

**FERRELL LOWE, G.; HUJANEN, T. (eds.)**

*Broadcasting & Convergence. New Articulations of the Public Service Remit (RIPE@2003).*

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This book is the result of the congress on broadcasting and convergence organised by the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Tampere (Finland) and Finland's public television network YLE in 2002. It includes speeches presented at the congress and material developed afterwards, in line with the reflection areas proposed. The book is part of the Revisionary Interpretations of the Public Enterprise (RIPE) proposal, a biannual initiative promoted by a number of Scandinavian and North American universities aimed at being a discussion forum for professionals and academics on public-service communications. The book is published by Nordicom, a well-known Scandinavian communication-research institute based at Goteborg University. Sweden.

As the title suggests, the purpose of this compendium of speeches is to analyse research and discussion areas and professional problems relating to public-service broadcasting that arise from the process of technological convergence.

The book approaches broadcasting from two perspectives. It firstly considers it a technological resource, tackling questions related to the legal and political framework and overcoming technical limits that have until now necessitated public control or planning of the broadcasting activity. It secondly considers broadcasting as a social application, where it discusses sphere and public service, the national or group identities that are articulated and negotiated and the democratic social structures that are built and maintained in a plural media market that promotes cultural expression.

This is not a historical or revisionist approach to the issues proposed. The book's editors have selected materials that

offer an introduction to the current state of public-service broadcasting within the sphere of convergence and digitalisation. Of these two fields, the first would be the ideological premise and the second, the platform for its application.

The book is organised into three well-chosen sections. The first, "Public Service Concepts in Context", offers seven texts on the social context in which public-service broadcasting and convergence meet, the political discourses it leads to and different governments' solutions and applications in the face of this situation. The second section, "Public Service Principles and Priorities", includes a further seven contributions that reflect on appropriateness, adaptation and the changes that public-service broadcasting must soon make. Finally, the third section, "Public Access and Participation", includes six speeches on the old and new roles of audiences and the transition between them, the new applications and services of the information society and the progressive disappearance of the borders between media and content; phenomena that public-service broadcasting must tackle to ensure its ongoing existence and the achievement of its goals.

Within each section, the texts are organised with a logic that leads from more general, broader and theoretical reflections to case studies or research results.

The editors have worked hard to give the compendium a trans-Atlantic nature that is very enriching for the reader. It contrasts theoretical reflections and case studies from Europe and North America. Given the differences in the approach that these societies and their broadcasting markets have undergone, it provides a good opportunity to compare quite different ideas and visions and makes it possible to open ourselves up to new reflections. The texts refer to Canada, the UK, Russia, Germany, Holland, the US and Denmark.

The book does not establish new theoretical questions about research that has not been done or discussed previously, but it is innovative in the approach the authors take towards the issues and because of the reflections they lead to.

All the speakers defend the survival, consolidation and development of public-service broadcasting in the new media structure brought about by convergence and digitalisation. The book does not aim to repeatedly praise

the new possibilities that are appearing on the audiovisual panorama, but rather critically review the dominant pro-technological discourse.

One of the most important aspects of the book is the multiplicity of definitions awarded to convergence and the diversity of the theoretical spheres in which they are made. Convergence is identified as a process and ideological construction associated with neoliberal currents that goes beyond a technological nature to be framed within the political and economic discourse and which justifies deregulation and business concentration. Convergence is for many of the authors synonymous with blind trust in market forces, free competition for the agents involved and increased election ability on the part of users as elements for guaranteeing pluralism and diversity. The book also stresses how convergence has been axiomatically and determinedly associated with technology to cover commercial interests.

The authors approach the issue and defend the need for public-service broadcasting and the validity of its functions and goals as a unique tool for ensuring the democratic and plural nature of the media system. The need for restructuring and the redefinition of public-service broadcasting, its goals and social functions are also tackled. It considers it important to review the content and services to cover, including exclusions and new incorporations. It also defends a new relationship between public-service broadcasting and technology in which the latter is not seen

as a threat but rather a tool that allows new possibilities.

The book also tackles the imminent revision of legislation and suggests studying formulas of self- and co-regulation. The national case studies are an interesting way of comparing the different approaches that states, as regulatory, control and organisational bodies, have made on these issues.

The book also includes the results of different research work into the creation of communities of interests, viewer participation, interactivity and access to content. It discusses the different proposals offered by commercial and public-service broadcasting in these fields and suggests studying successful commercial experiences to find a possible application in the public sphere.

It also critiques discourses about the future of digitalisation and interactivity and defends the need for caution in the creation of new content and services. The results of the experiences carried out until now are conducive to reviewing theoretical formulations that anticipate a radical transformation of the nature of the broadcast media and the relationships people establish with it.

This book would be a good read for any academic or professional seeking new ideas and suggestions for reflecting on the way public-service broadcasting should tackle the era of globalisation, convergence, digitalisation and the information society. It is structured to be read easily and in parts and can adapt to the interests and needs of each person.