

# Broadcasting in the Post-Broadcast Era

## *Policy, Technology, and Content Production*

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### *Background*

Despite continuing social, economic and political importance in Europe, broadcasting is losing ground as a socially privileged cultural form and the primary electronic mass communication technology. *Digitalisation* was supposed to safeguard the future of broadcasting in the development of the European Information Society through convergence, but it has mainly intensified the market dependence and orientation of broadcasting and opened a new set of problems. Policy plans concerning the use of the *digital dividend* are shifting the focus to online audiovisual services and related broadband strategies. The rapid development of mobile broadband has intensified competition for radio spectrum space.

Discussion about how to use of digital dividend focuses on terrestrial distribution of radio and television signals, characterised as free-to-air broadcasting (FTA). That is the historic justification for broadcasting's universal service orientation. This principle was first undermined by cable and satellite delivery that now dominates television distribution in densely populated areas. This development encouraged a shift from broadcasting towards narrowcasting – from service intentions for broad and large audiences to segmented audiences, but this particular shift was not yet the end of the broadcast era. Radio and television remained comparatively broad in their reach for audiences and co-related practices of production and distribution. In other words, those changes did not threaten the social and cultural relevance of broadcasting.

However, the development of the Internet and network communication is evolving a different media ecology where broadcasting risks marginalisation. The values of network communication are radically different compared with traditional broadcasting, as illustrated in a range of pertinent dualisms; national vs. global, collective and national identities vs. individualism, audiences vs. publics, professional autonomy vs. participation and interactivity. The question is whether it is possible to create a socially beneficial balance in the emerging ecology?

This overview suggests that what is emerging today is a true *post-broadcast era*. New media is not only recontextualising television and broadcasting in general (Turner and Tay 2009), but also redefining and to an as yet undetermined degree even replacing

it. The purpose of this research project is to understand the dynamics and implications for broadcasting in that era. The transition can be understood as a gradual process with several stages. How it unfolds needs to be researched because there are policy and society implications that deserve deeper consideration. Current changes in media policy, legislation and spectrum planning are important because they are A) reinterpreting the past and defining the directions for change in the media ecology and B) redefining the industry with implications for future options to be offered or withdrawn from users of media services.

This four-year (01.09.2013 – 31.08.2017) research project is funded by the Academy of Finland and implemented in the School of Communication, Media and Theatre, University of Tampere, Finland. The management team consists of professors Taisto Hujanen (taisto.hujanen@uta.fi) and Gregory Ferrell Lowe (greg.lowe@uta.fi).

### *Objective*

The objective of the project is to describe and critically analyse broadcasting as technology and as cultural form in the emerging context of network communications. More specifically, we aim to identify, characterise and analyse the ongoing processes of mediation as constructed by the encounter between broadcast media and network communication. Aligned with theories on remediation (Bolter and Grusin 1999) and intermediality (Herkman et al. 2012), we understand mediation as a process that integrates technologies and their use with co-related social and cultural meanings and practices. This area of developing media theory is critical to essentialist notions of specific media like radio or television, and emphasises mediation as continuous processes of transformation, negotiation and contest. Following Holmes (2005) we concur that critically reflecting links and integration will mature understandings of social practices and meanings of the broadcasting tradition, and reappraise their value and relevance for the emerging media ecology.

The governing research questions of the project can be divided into two main categories:

#### **Q1** *Broadcasting as technology*

How much and in what sense is broadcasting as a social institution dependent on distinctive technological platforms? Is it possible to transfer institutional dimensions of broadcasting to online and mobile broadband environment? How does the change impact universality of services and open access?

#### **Q2** *Broadcasting as cultural form*

Can broadcasting as mass communication complement and enlarge the interactivity of network communication? How should the dimension of ‘mass’ in broadcast media as mass communication be re-articulated and evaluated in the Internet-dominated media environment? As an operational strategy and as a concept for services, is ‘broadcasting’ applicable in online networks and for mobile broadband?

Methodologically the project will combine detailed analysis of media policy with a tight focus on key areas of public service content production, here focused on journalism, documentary and drama. In the spirit of what is identified as an institutional view of technology (Katzenbach 2012), we will investigate interrelationships between explicit,

formal rules of policy & regulation, and common beliefs, mutual expectations as well as cognitive frameworks of the fields under study.

The two research perspectives are entitled as Focus A (Transitions of Broadcasting Policy and Technology) and B (Transitions of Public Service Content Production).

### *Focus A: Transitions of Broadcasting Policy and Technology*

We hypothesise that four interrelated factors are driving the decline of broadcasting in Europe. 1) There is external political and economic pressure for re-allocating even more broadcast spectrum for mobile broadband, originating from neighbouring regions with less broadcasting services. 2) There is internal cultural and social pressure to shift resources and talent from broadcast operations to online and mobile media development inside European media organisations as resources decline, costs rise and they update and redefine their values, objectives and operational strategies.

These forces are amplified further by 3) changes in audience behaviours with media, as well as perceptions of media, which will be co-related with increasing demand for mobile broadband that require strategic responses in media markets. Finally, 4) with the completion of digitalisation of television the focus of communications policy in the EU is shifting to broadband both at national and EU levels. This is compounded by the increasing economic importance of the Internet. In this context, European political and economic elites will tend to underestimate the social role and societal value of broadcasting for the future. This interpretation is reflected in changes of media policy, communications legislation and spectrum planning, which intensify the spiral of decline.

### **Research Questions**

QA1 – How do political and economic elites in Europe understand the present and future role of broadcasting as a social practice and an operational and technological solution for mass communications?

QA2 – How do media policy, communications legislation and spectrum planning, as well as public subsidies concerning electronic communications, change after and during the final stage of digitalisation of television in Europe (2007-2017)?

QA3 – What is the available supply and demand of radio spectrum for free-to-air (FTA) broadcasting and how has the cost of utilising these frequencies developed in Europe (2007-2017)?

QA4 – To what extent and on which conditions could the current social and political role, as well as legal obligations, of European broadcast media be implemented on other technological platforms, especially mobile broadband Internet?

This research is coordinated by Marko Ala-Fossi (marko.ala-fossi@uta.fi); Postdoctoral Researcher for the period 01.01.2014 – 31.12.2016.

### *Focus B: Transition(s) of Public Service Content Production*

This part of our study aims at a concrete empirical analysis of the key strategic areas (cf. genres) of content production. The point is to demonstrate the struggles and negotiations between broadcasting tradition and network communication in practical, operational

results. This is important to empirically establish what is at stake. The main areas under study are journalism, documentary and drama as operational endeavours of the trilogy of public service functions commonly described as information, education and entertainment. Analysis will focus on strategies and practices of multi-platform publishing and consequent product / service differentiation.

### **Research Questions**

QB1 – What sort of mediation processes do these concepts and formats represent?

QB2 – How do they negotiate a balance and / or hybridization between values and identities of broadcasting and those of network communication?

QB3 – What kind of authorships do they represent? What sort of professional identities and practices are developed? How are the professional autonomy and editorial independence constructed in relation to interactivity and participatory forms of content production?

QB4 – How is the aesthetics of each area changing? What sort of value conflicts and / or hybridization are evident?

The analysis will consist of several sub-studies conducted both as post-doctoral research and as doctoral studies. The main themes of this research are listed below.

### **Focus B themes of research, research fields and names of researchers**

#### **B1 JOURNALISM**

- Interactive and participatory concepts and formats in news and current affairs (journalism research, by *Heikki Heikkilä*)
- Re-negotiation of public service values and professional ideology in news and current affairs (journalism research, by *Eeva Mäntymäki*)

#### **B2 DOCUMENTARY**

- Radio documentary in public service media: towards integration of broadcasting documentary and multi-platform concepts (broadcasting research, by *Hannu Karisto*)
- Changing conceptions of audience(s) and re-negotiation of quality in television documentary production (broadcasting research, by *Pentti Väliahdet*)
- Television documentary as a cultural form and public discourse (media studies, by *Iiris Ruoho*)

#### **B3 DRAMA**

- Serialisation and multi-platform concepts of television drama: transition of aesthetics, authorship and values (media studies, by *Heidi Keinonen*)
- Multi-platform production and broadcast television: a comparative study on television production in Israel and Finland (media studies, by *Heidi Keinonen* and *Oranit Klein Shagrir*). Implemented in cooperation with the Open University of Israel.

### *About research environment and organisation*

Within the School of Communication, Media and Theatre (CMT) the research is administered by the Tampere Research Centre for Journalism, Media and Communication (COMET, <http://www.uta.fi/cmt/en/research/comet/index.html>). The coordination team (C4) for the project, in addition to the two senior faculty (Taisto Hujanen and Gregory Ferrell Lowe), consists of two post-doctoral researchers, Marko Ala-Fossi and Heidi Keinonen.

The project will be supported by two international partner groups: a) an academic group which consists of six (6) European scholars, including three (3) members of the DRACE group (Digital Radio Cultures in Europe, <http://www.drace.org>), and b) a practitioner partner group of six (6) professionals in key positions at either the Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE) or an independent Irish production company (Athena Media). Concerning data collection and analysis, the academic partners will especially facilitate the research for Focus A and practitioner partners for Focus B. The members of the academic partner group come from Austria, Denmark, Ireland, Norway, Spain, and UK. The implementation of Focus B (Journalism) will include cooperation with Donald W. Reynolds School of Journalism and Center for Advanced Media Studies, University of Nevada (with professor Alan G. Stavitsky).

The project is also linked with the RIPE initiative (<http://ripeat.org>) which in the course of more than ten years has developed a global network of academicians and practitioners to discuss current issues of public service broadcasting and public service media.

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