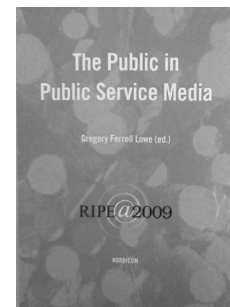


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This is the fourth book in the series *Re-Visionary Interpretations of the Public Enterprise* (RIPE, <<http://ripeat.org>>), led by Gregory Ferrell Lowe, professor in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Tampere (Finland), whose main purpose is to promote discussion and collaboration between academics, researchers and professionals interested in public service media (PSM). Every two years RIPE organises an international conference, hosted by a public service provider, which conceptually covers the main issues and challenges faced by the PSM. They also discuss possible theoretical contributions and propose practical solutions. As a result of each conference, RIPE and the Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research (Nordicom) of the University of Gothenburg (Sweden) publish a volume in which they summarise the most relevant contributions.

The text under review comes out of the conference entitled *Public Service Media in the 21st Century: Participation, Partnership and Media Development*, held in October 2008 in Mainz (Germany) and organised by the German public broadcaster Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), the programme Mediainelligenz of Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz and the Institut für Mediengestaltung at the University of Applied Sciences at Mainz. After the corresponding books from the 2002, 2004 and 2006 conferences, this fourth volume consolidates RIPE as a think tank for public service media. Undoubtedly, both the international conferences and the resulting publications have respectively become a meeting point and an essential point of reference for academics and for sector professionals. Moreover, it can be seen that both cases – meetings and publications – involve top-class, internationally renowned individuals and young researchers bringing new perspectives.

This fourth volume is entitled *The Public in Public Service Media* and its aim is to address the conception and current role of the audience, of citizens, in relation to public service media, focusing on television and occasionally online. The

main theory is that, in the current transformational context, digitalisation has led to the creation of a multiplatform environment, resulting in inevitable audience fragmentation and segmentation, so that the legitimacy and future development of public service media are inexorably going through a reconceptualisation of the public, with whom it must actively engage. Amongst the arguments mentioned, the need to take advantage of new technologies is emphasised in order to establish new links between public broadcasters and their users and thereby encourage more collaborative relationships. Only in this way can public services maintain their visibility amongst an increasingly abundant audiovisual market. This is essential to ensure its presence in the audiovisual market. Moreover, audience engagement is key to ensuring the public support that legitimises PSM. Both aspects – economic and social – are essential for guaranteeing the continuity of public service within a scenario where its relevance and necessity are systematically questioned.

As in earlier RIPE volumes, this book is designed as an anthology. Therefore, since each chapter is autonomous and deals with a specific theme, it does not need to be read in a linear manner. This makes the text a practical and functional source of reference. The book is organised into two sections. In the first (“Trends and Theorisation”), the focus is more conceptual and theoretical. It analyses what the current needs of public service media are and why, and what steps need to be taken to resolve these. The second part (“Audiences and Accountability”) looks at how to relocate the public, as audience, users or citizens, within the necessary definition required by PSM within the new context. To this end, it has chosen to present critical analyses and comparisons of experiences implemented in different European countries. Both the sections are preceded by an extensive introduction by the editor that brilliantly explains the status quo of public service and identifies the questions that establish how it will develop in the near future.

The contents of the chapters are worthy of a few comments.

First, there are noticeable differences in the formal quality of the various chapters. While some read fluently and the way ideas are organised stimulates curiosity, others are written in an excessively confusing manner, with a complex rhetoric that discourages the reader (such as in L. Jackson's chapter on participative audiences and PSM). Similarly, while the analysis in some parts is brilliant and illuminating, raising arguments that invite serious consideration of the theme in question and encourage readers to draw their own conclusions alongside those of the authors, other contributions are little more than mere descriptions of national experiences, which are usually related in a manner that hardly makes for compulsive reading and present data that, lacking adequate contextualisation, do not add much. In these cases, the lack of an elaborate analysis results in conclusions that sometimes seem rather arbitrary or questionable (such as the contribution from I. Costanera about the quality of television in public service media). Therefore, the reader might be under the impression that a case has been chosen simply because they wanted to publish the results of some research, regardless of its importance or suitability to the book's topic (an example is the chapter by D'Arma, Enli and Steemers, which analyses how public service media serve the infant audience).

Second, the volume suffers from an unexpected geographical bias considering the RIPE initiative, which encourages researchers and professionals from different countries to participate. Essentially, the work deals with national paradigmatic cases (United Kingdom and Germany) and takes a tour of Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway and Finland). Holland and Italy have been included, as well as the United States as a colourful note. The experiences of Mediterranean and Eastern European countries, which were represented at the conference, have been left out, when their inclusion could have contributed interesting results and ideas. Moreover, no attention has been paid to the regional situation in Europe or to the development of the idea of public service in other areas of the world.

These negative points aside, the contributions by Josef Trappel, Richard Collins and Minna Aslama in the first part are noteworthy for their quality. The first systematically reviews the challenges faced by public service and identifies opportunities generated by the new technological context to renew its legitimacy. Richard Collins also looks at public service's apparent loss of legitimacy and reflects on how the internet could help to resolve this. Aslama adopts an interesting approach to the concept of audience participation and methods to drive this forward. In the second part of the book, the chapters by Uwe Hasebrink, Leurdijk and Leendertse and Hans Kleinsteuber stand out. Hasebrink provides a very solid framework for the conceptualisation of roles that spectators assume with the public media and proposes a model that is effectively validated using Germany as a case study. Meanwhile, Leurdijk and Leendertse contribute an interesting reflection that questions some of the preconceived ideas about the effects of technology on audience attitudes. Their contribution is interesting because

it reconsiders some of the principles that many broadcasters and professionals are blindly following when developing new services. Kleinsteuber, by means of acidic criticism and subtle irony, deconstructs one of the myths surrounding Germany's public service: the importance and efficacy of public broadcasters' internal boards as a tool that represents society's interests.

In conclusion, it should be said that, despite any shortcomings, this 2009 volume from the RIPE series is a highly valuable text in the debate and reflection on public service media. It covers a wide range of themes and experiences and provides important information for very different readers, from academics and professionals to students interested in the future of public service media.