

# A Discourse of Legitimacy

## *Critiquing the Culture Agenda in Finnish Public Broadcasting*

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A zealous and time-honoured commitment to cultural concerns is a cornerstone of public broadcasting in the comparatively small Nordic countries (Hujanen and Jauert, 1998). The preservation and nourishment of Finnish culture has long been a central plank and supporting beam in the legitimacy platform that justifies Yleisradio's [YLE] position in and demands on their society (Enden, 1996). Compelling contemporary evidence is found in the 1993 Act on YLE which legislatively reaffirms the company's mandate to frame the services of public broadcasting here in culture-centred terms. This Act complements and extends a cherished historic devotion to such concerns, and has been suggested as the clearest unbroken thread of continuity in YLE's institutional history (Lowe and Alm, 1997). Culture services in Finland and elsewhere in northern Europe are tightly linked with the legitimating logic of the Nordic welfare state wherein democratisation of broadcast programming is rooted in the ethic of providing "universality" in access to signals and content (Hujanen, 1995).

That "public service" ethic, its presumed and incumbent values, as well as its institutional complexion and practical operation, have been challenged and critiqued (e.g., Raboy, 1996; Avery, 1993; Foster, 1992). Today's competitive context is strikingly dissimilar when compared with monopoly arrangements twenty years ago. The differences are largely a function of increasing competition with the private, commercial sector, and the more general influences of market-oriented rationale in political, social and economic spheres of interest. The Nordic

setting has been similarly construed (Kemppainen, 1998).

Here as elsewhere, the legitimacy of a public service approach to and practice in broadcasting continues to be vigorously challenged. This is fundamentally a debate about legitimacy that is keyed to differences of opinion in social, political and cultural perspectives. "Some debaters think that public service broadcasting remains a historical relict, while others argue that in the new environment its unique features will be more important than ever" (Hujanen and Jauert, 1998:124). The essence of such conflict hinges on the degree to which public service broadcasting remains socially relevant and legitimate. To the extent that it does enjoy continuing or strengthening legitimacy, a decisive element is rooted in the strongly cultural agenda that tends to frame the enterprise (*Radio and Television Systems in the EU Member States and Switzerland*, 1998). The situation in Finland is relevant to this more encompassing "discourse of legitimacy."

Yet for all its evident centrality, "culture" has largely flourished under an assumed identity. It is summoned as a god-term to explain and justify what is and isn't done, but in the institutional setting it is rarely explicitly defined. The meanings and values of "culture" can, however, be ascertained and critically analysed. There are, of course, a variety of ways to describe this area of media studies, here it is framed as a three-dimensional construct: production, texts and reception. In this article, the author focuses on the first of those dimensions by investigating the ways culture is defined in professional discourse and for practical reasons. The analysis critically investigates "culture" as a defining element in the legitimacy discourse that characterises YLE in the 1990s. It is framed by a heuristic proposed by Lowe and Alm (1997) in which the envi-

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ronmental context of broadcasting is considered under the rubric of four interdependent “markets”: political, popular, professional and open. The four markets are analysed in terms of “value transformation,” suggested as a dialectical dynamic characterised by the interplay of change and continuity. Here, the focus is on analysis of discourse about culture, contextualised by the YLE professional market of radio broadcasters as they discuss its importance in reference to political and popular markets. The findings suggest that:

- 1) The ways culture is defined by broadcasters are keyed in large part to a variety of self-serving rationale, which also account for why the term is so often hazy in definition.
- 2) That alternative semantic constructs have as much to do with internal institutional struggles over programming and channel policies as genuine differences in cultural emphases with regard to political and popular markets.
- 3) And that “culture” serves as a time-honoured and still politically relevant theme in YLE’s discourse of legitimacy, in terms of institutional policies and structure as well as in relation to Finnish society at large.

## Methods

The reported findings are based on data collected over a seven year period beginning in 1991. Here as elsewhere, the 1990s have been a decade of ferment and reform keyed to the increasing societal prevalence of market-oriented preferences and a correlated expanding presence of private, commercial competitors (Wiio, 1998). In this context, the discourse of legitimacy enjoys a robust presence in political, professional and open markets. The situation offers fruitful avenues for case-study research about the constitution and complexion of a mediated and fractured public sphere in contemporary societies. Given the literature already cited, such issues enjoy a much broad and inclusive purview.

In the present article, analyses are based on interview data. These data are derived from public radio broadcasters and administrators working for YLE. The interviews invite respondents to describe and explain perceptions and applications of normative values in their everyday work. Baseline data are derived from a dissertation study conducted in 1991 when 36 broadcasters and administrators charged with managing channels and making programs were first interviewed. Annual, on-going research supple-

ments, critiques and extends that work. Since 1992, the author has served as a consultant to YLE radio, and in that capacity has undertaken a variety of research and teaching projects involving all of Yleisradio’s radio channels at one time or another – often repeatedly and in cumulative fashion. In those capacities, the author has worked with most of YLE’s radio professionals, and enjoyed fruitful opportunities to observe work cultures and practices in concert with broadcaster discussion and discourse about those undertakings.

Interviews are focused on learning about understandings and perspectives among radio professionals in YLE’s three Finnish-language, post-1990 reform channels (discussed shortly). The Swedish-language section undertook its own reform in October, 1997 and is a topic of study at the present time (Radio Extrem and Radio Vega).

In the formal research setting, respondents are queried to solicit descriptions and explanations of concepts rooted in normative values. The format relies on the use of a series of standardised open-ended questions followed by probes to deepen understanding (see Patton, 1990). The interviews begin with a brief description of the research project, as well as how the data will be used and why the study is important. Each respondent is promised confidentiality to relieve anxieties about, or potential threats posed by, institutional politics. The methods are briefly explained, culminating in a request for permission to tape-record the interview. Respondents are aware that no one other than the interviewer will hear the tape, that the contents will be transcribed, and that he or she will receive a hard copy. This is necessary because English is not the native language of respondents. This procedure helps to insure accuracy, fairness and clarity. The first item is designed to establish rapport. Each respondent is asked two sequential questions about his or her position and work history: What is your correct title? What is your job and primary responsibilities here? The questions encourage respondents to talk about themselves and their work histories. These data are useful for providing context for the answers.

The items are asked in order, with most having two or three separate but related elements. Each begins with a brief statement to provide context for the topic. In the present case, discussion begins with the following: “During my time here at YLE and in talking with the people who work for the company, I’ve found that there is a lot of talk about culture. It seems to be quite important to the company and the people who work here.” The questions about the

topic are then asked in order: 1) What is culture? 2) What does that mean for your work? 3) Why is this cultural agenda so important for the company?

The interviews are conducted in English, which is a caveat in considering the results. This is the primary reason that each interview is tape-recorded and transcribed. Fortunately, most Finns speak English as their third language (the first two being Finnish and Swedish by law), and broadcasters at YLE are relatively fluent given the prevalence of English in news, technical and professional practices. After each research project the people who have been interviewed are invited to attend a session in which the findings and results are presented, and where further discussion is invited which encourages participants to critique them for accuracy and fairness.

There are three key limitations in utilising this methodology. The first and potentially greatest is the cross-cultural and linguistic limitation. The steps taken to deal with this have already been discussed. The central problem that remains is that not everyone is equally fluent. A Finnish-English dictionary is used to help clarify matters when there is confusion. Not all interviews are equally rich and useful. The number of times this becomes a confounding aspect that can't be redressed is fortunately low, about 1 in 10. The second limitation is that people tend to rationalise what they do and think in ways that are self-serving. This is not a problem in the present case because questions are intended to probe individual values and perspectives, and then analyses seek to find similarities and contrasts within and across the total data set that allow critiques of rationalisation. The third limitation is that a standardised approach limits flexibility in pursuing ideas and topics that arise in the process of answering a particular question. The solution has been to follow-up on such after the standardised item has been answered but before moving on to the next research item. Most interviews require an average of 90 minutes, with the maximum being about 120 minutes and the minimum about 60 minutes.

This methodology has been fruitfully used over the years, most recently in funded research about the digitalisation of Radio Suomi (translated: Radio Finland) production and on-air technical systems with regard to its reflexive relations with work culture. The notion of "reflexivity" and "agency" in the pursuit of continuity or change is premised on ideas discussed at length by Giddens (1984).

Analyses are also the result of less standardised observations. Throughout the 1990s dozens of seminars and workshops have been conducted with YLE radio broadcasters across its public channels. For

the most part, these have been about channel and programme formatting and structure, transformation in professional work culture, and alternative, comparative approaches to broadcast journalism. In the course of such work, participants frequently voice issues and ideas about culture and professional practice. These discussions inform understandings and perceptions considered in the present article.

The research perspective suggests dialectical qualities in institutional life. Attention is devoted to change as a defining quality, but as much is devoted to continuity as a co-determinant tendency. Relations between continuity and change are conceptualised as dynamic, contradictory and reflexive aspects under the rubric of "value transformation process." This is investigated via discourse and observation that query meanings and values of fundamental importance to the public broadcasting enterprise. These include: audience, public service, journalism, entertainment, information and, in the present case, culture.

The author is an American academic with a decade of research about YLE public radio programming and operation investigating institutional dynamics in light of the company's practical and ideological history in relation to its contemporary market-related experiences and societal context. This work can be summarised as critical investigations of the relations between media, culture and society, with a focus on the practical and philosophical framework that legitimates public broadcasting.

## **Yleisradio Oy**

Yleisradio Oy (translated: General Radio Corp.) enjoyed a monopoly in radio until 1985. As was the case in most European countries, YLE was chartered as a public institution while private, commercial stations were forbidden. How radio has been done, why it has been done in the ways it has been done, and who was able to do it, have been determined by legal mandates, institutional legacies and the centrality of public broadcasting to Finnish social life.

Like the BBC in Britain, over the seventy-two years of its history YLE has become a relatively wealthy and certainly an influential social institution. It is beyond the bounds of this article to detail the comprehensive idealisations and practices of the European "public service" approach to broadcasting. Suffice it to say that this approach has been conceived and defended as the antithesis of the American private commercial approach, and that in large measure the public service enterprise has been

deeply committed to national, cultural themes – especially in the Nordic context. Similarly, as highlighted by Hujanen and Jauert (1998) the increasing use of “public service” as an institutional frame, rather than the previous “public broadcasting” characterisation, is an indication of social and political conflict related to the legitimacy of the approach in light of the growth of commercial alternatives.

In 1985, the Finnish government made a decision with long-term ramifications for Yleisradio when an “experiment” in private, local and commercial radio was approved. This was subsequently extended for another two-year period in 1987, and then ratified as a permanent addition to the Finnish media mix in 1989. The process and results of those decisions and subsequent practices have been topics of scholarly publication (Prehn, 1998; Lowe and Alm, 1997; Enden, 1996; Hujanen, 1996). These independent local radio channels initially targeted young Finns with popular music, but in more recent years have begun targeting Finns in their 30s and 40s with a blend of adult contemporary music and news programming.

YLE had provided select programs of youth-oriented content beginning in the 1960s, and initially in reaction to pirate broadcasting. Thus, the company had not completely neglected such programming or its fans in Finnish society, but both were quite marginal in the institutional context. The chief practical problem with this had become shockingly clear by 1989 as the company suffered sharp declines in ratings as the youth market tuned in the independents in increasing numbers (Kempainen, 1998). In the interests of the institution’s survival and future health, it was decided that YLE must embark on a reform and restructuring of their radio channels.

Prior to the 1990 radio restructuring, YLE had two national channels (called The Primary Programme and the Parallel Programme) and nine regional channels. Afterwards, the first national channel became Ylen ykkönen (translated: YLE’s First) and the second became Radiomafia (translated Radio Mafia), an entirely new enterprise devoted to serving young Finns as a popular culture, public radio channel. The third channel is a network organised under the auspices of the national office of Radio Suomi with 20 regional stations (plus local news offices in area towns and villages). These mostly programme the morning and afternoon drive-time periods (although the volume of daily programmes originating at the local level continues to increase for competitive reasons).

Ylen ykkönen is the most traditional channel while Radiomafia intends to be innovative in the corporate context. “Intends to be” is appropriate because, as will be demonstrated, the channel is constrained by the structural legacies and characteristic work cultures that marble the company overall. Ylen ykkönen features classical music and “serious talk” programmes about arts and sciences, distance-education services, religious programmes involving the Church of Finland (Lutheran), plus documentaries and radio theatre. Programmes are intended to contribute to social enlightenment, most are pre-recorded rather than live, High Culture arts are a priority, production practices tend to adhere to a monthly rhythm (although this is changing), and airing “demanding, high-quality” programmes is celebrated. Ylen ykkönen maintains continuity with the most traditional values of YLE’s public service intentions in Finnish society and “keeps faith” with its social-responsibility legacies. The channel has done quite well since its inception, averaging 11-13% of the national market.

Radiomafia is targeted to teenagers and young adults with popular music and features about topics and trends of interest to Finnish youth. In recent years the channel has tended to be more about music flow and less about journalistic service. The situation is in flux, however, due to abysmal ratings in national survey research over the past two years. Most of their broadcasters are young freelancers in their 20s, programmes are live rather than pre-recorded, Popular Culture arts are the priority, production practices adhere to a weekly rhythm, and being entertaining is a mandate. Unfortunately, as hinted above, that mandate has not been accomplished in consistently sterling fashion, at least to the extent that one can premise such a claim on diminishing ratings. Although the channel enjoyed better than 20% of national weekly ratings in the early years of its operation, a steady decline since 1994 crystallised in middle 1998 at an alarming 9% rating. The channel is in crisis due to increasing competition with the private sector, and particularly since 1997 when the Finnish government licensed a first national and private commercial competitor (Radio Nova).

Radiomafia discursively eschews much of the traditional ideas and practices of Finnish public radio (and did so especially in their initial years of operation, 1990-1993). Personnel have defined their channel primarily in opposition to those traditions. Whereas Ylen ykkönen features continuity slowing giving way to change, Radiomafia has featured

change slowing ebbing back to continuity. Such tendencies indicate the dialectical qualities of value transformation, and will be considered in more depth shortly. Taken together, these channels provide the best indications of a value transformation dialectic that has energised the public radio dynamic in the 1990s. The company considers both channels essential to the social legitimacy of the public broadcasting enterprise in Finland, and both are fundamentally situated as culture-oriented services.

Radio Suomi has a national office in the capital of Helsinki that provides hourly newscasts about national and international events of the day. The national office also produces specialised programmes that are offered to the regional stations including, for example, programmes produced by the Music Department. The lion's share of daily programming, and especially within peak listening periods, is produced by the regional stations. These focus on local and regional news. The channel also features the most Finnish popular music, much of it in the form of tangos and other forms of music that are frequently castigated as Finnish "oompah" or "schlager", but which are popular among middle-aged Finnish listeners – especially during the summer holiday season. Taken together, Radio Suomi accounts for a consistent 35-38% share of the weekly listening market, and is the most competitively successful of YLE's post-reform efforts.

## Practical Dimensions of "Culture"

Broadly construed, YLE radio professionals describe culture with regard to practical concerns, and as three overlapping but somewhat distinct notions. These are treated as categorical descriptions below and are framed by the author to summarize respondent definitions and perceptions of the term. In most ways, these represent practical dimensions of a discourse that situates culture in an institutional context with reference to applied settings.

The first dimension is most often discussed with reference to the "old YLE," meaning Yleisradio prior to the 1990 reform. Culture has been viewed as segmented areas of professional expertise assigned to *specialist production units* comprised of producers and, since the early-1970s, journalists. These lay claim to expertise in various venues of fine art, including theatre, classical music, painting and sculpture, ballet, opera, literature and so forth. This approach is most overt in Ylen ykkösen's Culture Programme unit. For self-serving reasons, this channel's practitioners favour and defend this attribution in contrast to criticism (often quite harsh)

from broadcasters in other channels. Resentment and resistance is keyed to a (perceived) disproportionate amount of resources and related in-house prestige historically and, to a lesser degree, currently accorded the handful of broadcasters specifically devoted to so-called High Culture programming.

Resistance and opposition to this conception is most noted among Radiomafia personnel for similarly self-serving reasons, but is certainly not confined to this channel. Broadcasters within Ylen ykkösen who work for other units have also criticised the approach. In the main, opposition is framed as a reaction against the old YLE where culture was too narrowly defined and classically construed. Those outside the Culture Programme unit make statements to the effect that "what we do is also about culture!" The bulk of respondents, then, react for and against institutional legacies as these impact their respective self-interests.

But the practice of organising expert units to address and service particular publics, conceived in specialist cultural terms, is common across channels. Radio Suomi has a Music Department that produces specialised programmes under the rubric of "music journalism," and Radiomafia has "program teams" with similar duties relative to popular culture genre. Broadcasters working specifically with music in every channel tend to define (and defend) themselves as specialist "music journalists" because the institution privileges journalists as the cream of YLE professionals, and has tended to devalue DJs as "people who just play records."

In these regards, culture appears not only as forums of particularised artistic accomplishment, but as institutionalised, politicised and contested practices framing and informing work culture within the company at large. Segmenting and valuing the relative merits of cultural genre indicate patterns and perceptions that define the institution in those organisational terms that provide the ground and context for professional identity, activity and valuation. Thus, the preservation and nourishing of "culture" acts as a warrant for validating company structures, resource allocation, channel and broadcaster identity and promotion, work experiences, and collegial discourse. It is all about whom is 'most' legitimate, and culture plays a pivotal role in legitimating those choices.

Culture is secondly construed as a series of *artistic artefacts*. This application is hinted in the first conception because culture as a series of artistic artefacts furnishes the subject matter that comprises the purview of expertise justifying culture as spe-

cialised production units. But whereas the later focuses on broadcaster identity and performance, the former focuses on the objects for which expertise is claimed. Specialised production units are about organisation and collective programming, whereas artistic artefacts are about orientation and individual subject matter.

At Ylen ykkönen, subject matter decidedly privileges artefacts traditionally associated with High Culture and Fine Art. The Radio Theatre department produces dramas in the Finnish language, while a Classical Music department is responsible for programming that aspect of the channel's total profile. The Radio Symphony Orchestra is independent of the channels per se, but certainly has a deeply symbiotic relationship because Ylen ykkönen airs the bulk of their performances. There are also programmes devoted to poetry readings and critical analyses of literature and literary figures, as well as units responsible for productions covering annual opera festivals. Here one finds continuing dedication to the mission of "enlightenment" through education (as classically conceived) in the project of Western civilisation.

This enlightenment mission is of fundamental importance to understanding the continuing devotion to High Culture and the Fine Arts in YLE. From the beginning of company history, it was believed that radio broadcasting could and should be applied as a service for distance-education with an emphasis on inculcating appreciation for the classical arts. The social results and effectiveness of these efforts are mixed and certainly beyond the parameters of this article, but the idea and its pursuit enjoy a long and deeply rooted legacy within the company's idealisations of its public service goals.

Most broadcasters today are eager to disavow that mission as something that has been elitist, old-fashioned and programmatically ponderous. Yet the basic premise of seeking to educate listeners to varying degrees, and with the goal of aiding in their enlightenment, is common and continuing – even if paraded under different semantic banners. Actually, most of them are not so new because wanting "to change how people think, to make a difference in people's views of the world, and opening doors to something new" are slogans featured in the 1972 *Organisational Guidebook* that framed the Informative Programme Policy (see Nordenstreng, 1972 & 1973).

Radiomafia is an exercise in definition-by-comparison relative to Ylen ykkönen. Yet despite the High Culture versus Popular Culture dynamic most often summoned by respondents to differentiate

their channels, both are fundamentally devoted to preserving and nourishing artefacts of cultural art. The chief difference is with regard to the age of the artefact and corresponding targeted audiences. Ylen ykkönen focuses on time-honoured genre and classical works of artistic merit (although, of course, these include modern examples of such), whereas Radiomafia is devoted to contemporary expressions of youth culture production. In that regard these channels are different in their approaches to culture because the first is more about preservation while the second is more about nourishing. Despite that, however, the channels are much the same in their devotion to programming that celebrates culture as artistic artefacts. The subject matter is segmented, but the underlying principle is not. Whether the artefact is displayed in a museum or a carnival is a matter of presumed aesthetic values, which of course has decisive impact in ordering the relative degrees of legitimacy accorded each genre of artefact in institutional terms. But the same company comprises the context and forum for both pursuits. The legitimating premise rests on the fact that the artefacts are on display somewhere and in some fashion that has social relevance.

The third concept is historically newest and accordingly more narrowly restricted than the other two, although that is changing. In 1991, culture as *the medium and expressions of living social experience* was mostly evident at Radiomafia. Since that time, it has become increasingly evident elsewhere, and especially within Radio Suomi which most tightly organises schedules and practices to the rhythms and concerns of daily happenings. But this notion also plays a role in the recent retooling of Ylen ykkönen in pursuit of a faster, more responsive work rhythm in tune with events of the week, at least, if not also the day. As the medium and expressions of living social experience, culture is framed as a dynamic, diverse and universally important index to on-going social practice. Culture may have museum-like and carnivalesque features and traits, but only in relation to the continually contemporary contingencies of social experience. Here the current life experience of a subject, object or event furnishes the template of legitimacy, as compared with an institutional arrangement (in the first broad concept of culture treated above) or a topical index of its presumed worth (in the second).

It's important to note that in each construct, culture is construed as a vital and tightly correlated element in the project of "universality" that informs the heartland of the public service ethic. Specialised production units survey and analyse the universe of

artistic artefacts in various genre of cultural production, and create programs that provide universal access to them. Moreover, doing so is defined as a crucial service in public broadcasting's on-going contributions to providing cultural resources as a defining element of the medium and expression of living social experience for all Finns everywhere.

The preceding are summarised as three dimensions of culture as the term is institutionalised by YLE radio professionals: 1) culture as expert production units; 2) culture as a series of tangible, artistic artefacts; and 3) culture as the medium and expressions of living social experience. Whereas the first approach defines and defends professional identity and the second programmatic identity, the third focuses on the chronicle of living, social experience and the expressions of cultural identity. Of most relevance here is the idea that public radio professionals serve their audiences by acting as facilitators of an inclusive cultural discourse that is nonetheless organized institutionally in relatively exclusive terms. One could say of the three broad concepts that the first is about specialisation, the second about education, and the third about mediation. In that light, all of this is about how culture helps to organize and validate work, and ways in which variations are summoned to explain and legitimate hierarchies in normative values. But what is "culture" in semantic terms?

## Cultural Semantics

At Ylen ykkönen culture is described in terms that have a "heavy" and "serious" flavour. Culture is equated with "quality, preservation, enlightenment, and high brow art." It is lauded as a "civilising force" and defended as "the best fruits of what has been thought and done." Culture makes demands on listeners because one has to work to appreciate it. The goal of cultural programming is to "create better people" and to enable discovery and appreciation of artefacts that have stood the test of time. Culture can accomplish this because it presumably has inherent nobility, purity, virtue and dignity that encourage sober contemplation of human aspirations to create things of enduring beauty and endearing aesthetic richness.

On the whole, this is a Romantic view of culture. Although not true in any extreme sense, one could nonetheless say that the construct is more homogeneous than heterogeneous, more mainstream than avant-garde, more artefactual than dynamic, more historical than contemporary, and more intellectual than emotional. Good culture is hard work, but

worth the effort because of what one earns from the labour – one becomes civilised and sophisticated. Such a view harmonizes with (and is rooted in) the educational paradigm and enlightenment mission that so characterised public radio identity and programming until the reform. Here we have the conservative and tradition-bound view, replete with elite aesthetic judgements concerning normative values defining "good and bad" taste – as well as listening. Interestingly, the on-air result enjoys a respectable and stable audience. There is apparently little that is dysfunctional about any of this for the audience that chooses Ylen ykkönen. On the contrary, the premise enjoys astonishing legitimacy if listening figures can be fairly taken as one evidence.

The view at Radiomafia provides a sharp contrast. Here culture is described in terms that are deliberately reactive and alternative to the preceding view. Culture is described as things that are "fun, gossipy, weird, trashy, underground, and grassroots" in nature. These broadcasters are less interested in the "bright full moon than in the dark side of the moon," as one put it. One notes a defensive quality that is keyed to the historical, corporate commitment to High Culture and a correlated reserve about Popular Culture. Here culture is not supposed to be something you have to work at, but instead is something you play with. It's not about enlightenment – it's about entitlement. Legitimacy for the channel is premised on the idea that people have a right to enjoy culture in personal terms, rather than an obligation to appreciate it in social terms.

In fact however, and despite the "darker" aspects in the preceding descriptions, the bulk of this channel's programmes are mainstream recordings of various music genre already popular among Western youth. Radiomafia has only been alternative in relation to the institutional context. It is clearly less alternative in relation to the listening market, given declining audience figures. There is little that could be fairly construed as dark, closeted or otherwise unacknowledged as outside the mainstream of topics and interests of young Finns. Nonetheless, reaction to the channel and its profile by other company broadcasters has only softened from aloof critique and frequent ridicule to tolerant acceptance and even grudging respect in the mid-1990s. The reasons for that change in part reflect a notable trend within the channel to back away from the aggressively antagonistic aspects that characterised the channel in its early years. Radiomafia defines culture in ways as much keyed to corporate work culture as to larger social trends, and is increasingly institutionalised in practice. One wonders if this might

also play some role in declining listener figures. Also the reasons are partly linked with losing the competition with private channels since 1997.

As respondents frame the channels, then, Ylen ykkönen is commonly characterised as the High Culture channel and Radiomafia as the Popular Culture channel. This is less than precise. In the author's observation, Ylen ykkönen could more accurately be defined as a channel devoted to European High Culture and Radiomafia as a channel devoted to International Youth Culture. This is of central importance for clarifying why Radio Suomi has been so successful since 1990 despite constant changes in the market.

Radio Suomi is primarily a news channel. There are, however, music profiles and these are very important to each channel's overall flavour and "bouquet" of services. Here the most relevant aspect of these profiles (which do vary, depending on the station's location and the community it serves) is an emphasis on traditional and contemporary Finnish "schlager" which American programmers characterise as middle-of-the-road, adult-contemporary or easy listening formats. Because Radio Suomi (nationally and regionally) airs the most of such genre, it's not surprising that broadcasters here tend to describe their profile as "folk culture." Given the preceding description, however, it would be more precise to say that this network is devoted to Finnish Popular Culture. This is a primary reason for the channels' market successes (two other defining reasons are its localised services and journalistic focus). Radio Suomi airs the music profile most strongly correlated with popular and indigenous tastes of Finns in the middle-age demographics.

An operational reason for the network's combined success also hinges on the fact that it has been most deeply involved with local competition in radio. Yes, Radiomafia was chartered and mandated with taking back young listeners who had switched to local independents, but it transmits the same programme everywhere in the nation and has not been able to deal with specific local challenges very well. This has been a source of frustration for many within Radiomafia, and may also help account for why the lion's share of their listeners have been among young people living in the countryside where private local music stations aren't available. This is not, however, a sufficient explanation for Radiomafia's competitive woes because the private commercial national channel, Radio Nova, isn't local either, and yet has managed to conquer 22%+ of the total listening market since its introduction in the late spring of 1997 – much of that at Radio-

mafia's expense. More encompassing explanations focus attention on broader institutional problems in management and organisation practices, problems that are rather common across European public broadcasting companies (Foster, 1992).

At any rate, Radio Suomi's success, and the degree to which that is based on their music and service profile (large in observation), indicates the degree to which domestic culture is far from fragile and at risk in an increasingly competitive and international media marketplace. The claim that domestic culture is supremely vulnerable in the face of international media products and competition is frequently voiced, but this analysis supports a more complex and finely-grained argument elegantly and persuasively argued by Varan (1998) in his research about communities in the South Pacific. At least in Finland and for the Finns, those radio channels that offer the most domestic content and focus enjoy the highest ratings and strongest market presence. Far from being a wilting wall flower of weak and tepid longevity, Finnish culture appears in the present case as a robust, tenacious and deeply valued aspect of social life and practice – and its pursuit is a decisive element in legitimating YLE's public broadcasting enterprise.

### **Why the Culture Agenda?**

The final question to be addressed here is arguably the most fundamental: Why is "culture" and the "cultural agenda" of such central and enduring importance to YLE public broadcasting? Answering that requires some understanding of Finnish history and wider social influences that can only be treated briefly in this article. But we can proceed with the understanding that this is crucial to the framework in which all of the preceding finds relevance and argues legitimacy. Note, as well, that the following is not based on interview data, but rather on readings, personal immigrant experience and on-going research about Finnish history, society and culture.

Finland has been both the beneficiary and victim of clashes between Western and Eastern European cultures, broadly construed. For most of its recorded history, Finland was a province of Sweden (c.1100 C.E.). In the early-1800s as the result of a war that Sweden lost, Finland became a Russian Grand Duchy under Alexander II. These influences are evident, for example, in the two buildings that dominate Helsinki's skyline – the Lutheran and Greek Orthodox cathedrals. Also the fact that Helsinki is the capital today is a legacy of Russian rule. During the Swedish colonial days Turku (in Swed-

ish, Åbo, and on the southwest coast) was the capital. Moreover, the most significant minority in terms of social and economic influence are the Swedish-Finns (about 6% of the total population of 5 million total), while one of the biggest holidays of the year is May Day (celebrated as a worker's holiday as in the East generally). Like Poland and Hungary, Finland is at the crossroad between East and West and here the twain have assuredly met. That position and the difficulties it has created for a people that are not genetically linked (except through cross-cultural marriages) nor linguistically related to either Swedes or Russians, have inculcated a deep sensitivity to cultural concerns among Finns.

Moreover, before Finnish independence was declared on December 6, 1917, at least thirty years of artistic accomplishment committed to creating a myth and context for Finnish national identity had already passed. This was a period of nationalist, cultural ferment, and is frequently referred to as the Golden Age of Finnish Art. It includes, most notably, the great composer Jean Sibelius and the gifted painter, Akseli Gallen-Kallela. These and other artists drew inspiration from Elias Lönnrot's *Kalevala* tales. This national epic was compiled in the mid-1800s based on folk tales that were common in the Karelian area near Lake Lagoda (today located in Russia after the territory was ceded to the USSR as a penalty of WWII). The rallying cry of Finnish independence was: "We can't be Swedes, we won't be Russians, let us be Finns!" Thus, culture is a crucial aspect inscribing international influences and domestic distinctiveness.

Nearly all of Finland's legendary figures in the creation and celebration of Finnishness, from the 1850s through the early decades of this century, had at least three telling traits in common. First, they were artists; second, they were cultural nationalists; and third, they had interest in and involvement with Finnish journalism. That construct offers insights that help explain the character and values of YLE. The expansive strength of YLE's journalistic emphasis is relatively recent, however, being rooted in the Informative Programme Policy of the 1960s and 1970s, and first validated by General Director Eino Repo. It has certainly become a defining element of institutional legitimacy and activity in the decades since. Journalists are the most respected of all YLE professionals, and many see themselves and their craft as having artistic qualities. When combined with a commitment to national, cultural themes, this comprises an enduring legacy.

Ten years after independence, and following a civil war between the Whites and the Reds over the

type and complexion of political government for the new nation (which was also an intercultural conflict), turmoil between the Finnish-Finns and Swedish-Finns erupted. Yleisradio was chartered in this conflicted period (1927) and became a public company (1934) shortly after it ended. From the beginning, then, radio broadcasting was conceived as a centrist voice for national unification and solidarity, and with a keen sensitivity to the importance of culture. The particulars of "cultural threats" have certainly changed over the years, being today mostly trans-European and with a robust American presence, but the principle of preserving and nourishing a distinctively Finnish culture in the face of such influences is a constant. This continuity in Finnish social and historic national life is reflected in the principles and practices of Yleisradio, particularly for example in their mandated devotion to serve Swedish-Finns on a par with the majority population (Moring and Salmi, 1998).

Given all that has gone before, it might seem surprising at first blush to find that "culture" has lived under an assumed identity without much apparent effort to define this term and aspect of such central importance. But leaving culture as a hazily defined and generally abstract notion has been strategically beneficial. On the one hand, doing so has provided for great flexibility and the freedom to make programmes that appeal to small listener groups. On the other, it has also limited accountability because it is impossible to hold anyone to a bargain that has yet to be defined. Since the 1993 Act on YLE, however, that haze is less functional (Wiio, 1998).

As a result of the Act, Managing Director Arne Wessberg (approved for a second six year term in the spring of 1998) decentralised YLE operations. Allocation and programming decisions today are made at the unit and channel levels rather than at the corporate level. In return, YLE broadcasters are required to develop and apply precise performance indicators and evaluation criteria. The trade-off, of course, is that more explicit criteria greatly increase accountability. An advantage to fog is that it moves with the wind, whereas tables of stone require people to carry them. If culture is the medium and expressions of living social experience, at least in part, then the power of ambiguity is sacrificed for the power of control inherent in accountability. Interestingly, however, the power of control may actually be higher in a decentralised but accountable system than in the previously over-centralised institution.

Two final aspects or dimensions of "culture" as a defining characteristic of Finnish public broadcasting remain to be addressed. The first is keyed to

YLE's legal mandates and corresponding legitimacy as a "public service" company in relation to the social context in which it operates. The second is more internal to the company and hinges on the need for work culture cohesion in an increasingly diverse and even fragmented organisation.

Yleisradio is legally mandated to serve the unique and various cultural needs of Finnish society. The cultural mission of YLE broadcasting is the clearest and most enduring continuity in the company's seventy-three year history to date. From its inception in the mid-1920s, and unswervingly in every legal act and agreement impinging on the company since that time, YLE is charged with serving the cultural interests of all Finns. The principle is continued and even strengthened in the 1993 Act on YLE which demands that the company work to foster and nourish Finnish culture as a core value in its identity, and as a key warrant for its legitimacy. The pursuit is affirmed as a continuing requirement to provide services on a universal basis. That, in short, legitimates its demands on public resources. The company is especially mandated with taking care of the needs of those who are commercially unattractive, but to also provide "comprehensive services" for all Finns everywhere. The comprehensiveness of such services has been strongly construed as cultural in nature.

That mandate legitimates the company's on-going efforts to serve Swedish-Finns and the native Sami people of Lapland. Such services are extremely costly and cannot be economically rationalised. Yet they are considered vital to the national life and health of Finnish democracy, on the basis of which they are supremely rational. Moreover, the same can be said of Radio Theatre and the Radio Symphony Orchestra with regard to the life and health of national culture. These are expensive "products," but are accorded legitimacy by virtue of the company's continuing commitment to advancing and preserving the Finnish arts. Yleisradio is expected to make vital and visible contributions in nurturing Finnish talent and supporting domestic creativity. The cultural mandate and mission legitimates such pursuits.

Thus, "culture" provides a strategic agenda that legitimates the company's demands on tax-derived funds (license fees, in the main, but also the "public service tax" levied since 1994 on commercial broadcast companies as part of the cost of doing media business here). It is also competitively useful because the agenda makes YLE public broadcasting distinctive in relation to the private commercial sector. Moreover, cultural interests legitimate the pro-

files of existing channels and programmes, particularly those that have a relatively small audience but can be defended as making some vital contribution to Finnish cultural life. Further, this mission is viewed as a means of enhancing the total service image of the company, and thereby helps YLE to maintain the "good graces" of Finnish society – i.e., to continually legitimate the company's position in this social context.

As to the second aspect noted above, culture is conceived as a defining element and principle to facilitate a "way of thinking" for the increasingly divergent units and programmes within the decentralised, restructured company. Culture is not only a defence for programmes and services in societal terms, but also a means of welding some cohesion across the company's fractured work cultures. In this case, culture serves as a tool for conceptualising and evaluating the company's production processes and practices, as well as a rallying point that conceivably integrates everything from radio theatre and classical music to pop music radio and local news services. In all its abstract power, culture acts in practice as a kind of ideological touchstone and cement that binds the social collective of broadcasters, furnishing each with a sense of organisational purpose and professional identity. In doing so, culture provides continuity in the face of sweeping changes.

## Conclusion

With all of this in mind, it is not surprising that culture should occupy a defining position and act as a principle of singular, foundational importance for Yleisradio Oy. Each of the company's radio channels is legitimated as a concurrent if diverse aspect of YLE's efforts to best serve the contemporary needs and interests of all Finns with a comprehensive service in an increasingly pan-European and internationalised context. Ylen ykkönen caters to such in areas traditionally associated with European High Culture, while Radiomafia struggles with a newly institutionalised mission to more fully attend to the interests of Finns in International Youth Culture. Further, an aspect of supreme importance in legitimating Radio Suomi's services and explaining its popularity hinges on that network's devotion to Finnish Popular Culture. Taken together, these channels and the services they provide are construed as a vital strategic element to the political and popular market legitimacy the company must maintain. Professional discourse about culture reveals a variety of self-serving interests, but all of these are framed in one form or another in ways that indicate

that “culture” is an animating force in the ethic that legitimates “public service” operations in today’s competitive media marketplace. It’s all about providing “something for everybody” which is, as Hujanen and Jauert (1998:123) point out, “the core of universalism.”

The profiling of YLE’s public radio channels has been based on a relatively recent acknowledgement

(forced by the successes of commercial competitors) that any perspective of Finnish culture as a kind of seamless and monolithic entity is untenable in light of contemporary preferences manifest in listener choices. Thus, channel profiling and audience segmentation practices are also legitimated as recognition of cultural pluralism despite strongly shared generalities in Finnish national life and identity.

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