topp 20, mP3, Sving, Ustet.

**SUPER** > Superbar, Nett-TV for superbar, Superstar, Nett-TV for superstar, Superradio, Barneprogrammer.

**NATUR, MILJØ OG VTEN** > yr.no, Natur, Lars Nøtten på Nordkalotten, Sydøst, Naturprogrammer, Vitenskapsprogrammer.

**TV** > Programoversikt, Finn ditt program, Alfabetisk oversikt, Nett-TV, Tekst-TV, Frekvensoversikt.

**RADIO** > Programoversikt, Finn ditt program, Alfabetisk oversikt, Alle radiokanaler, Nettradiv, Frekvensoversikt, DAB, Radiosjefens blogg.

**PROGRAMKATEGORIER** > Barn, Drama/serier/film, Fakta/forskning/dokumentar, Kunnskap/vitenskap, Kunst/kultur, Natur, Nyheter, Musik, Religion/livssyn, Sport, Underholdning.

**NETT-TV** > Tv-programmer, Nyhetsslipp, Sportsklipp, Lokale nyhetsslipp, P3tv, Telesport.

**NETT-TV: LOKALESENDINGER** > NRK Hedmark og Oppland, NRK Hordaland, NRK Møre og Romedal, NRK Nordland, NRK Rogaland, NRK Sogn og Fjordane, NRK Sørlandet, NRK Nordnys, NRK Trøndelag, NRK Østlandet, NRK Østfold, NRK Østlandsendingen.

**NETTRADIO** > NRK P1, NRK P2, NRK P3, NRK mP3, NRK Folkemusikk, NRK Alltid nyheter, NRK Klassisk, NRK S.1, NRK Gull, NRK Super, NRK P1 Oslo/Trond, NRK Sørland, NRK Østlandet, NRK Østfold, NRK P3 Løst, NRK Jazz, NRK Sport.

**NETTRADIO: FYLKESENDINGER** > Akershus, Vest-Agder, Buskerud, Finnmark, Hedmark, Hordaland, Møre og Romedal, Nordland, Nord-Trøndelag, Oppland, Oslo, Rogaland, Sogn og Fjordane, San-Trondelag, Telemark, Troms, Vest-Agder, Vestfold, Østfold.

**DITT NRK** > Produkter, RSS, Databatt, Mobil, Nedlastinger, Butikk, Kopier av programmer, Abonner på programmet.

**OM NRK** > Nyheter om NRK, Kontakt oss, Om lisens, Annonsering og sponsing, Presse, Stillings ledig, About NRK, Hjelpe.



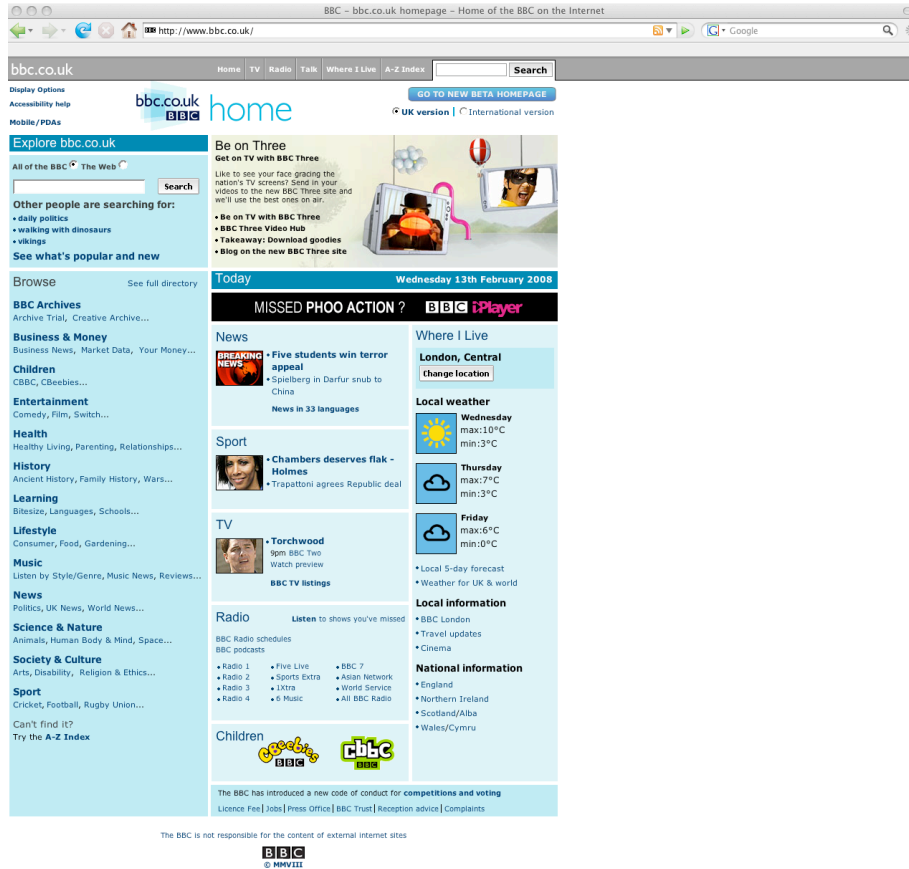

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# Appendices

Figure 4: Complete front page, bbc.co.uk, UK version, February 13, 2008.



**Appendix 3:**  
**Postscript – updating *The contexts and strategies article***  
**and *The national policy article***

The final, revised version of *The contexts and strategies article* was submitted for publication in August 2007. The final version of *The national policy article* is dated September 2006. Since these dates, new developments have naturally arisen. In this postscript, I consider some key developments until early June 2008, and relate them to the argument made in the articles.

**Updating *The context and strategies article***

After a moderate licence fee settlement, and furthered plans by Ofcom to spread the licence fee money among more providers (e.g. Gibson 2007), the BBC has continued its expansive search for additional funding. In the autumn of 2007, the British institution announced plans to sell off its studios and post-production subsidiary BBC Resources. The plan fit a strategy to get rid of anything that does not "either export or exploit the BBC brand or content" (BBC 2007, 1).<sup>1</sup> By early 2008, the same strategy reportedly led commercial subsidiary BBC Worldwide to look for partnerships with private equity firms to "expand its acquisition muscle" (Conlan 2008b).

Similarly, the BBC's division between domestic free public services, and commercial ventures for the international market seems to remain: in late 2007, BBC Worldwide announced its intention to join Channel 4 and ITV in building an international web portal for British television programs. Offering both current and archived content, the initiative is a commercial, international response to the BBC's domestic public service iPlayer (BBC Worldwide 2007). In 2008, BBC Worldwide also offered television programs for sale internationally as downloads via

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<sup>1</sup> By February 2008, the sales process was delayed, reportedly due to unsolved issues with a pension shortfall of €20 million (Conlan 2008a). By April, one division – BBC Outside Broadcasts – was sold to commercial television production company Satellite Information Services Limited (BBC 2008a).

Apple's online store iTunes (BBC Worldwide 2008).<sup>2</sup> Mirroring a persistent issue for the NRK – to make online audiovisual content free from the enclosure of proprietary software – the BBC have, amid complaints, repeatedly assured the public of its intentions to make the iPlayer available across soft- and hardware platforms. This would arguably counter enclosing tendencies (Sweney 2007; Rose 2008; Thompson 2008; also Selsjord 2007a on recent protest against the NRK). In *The contexts and strategies article*, I warn that the expansion onto third parties-controlled platforms – exemplified by Microsoft's computer game console – represented a challenge for the BBC since it could entail new arrangements leading to enclosure. The recent developments related to the iPlayer could, however, be seen to signal that the British case manages to keep clear of such processes of enclosure, even when pursuing a strategy towards platforms expansion.

The NRK's strategy for commercial exploitation is confirmed both in official documents and in actual moves, still without any major political or public disputes. The strategy for 2007-2012 states increased commercial activity among its aims (NRK 2007). The idea of being present wherever the users may be for instance led the NRK to cooperate with planned advertising funded web-TV provider Joost (Løwe 2007), and sign a content exchange deal with a financial newspaper pertaining to the web, teletext, and the Oslo airport express train (NRK 2008). A 2007 White Paper on "broadcasting in the digital future" did propose – and get political support for – a better-defined division of public service and commercial services provided by the NRK (MCCA 2007a; Familie- og kulturkomiteen 2007). Limiting the level of commercial revenues to 10 % of the total, the new regulations may seem to have made an impact – also on actual initiatives made by the NRK (e.g. Hauger 2008). If so, it could point to a more clarified situation with less generous leeway for the Norwegian institution.

In Germany, while the continuance of the licence fee funding scheme confirms the public broadcasters' function (e.g. Eifert 2007, 602ff), the institutions have had to combine arguments for further ex-

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<sup>2</sup> By November 2007, the planned move to expose international users of bbc.co.uk to banner ads – as discussed in the article – was also being put into action (e.g. Holmwood 2007a). One instance of initiatives countering enclosure, highlighted in the article, is the free to air digital television satellite service Freesat. It finally launched in May 2008 (BBC 2008b).

pansion beyond broadcasting with a defence of the basic right to sell limited amounts of television ads (e.g. Herkel 2007; see Ridder and Hofsummer 2008 for a thorough discussion of arguments in the recurring debate). The ZDF seems to continue to take the most adventurous approach, recently announcing plans to combine its web-TV service Mediathek with content from commercial publishers (von Streit 2007).

By and large, these developments do not seem to distort the arguments in the article. The BBC keeps manoeuvring between the aims of being a commercial media company with a global market, and of being a non-commercial domestic public service institution – all the while under public scrutiny. And, though new regulations introduce new challenges, the political support for this strategy continues to be strong. Likewise, the NRK's strategy remains the same, even though the context seems to get somewhat more clarified. But still, the level of public debate has stayed comparatively low. In Germany, the stable and restrictive political context means the public broadcasters remain bound to a combine expansion plans with a vocal defence of their existing privileges in terms of limited commercial funding. In effect, they remain the most “pure” public broadcasters among the cases.

### Updating *The national policy article*

The Norwegian regulation of NRK online activities has arguably been somewhat clarified since autumn 2006. In May 2007, the Centre-Left coalition Government issued a long-awaited specification of NRK regulations in the shape of a “Public Service Broadcasting Poster” (MCCA 2007a). While it set out to recognize the public service status of internet services on the same level as radio and television, requirements are still unequal. As a result, certain misbalances and unclear points remain.<sup>3</sup> The process may at least have raised public attention to questions of the NRK and the internet. As the institution changed Director General from John G. Bernander to Hans Tore Bjerkaas in early 2007, commentators attacked the lack of a unified strategy for the public broadcasters' online

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that I authored a statement on behalf of The Norwegian Association of Media Scholars as part of the public hearing of the White Paper (see Moe 2007; MCCA 2007b). The Poster, renamed “The NRK-poster”, was passed by the Parliament in March 2008 (Familie- og kulturkomiteen 2008).



initiatives (e.g. Eckblad 2007; Omdahl 2007). Responding, the institution did acknowledge the need for introducing new ideas (in Selsjord 2007b).

In Germany, the ARD has maintained its restrictive scope online – far from its “third pillar”-strategy of the late 1990s (e.g. WDR Director General Monika Piel in *Evangelischer Pressedienst* 2007). This is very much in line with regulations, which from the spring of 2007 operate with the label “*telemedien*” to describe all electronic media services apart from broadcasting, provided by the public broadcasters. “*Telemedien*” can only be auxiliary to radio or television (Bundesländer 2006a, §11; also Bundesländer 2006b).<sup>4</sup> Competing interests have kept pressuring the public broadcasters to restrict their ventures further (e.g. Grimberg 2007). During the spring of 2008, the newspaper publishers were especially aggressive, seeking to restrict the public broadcasters’ right to provide text-based online news. Echoing arguments from the 1970s debate about teletext, they claimed such provision should be reserved for press actors (e.g. Siebenhaar 2008; also *Evangelischer Pressedienst* 2008). Taking a novel welcoming approach, the ARD tried to reply to the newspaper publishers’ “snarl” with an invitation to “snuggle”, i.e. collaboration (Merschmann 2007). The institution has, despite these restraining circumstances, been criticized for lacking a thought through strategy for the internet – much like in the Norwegian case (e.g. Schader 2007; also Patalong 2008).

While all the institutions have continued to build their online presence, the BBC has been the most active and – contrasting the other two – the one presenting changes as within one comprehensive strategy. When the BBC celebrated ten years on the internet, for instance, it revealed a new design of *bbc.co.uk*. Or, as the corporation put it, the web site was “reinvented”, providing a “world-class on-demand user experience” (in Holmwood 2007b). At the same time, however, the new BBC Trust has introduced a more rigid testing of the public service value of potential new services – much in line with the EU competition law inspired regime, as discussed in *The supranational policy article*.

The developments, both in services and policies since 2006, may be read as moves in a converging direction. As the institutions’ web activities – like web services in general – mature and get more attention from regulators as well as users, they become somewhat “streamlined”.

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<sup>4</sup> By late spring 2008, a new revision of the relevant agreement between the states [*Rundfunkstaatsvertrag*] was being negotiated (e.g. Segler 2008).

### Appendix 3

Whereas specific designs and priorities differ, the kinds of services seem to become gradually more similar. In parallel, especially the British and German regulations seem to be converging on vital issues. Still, I stand by the argument I make in the article that any concrete organization and definition of public broadcasters' public service activities online should be carried out with due attention to national characteristics – with consideration of the needs of the society in question.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 4: Screen shots: the marginal services

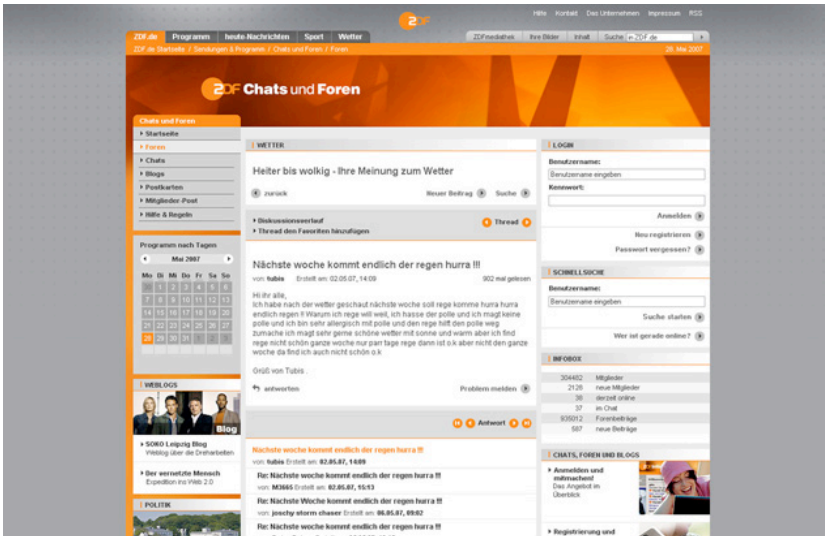


Figure 1: Screen shot, the ZDF weather forum, May 29, 2007.

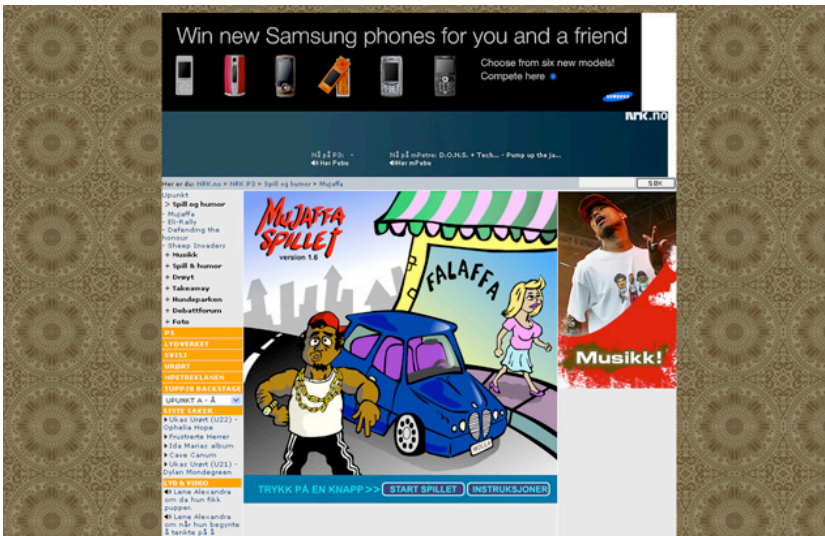


Figure 2: Screen shot, *Mujaffa* start screen, June 1, 2007.

Appendix 4



Figure 3: Screen shot, the BBC Radio 1's Big Weekend Festival in Second Life, May 13-14, 2006.





