

Preface

The RIPE@2018 Conference was a milestone for the initiative as the first conference hosted and held in southern Europe. The School of Communication at the University of Navarra was pleased to host the event, and did so in conjunction with CICOM 34, an annual International Communication Conference organised by the School. The RIPE initiative is committed to deepening fruitful relations between academic researchers and educators and the practitioner community in public service media (PSM), especially strategic managers. Our 2018 conference was sponsored by Corporación de Radio y Televisión Española (RTVE), Spain's PSM television company. Conference participants visited the new facilities at RTVE because the conference was conducted in Madrid. The RIPE leadership team and conference participants are grateful for the considerable work and investment from the University of Navarra that made the 2018 conference a success.

RTVE's commitment to sponsor the conference was not exempt from uncertainty, because a 2018 change in government caused complications. But the senior management team of RTVE took care to ensure the conference went forward, and RTVE's professionals added the practical component necessary to ground conference discussions in operational reality. The RTVE digital and innovation manager, Ignacio Gómez, provided an insightful overview of the Spanish media market and the challenges it poses for RTVE in the new digital consumption context. The technologic strategic and digital innovation manager, Pere Vila, demonstrated RTVE's leading role in Spain's digital transformation and emphasised relations with audiences and producing new contents for new devices. Pablo García Blanco, commissioner for corporate public affairs, clarified the European vision of PSM and explained how building support and public affairs work. Finally, Roberto Suarez, head of strategy and media intelligence for the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), discussed the supreme importance of ensuring PSM's contribution to society to secure the future of the enterprise in Europe, taking into account powerful transnational competitors that include Amazon, Apple, Disney, Google, and Netflix. The organisers and participants appreciate the contributions from RTVE and the EBU.

The RIPE@2018 Conference theme was universalism and public service media. The theme focused attention on challenges and opportunities involved with achieving the historic and continuing universal service mission for PSM in today's era of media abundance. The conference theme has been more fully

developed in the work undertaken to produce this book, the RIPE@2019 Reader – ninth in the series published by Nordicom. In the age of channel scarcity, universalism was not easy to achieve, but it was inarguably easier than today. As mass media, radio, and television enjoyed universal growth and reach in the period of monopolies and oligopolies (depending on the country), the same programmes were watched and heard by millions of people in each country at the same time.

In the 1960s and 1970s, broadcasting shortened distances and strengthened ties between distant people. Television played a formative role in the universalisation of human relations and the sharing of knowledge. This mission had pronounced importance in Europe, because from its start, broadcasting was conceived as a public service mandate that included a legal requirement to provide a universal service. This was correlated with the pursuit of cultivating enlightenment, promoting social cohesion, and providing a fair, full, and equitable range of media services (UNESCO, 2005).

Nowadays, the “mass media” of yesteryear has been substituted by “a mass” of media channels across an expanding range of digital platforms. Access to information, culture, and entertaining has become greater and easier thanks to the Internet and social media. Public companies have developed their digital departments as online services too. But the Internet is a global media platform (Albarran & Goff, 2000) not only because it is connected around the world but also because it does not have a specific geographic constituency. In addition, more or less any activity of human interest is available on the web and anyone can create content to share. That is why the concept of universalism must be reconsidered, reimagined, and renewed.

PSM has been severely challenged by deepening crisis for the past 20 years, at least. As Richeri (1994) suggested, the crisis has three dimensions: 1) it is a *legitimacy* crisis because private media can perform many of the same functions as public media – this dimension has been compounded by problems for public media as nationalist and state media enterprises, cultivating political connotations that are difficult to reconcile with public service; 2) it is a *financial* crisis as growth of competition has led to steep decreases in income and an increase in production costs, higher costs for acquisition of rights, and complications for human resources that has made financing difficult, especially for managers that have had a bureaucratic mindset rather than a business orientation; and 3) and it is also an *identity* crisis, where the commercialism of media systems has created market dynamics that are a key driver in managerial decision-making.

The debate on the future of public television features differing solutions, but no single option is appropriate for all. Each dimension requires distinctive solutions, and all three must be tackled as a package. But the principles that legitimate the public service mission for this enterprise continue to emphasise universalism, diversity, independence, and distinctiveness. The universal ser-

vice obligation means PSM must somehow guarantee that the majority of the population have access to services regardless of geographic and financial constraints (Born & Prosser, 2001). Universality refers not only to physical availability but also to issues of language, understanding, and interest (Sakr, 2012). Consequently, they must be diverse, that is to say, the audience targets, types of programmes, and subjects taken into account must be broad and varied. To do so, they should be independent from political or economic power and not biased by any ideological influence. The contributions comprising this collection treat many of the most important issues related to this set of concerns and mandated requirements, and do so with a critical orientation that examines the past and future of the concept as a viable practice.

I want to close by thanking Gregory Ferrell Lowe, a founder of the initiative and the RIPE continuity director, for supporting our university, myself, and many of my colleagues, in our efforts to organise the 2018 conference in Madrid. We are pleased to have contributed to the inaugural effort to expand RIPE's efforts in the southern part of Europe, and beyond. I am personally grateful, as well, for the opportunity to participate in editing this volume. Much thanks to Philip Savage at McMaster University in Canada, our co-editor, and to our colleagues at Nordicom for supporting this publication once again. Finally, we thank everyone who contributed to the conference in various roles, especially the workgroup chairs, and to the reviewers of the chapters included in this RIPE Reader.

Mercedes Medina

Navarra, 21 March 2020

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