

## Chapter 1

# Universalism in public service media

## *Paradoxes, challenges, and development*

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From the beginning of radio as a social medium in the 1930s, the notion of universalism was a foundational principle for legitimating broadcasting as a public trust (Barnouw, 1966). Until media deregulation became the preferred paradigm in the 1980s, the principle was bedrock to the broadcasting mission and a mandate for public service roles and functions (Wu, 2010). Even in the US, where commercial financing and private ownership were the preferred arrangement for operationalising radio (despite opposition), the Radio Act of 1927 required broadcasting to “serve the public interest, convenience and necessity” (US Congress, 1925: n.p.). There was near universal agreement that broadcasting should serve everyone.

In the late twentieth century this ideal was deliberately abandoned. Caught up in a deregulatory frenzy that impacted many industries, governments increasingly embraced the commercial exploitation of broadcasting even in countries that had long resisted, as had been the case in Scandinavia (Ala-Fossi, forthcoming). Societies were promised more competition, more innovation, and vigorous economic growth for media industries. Some of this came to be true, but what was lost also matters. The explosive growth of online media enabled by advances in digitalisation and sped-up globalisation has unraveled domestic efforts to regulate media.

Today’s growing distrust in media is partly rooted in these dynamics and often justified by the illusion that more media in more platforms will ensure better media in all platforms. There seems to be more of everything on offer except social responsibility. Universalism is no longer much discussed in popular, political, or academic circles. When announced as the theme for the RIPE@2018 conference in Madrid, the response was muted and perplexed. The organisers were challenged to secure enough participation because many public service media (PSM) scholars consider the topic outdated and reactionary. The initial idea had been to focus only on the problems faced by PSM companies in their efforts to attract the attention and support of youth audiences. In formulating

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Lowe, G. F., & Savage, P. (2020). Universalism in public service media: Paradoxes, challenges, and development. In P. Savage, M. Medina, & G. F. Lowe (Eds.), *Universalism in public service media* (pp. 11–24). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.

the theme, we came to see this as one important part of a broader set of challenges involved with attracting all sorts of people who comprise the publics that PSM are still mandated to serve. Essentially, the animating issue is what to do with and about the fading prospects to achieve universalism mandates for PSM in market-based contexts characterised by media-society relationships that are increasingly fragmented and unstable.

This RIPE anthology interrogates the historic universalism mission and investigates aspects of continuing relevance in the enactment of public service as a primary purpose of media performance. Our departure point is critical in orientation because we do not presume all was cozy and rosy in the bygone days of broadcasting monopolies and oligopolies when universalism was a more realistic and accepted proposition than it is in the 2020s. But the collection recognises the principled importance of universalism as an aspirational quest – a project worth pursuing because of the social value its accomplishment can provide, even if only ever partial in scope and scale. At best, that quest can be inspirational as well.

The quest for universal service involves two key dimensions: reach and genre. Its pursuit encourages PSM managers, programmers, and content-makers to think about more than markets and to understand programme content as more than products created to achieve competitive advantage. Both are important, but the pursuit of universalism requires an abiding commitment to provide services for publics that address the shared needs people have in a society and other communities, which are more than an amalgamation of individual preferences and “taste markets”. The pursuit also requires investment in new platforms and content that can extend both the reach and range of services with due respect for the diversity of needs and the unique affordances that the varied platforms can provide.

The universalism mission has never been easy or entirely fulfilled. There have always been considerable difficulties in its pursuit that indicate persistent sociocultural biases that must be squarely faced. But the pursuit of universalism matters to the extent that people still value a sufficient degree of cohesion, trustworthiness, fairness, and inclusion that can be partly facilitated by media – or not. The latter is the “scary part” because we live in communities at multiple levels: national, regional, and local (with implications for PSM in all three). To that end, this introductory chapter situates the contributions to this volume and provides a grounding for readers to survey and grapple with a contemporary discourse about universalism as a principled pursuit that has, is, and is likely to remain, both difficult to achieve in practice and in need of serious public debate and reconsideration.

## Roots of the universalism ideal in broadcasting

As an ideal, universalism is rooted in the Enlightenment movement of European history from the late seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries. The Age of Reason, as often described, produced a flowering of philosophy on the nature of humanity and the importance of the individual as a rational being possessed of “inalienable” rights. This suggests a dialectical tension between the general (humanity as a whole) and the specific (individual rights). The Enlightenment cultivated much that the Western world has cherished, celebrated, and advocated as identity markers – especially democracy, capitalism, and science.

The chapter from Barbara Thomass within this collection treats the early development, background, and application of universalism as “a principle positing the equal moral worth of all persons”. The ethical nature of the concept is normative but, as noted, indicates a dialectical tension. On the one hand, the principle posits a shared heritage of presumed universal value in believing all people inherit a fundamental set of rights by virtue of being human. Famously, the American Declaration of Independence declares that “all men are created equal”. The French Revolution proclaimed “liberty, equality, and fraternity” for all. Leaving aside the problem of gender bias and demonstrated class bias in the periods when Western democracies were constructed, and the thorny issue of colonialism and slavery that remain a festering sore, the essential point is that humans have rights that are universal in scope and essential in nature.

At the same time, however, the universalism principle prioritises the individual to varying degrees, depending on constitutions, legislation, policy, and other adaptations. In the US, each individual has the Constitutional right to pursue “life, liberty, and happiness”. So, universalism is both a shared human right and an individual affordance. In other liberal democratic countries, universalist rights also speak to broadly shared community rights and protections, extending the universal right to minority language and cultural communities (c.f. Canadian or Belgian minority language rights). And the suffragette movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as the civil rights movement in the US since the 1960s, have significant importance.

The universalism ideal has been fundamental to the designs and intentions of welfare states, also called welfare societies. This is a comparatively recent application. According to Renwick (2018), until the late 1800s, most believed the welfare of individual citizens was nothing the state should be overly concerned with. Arguments against states “meddling” with the public welfare feature themes that are frequently articulated by conservative constituencies to this day: The poor should not be “coddled” because they need to own their situations to change; the state should not interfere with market dynamics; the costs for ensuring a safety net of public services such as education and health will bankrupt the national treasury; and so forth.

The grim realities of living conditions and life expectancy for the working class in Western nations (Renwick focuses on Britain, but the same would apply elsewhere) gradually and cumulatively encouraged social movements advocating change. The rationale was certainly argued on moral grounds (e.g., the unreasonable use of the “poor house” to incarcerate those who could not repay debts), but also on pragmatic grounds – the cost of malnutrition, disease, and lack of education was a drag on national economies. Positions for and against became increasingly volatile around the turn of the twentieth century with struggles for unionisation, civil rights, and extending the voting franchise to women. This came to a head in the 1930s as a consequence of the economic collapse of Western economies during the Great Depression (Domhoff, 2013) and was cemented by the scale of need to deal with monumental recovery efforts after World War II.

In the 1930s–1980s, the scale of social interest, concern, and prioritisation of universalism paralleled development of the mass society paradigm (Buechler, 2013). Even earlier, universalism was trumpeted in the development of mass production and distribution in many industries: American Telephone and Telegraph (1885), General Electric (1892), General Motors (1908), Radio Corporation of America (1919), Universal Studios (1912), British Broadcasting Company (1922), and National Broadcasting Company (1926). These familiar corporate names emphasise the importance of scale and reach, with an obvious affection (or affectation) for national pride.

Although the mass society paradigm was rooted in fears about potential alienation and isolation as a consequence of rapid urbanisation and advancing industrialisation, it had a brighter side in reflections on the potential for the new media of the day (broadcasting) to elevate public taste, improve general education, and strengthen national solidarity. This was especially pronounced in the philosophy of public service broadcasting as articulated in 1924 by John Reith, the first director general of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), in a book he titled *Broadcast Over Britain* – a curious phrase reflecting both an interest in universal reach in Britain and what Reith later described as “the brute force of monopoly” (Briggs, 1995: 217), which he considered essential to accomplish the public service broadcasting (PSB) enlightenment mission. As Hendy (2013: 13) observed, under this rubric broadcasting could be construed as a gift economy – something offered to all without the expectation of reciprocation with the “hope that in the process ordinary life might be made more interesting, more peaceful and more pleasurable”.

As the chapter by Minna Aslama Horowitz and Gregory Ferrell Lowe illustrates, the principle of universalism was a foundational ideal for PSB and a continuing normative mandate assigned to PSM by key stakeholders who demonstrate considerable uniformity in expectations. This is evident in documents published by the European Broadcasting Union, the Public Media Alliance, the

Council of Europe, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The pursuit of universalism remains a cornerstone of the public service mission in media. This being the case, two important questions immediately arise: 1) what are the key dimensions of universalism in practice, and 2) how achievable is the mission?

### Dimensions and complications in achieving universalism

Peter Goodwin, in his chapter “Universal – but not necessarily useful”, explores the history and legacy of PSB in Britain. Much of his discussion enjoys general application to other countries where PSB has long enjoyed an important presence. As elsewhere (if perhaps there first), in the UK universalist principles have mainly applied to “geographical universality” and “universality of appeal”. As he notes, these are fairly narrow concerns, and their definition has always been vague and bounded by numerous caveats.

This view is supported in the analysis by Barbara Thomass in her chapter, “Universalism in history, modern statehood, and public service media”. Her analysis extends the dimensions somewhat on the basis of earlier work by Paddy Scannell (1989) about operational aspects for doing public service in media. Scannell posited four dimensions of universalism in public broadcasting: 1) access and reach (corresponding with geographical universality); 2) genres and services; 3) relevance and impact (both 2 and 3 are aspects for universality of appeal); and 4) financing and attendant obligations.

The research by Karen Donders and Hilde Van den Bulck confirms these as core dimensions of the universalism mission in PSB across Europe. As they observe, from their start, public broadcasters have been required to provide the same quality and availability of services to every citizen at a national level. This legitimates an important asset for PSB, that is the justification to receive public funding. But it faces complications that have become critical with the growth of international media conglomerates and the splintering of national audiences into segmented communities of interest.

In the analogue era, universal reach was easier than universal appeal. Broadcasting companies had monopolies or oligopolies in the era of media scarcity. Matters of personal preference and taste publics were never easy to accommodate with one or a few generalist channels. This goes some distance in explaining the explosive growth of commercial broadcasting in Europe in the 1990s. Today, both aspects of universal service are difficult to ensure, not only because over-the-air is declining and on-demand is growing, but also because many countries have privatised transmission networks (as also noted by Goodwin in his chapter). And today’s realities indicate pressing concerns about overcoming a stubborn digital divide.

As for universal appeal, public broadcasters have primarily addressed national populations as a collective community – although never entirely and typically with a “high rail” bias (Lowe et al., 2016). The need to serve everyone on an equitable basis pleased few on a continual basis, but it did ensure a mixture of programmed genres in efforts to serve diverse interests and population demographics (Van den Bulck, 2001). The pursuit of universal appeal remains relevant for PSM companies but is ever more difficult to achieve in an environment characterised by media abundance as platforms and channels multiply (Donders, 2012). Arguably, the most difficult and costly achievement today is producing a mass audience. The value of that has risen sharply as its production has become scarcer (Doyle, 2013), one important reason accounting for soaring costs to obtain distribution rights for sports programming – one of the few genres that can still produce a mass audience (Mahon, 2017).

The universal service obligation is even more challenging in the digital media environment, a reality that is thematic in this collection. As Goodwin notes in his chapter, increasingly pervasive distribution of content over the Internet has largely undone the principle of geographical universality, and mixed genre general channels are no longer very popular due to the proliferation of niche options that undermine the universality of appeal. Universalism has fallen out of favour in part because it is less achievable.

This suggests problems beyond difficulties, perhaps impossibilities, with fulfilling the two key dimensions treated so far, problems that are keyed to making the transition from PSB to PSM (Lowe & Bardoel, 2007). This collection addresses some of critical importance.

## Contextual limitations in the pursuit of universalism

A variety of contextual factors have made it increasingly difficult to pursue the universalism mission as historically conceived. Several chapters in this collection address important contextual factors, including geography and population characteristics of a country, the dynamics of media market competition, challenges related to ex ante evaluation, questions about the public value of PSM, and issues related to purview.

Regarding the first factor, David Skinner analyses the evolution of mandated universalism requirements for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in “Historical dimensions of universalism at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation: Some implications for today”. The pursuit of this mission has persistently challenged the CBC due to its operational context. Canada is among the largest and most diverse countries in the world, consisting of 13 provinces and territories with two official languages (English and French) and a broad range of Aboriginal populations that are widely spread and speak as

many as 60 languages – representing just under a quarter of million speakers (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Since its origins in the 1930s, the CBC has been legislatively mandated to provide programming for all Canadians. Skinner’s analysis highlights limitations in the potential to fulfill the universalism mission that hinge on the complex interaction of geographic and population characteristics combined with stubborn financial constraints. Canadian legislation requires the CBC to provide comprehensive content that is, among other characteristics: predominantly and distinctively Canadian, regionally reflective, culturally expressive, contributing to shared national consciousness and identity, multicultural, multiracial, and should be widely available (Broadcasting Act, 1991: part 1, section 3m). While the universalism principle is comprehensively encapsulated in the legislation, and effectively unchanged from the Act’s passing in 1991 to the present day, fully realising this mandate in practice has been a nearly impossible mission, as is the case for many PSM organisations around the world. The universalism mission is especially challenging in Canada due to its enormity in geographic territory and the degree of multicultural complexity. Much smaller territories like the UK (comprised of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) and Germany (with great differences between populations in the east and west as well as the north and south) are severely challenged as well.

Julie Münter Lassen, in “Multichannel strategy, universalism, and the challenge of audience fragmentation”, tackles complications posed by PSM’s need to adapt to competition in commercial media markets, which is another broadly characteristic contextual factor today. As she makes clear, PSM companies need to achieve competitive success and this has encouraged a range of adaptations in approaches and priorities that are characteristic of the private commercial approach. In her analysis of the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR) and the Danish media market, she observes that upwards of 45 domestic television channels are available for a market of less than six-million people. Every PSB company in Europe has added new radio and television channels since the early 1990s that are profiled to reach targeted audiences that are variously defined. Some are intended to appeal to particular age groups, especially children (see the chapter by Donders & Hilde Van den Bulck) and teenagers or young adults. Some are defined by genre, especially channels for news and sports. And some are intended to serve the multicultural interests of increasingly diverse populations.

As Münter Lassen observes, this explosion of choices seems to “tick the box” for improving the potential to achieve universality in reach and appeal. But while this has some merit, she critiques “multichannelism” for contributing to the fragmentation of audiences and segmentation of publics – a point made earlier by Scannell (1990), as she notes. She further observes that the increasing focus on PSM instead of PSB encourages a multiplication of channels across an expanding array of platforms.

While this has potential instrumental value for pursuing the universal mission, it undoubtedly contributes to an increasing focus on personal tastes and individual preferences rather than the *raison d'être* for PSB, which is to serve a general public and society's collective needs and interests. We again observe the embedded dialectic. Her primary concern is whether DR's strategic response to compete effectively by attracting enough audiences to legitimate its importance as a PSM provider might not, paradoxically, undermine that very legitimacy. She doesn't see any realistic alternative to offering more channels as a portfolio, but encourages deeper thought about how to orient and operate the portfolio "as a unified offer or a series of discrete channels".

The chapter by Christina Gransow, "A question of value or further restriction? Public value as a core concept", investigates the impact of public value testing on five PSM providers in Europe, with a focus on how they have implemented new services intended to extend universal provision in the digital media environment. She shares the concerns of Münter Lassen that the multiplication of channels by PSB providers could undermine the universalism mission in a paradoxical way because, although intended to reach everyone with some channel or channels, their multiplication divides audiences into niches that PSM companies are producing. Her assessment of public value tests highlights a number of complicated questions: What universal values are centrally involved in serving the democratic, social, and cultural needs of a society? How are these values measured and by whom? Is the public involved, and if so, how much and with what impact? As treated in an earlier RIPE Reader (Martin & Lowe, 2014), PSM is caught in the dilemma of being required to serve everyone on an equitable basis without disturbing or distorting commercial markets. But as Christiana Gransow observes in her chapter, the universalist mission of public service media must consider larger principles; "essentially, the democratic, social, and cultural structure of a country is crucial to determining public value".

Karen Donders and Hilde Van den Bulck have done considerable earlier work on *ex ante* evaluation. In their contribution for this collection, "Universality of public service media and preschool audiences: The choice against a dedicated television channel in Flanders", they focus on an important case for Belgium's Vlaamse Radio en Televisieomroeporganisatie (VRT) in its efforts to provide services for Flemish-speaking children. They thoroughly analyse the degree to which the universalism argument that was made by VRT, to justify whether the initiative was considered and treated as credible by the Flemish public regulator. They found the regulator privileged the commercial logic of private sector competitors instead, although the opinions of commercial broadcasters were not substantiated by evidence. The private sector's interests disproportionately impacted the regulator's assessment of VRT's proposal and eventually resulted in a negative decision despite evidence from the PSM company that the market



impact would be quite limited and the public interest motivation was quite high. The authors conclude that although the universalism mandate is highlighted in Dutch media policy as a principle, in practice it is not taken seriously and decisions are “based on opaque, qualitative assessments of arguments”. In consequence, “overall, the entire process created the illusion of serving the public while being an exercise to have public broadcasters serve the media market rather than society and its citizens”.

An extreme case of public service, apparently at the service of the market but with unitary state incentives to temper both the market interests and the non-government public interests, is discussed in the chapter by Olga Dovbysh and Tatiana Belyuga: “Whose voices and what values? State grants for significant public content in the Russian media model”. Analysing the structure of current Russian media funding, this research investigates how forms of state support lead to paternalistic effects on media decisions. The research demonstrates that the mechanism of grants itself has some limitations in serving public needs. Two main groups of topics were found: typical public-related ones (culture, history, etc.) and the topics related to the official agenda of the government. The structure of state incentives means that public service topics are defined by journalists in ways that anticipate which topics and angles will be relevant to and supported by political officials. As such, they argue, only those voices that do not contradict the official political agenda receive public funding support.

Finally, as regards issues of purview, we have already touched on constraints posed by virtue of PSM’s national purview. Although the ethos and intentions of public service provision in media are arguably universal in merit and the sector is internationally affiliated through nongovernmental organisations (e.g., the European Broadcasting Union and the Public Media Alliance), the operational focus and locus of control for PSM is national. International services have been provided by several companies, including the BBC in Britain and Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai (NHK) in Japan, but recent years have seen sharp declines in investment and prioritisation of such services (Plunkett, 2015). Even so, within national boundaries, PSB has long struggled to serve local communities on a universal basis and with the same quality and variety of services.

This issue is addressed in the chapter by Aleksandar Kocic and Jelena Milicev, “Challenges for public service radio in small nations: Lessons from Scotland”. Their analysis of BBC Radio Scotland indicates that the provider offers only a limited Scottish news service for regional interests, or perhaps Scotland’s national interests, depending on one’s perspective in the post-Brexit context. Local and community news provision is available only online, which they found does not include “local hard news” or “civic affairs news”, which help inform the political activity of citizens. Their argument resonates in other countries with strong regional identities, diverse languages, and multicultural identities.

Such services can be quite popular, as with Radio Suomi – a regional network of services provided by Yleisradio Oy (Yle), the Finnish public service media company (Finnpanel, 2019). Yle radio overall reaches about one-third of Finns on a daily basis and a little more than 50 per cent weekly. Of the total, Radio Suomi accounts for 20 per cent of the total daily reach and nearly one-third of the weekly. But here, as elsewhere, the risk of dwindling support for local and regional PSM is high, as documented in a 2016 report published by the European Audiovisual Observatory (Cappello, 2016).

PSM companies have long been criticised for an elitist view of their publics and for having a capitol-centric perspective (Lowe & Hujanen, 2003). This accounts for significant investments in regional service operations over the years. The justification has been premised on fulfilling the universalism mission at regional and local levels. With varying degrees of success and in myriad ways, PSB has sought to create a better balance between the national audience and regional voices and perspectives. Worrisomely, the resources and efforts to continue this have been declining in broadcasting and increasingly pushed to online platforms. Kocic and Milicev treat the issues in useful detail.

Thus far, we have discussed historic challenges and contemporary constraints in fulfilling mandates for the universalism mission in PSM. There are also interesting developments that encourage a conceptual reframing of the mission. Several contributions in this volume address aspects of growing importance in that pursuit.

## New dimensions of universalism in concept and practice

The universalism mission would arguably be better served if public involvement were better facilitated across a range of strategic and tactical areas. This is not a new insight. Indeed, *The Public in Public Service Media* was the title and focus of an earlier conference and RIPE Reader (Lowe, 2009). At issue here is how to stimulate and incorporate proactive public participation not only as a resource for content and source of political support, but also in strategic planning practice.

The chapter by Donders and Van den Bulck calls for a more universal and accessible public service orientation in regulatory processes and decision-making to create a more open and even playing field for public involvement in the sector. This touches on a thorny problem that has persisted since the mid-2000s: how to ensure a sufficiency of value to a large enough proportion of a national public to legitimate the cost of PSM? In principle, the value of services needs to be sufficiently universal to justify the expense for the public. Securing sufficiency of value at an adequate degree of universality is no mean feat in today's increasingly fragmented media markets where political support is uncertain at best and often antagonistic.

The chapter by Horowitz and Lowe emphasises the importance of collaborating with diverse stakeholders to represent a reasonable scope of universality. This is important not only to support PSM institutions as such, but to actively, effectively, and rapidly respond to threats posed by the proliferation of false information, siloed information habits, and growing distrust in the media. These are among the most alarming challenges for digital media markets everywhere today and indicate escalating complications which the authors treat as “information disorder”. These phenomena impact trust in media at all societal levels – global, regional, national, and local – and are enabled by the interaction of sociocultural and technological transformations that have destabilised media systems. Regaining trust must involve a broad cross section of stakeholders, not only PSM organisations and NGOs but also commercial, governmental, and civic agencies. The capabilities of PSM organisations to counter these phenomena requires a new approach to universalism that prioritises and operationalises collaboration by all.

The good news, they observe, is that in Europe those involved with making media policy often mention PSM – and sometimes prioritise it – as a vitally important part of the solution toolkit. The bad news is, unfortunately, PSM is not strongly supported in most of the world and is taking hits even in Europe where the legacy of PSB is comparatively strong. The evidence suggests growing ambivalence about public media. The problem of “media capture” by authoritarian governments is an added complication. This is why Horowitz and Lowe advocate a more inclusive understanding of who is responsible for, and able to provide, public services in media. They emphasise perspectives from media scholars and policy makers that public services are delivered by varied sources and all of them are needed today. Some are PSM organisations that function as legally mandated institutions – that is, public service from the *de jure* perspective (in law). But many public services in media are not institutionally designed and mandated operations – they are *de facto* providers. These examples provide ample evidence that collaboration can produce effective solutions for addressing information disorder and an argument that, in doing so, these providers pave a way forward to accomplish a renewed universalism mission.

In his contribution, “Personalised universalism in the age of algorithms”, Jannick Kirk Sørensen addresses the paradoxical relationship between the universalism principle in the analogue era of media scarcity with personalisation in the digital era of abundance. He wonders how the principle of universalism can be maintained as a core value proposition given a sweeping “return” to individual communication, which actually characterised early intentions for radio that did not materialise. Sørensen argues that today we have a “globalised technical universalism” – a form of universalism subject to algorithmic programming and protocol rules that are outside the control of PSM content creators, and mostly also for national regulators. The language of coding and for web and app design interfaces provide the rules that are the most truly universal

things in media today. This, he argues, means that “the contents and services offered on popular platforms can only be universally accessed if they adhere to the general coding and design requirements that pertain to a platform”, most of which are commercial.

Sørensen proposes the pursuit of “personalised enlightenment” as having universal value for individuals to improve collective understandings and encourage mutual respect. He observes the need for a shared platform offering a range of content and formats that facilitate participation at diverse levels of education. This seems a worthy objective for PSM institutions, but as he observes, one problem that needs resolution is a tension between “professionals who are responsible for creating meaning by producing programmes” and platform operators who are responsible for “optimising the potential for exposure – that is, data scientists, data curators, and marketing departments”. This problem has become increasingly evident inside PSM organisations in their efforts to become tri-media companies, and is a cross-sector complication because content makers and digital network operators are not in the same “business”.

The chapter by Lizzie Jackson rounds out our collection. In “Datafication, fluidity, and organisational change: Towards a universal PSM 3.0”, she reviews a range of organisational structures that are now necessary to deliver datafied and nuanced content to a variety of taste publics and audience formations. Today, digital content must be capable of delivery to mass audiences, to groups of various size in varying types, and to individuals to accommodate personal preferences in the on-demand environment. Her chapter draws on the results of 150 interviews in an international four-year funded study about PSM in the digital environment. (2015–2019). The project explores for the first time the internal organisational cultures and knowledge exchange mechanisms of ten high-technology clusters in North America and Europe, including Toronto, which she highlighted in her chapter.

Analysis of the level of engagement between high technology firms and “in proximity” PSMs was included in the study, which strongly supports understanding the importance of PSM on the basis of maintaining the fluidity needed to evolve in a highly unstable and dynamic set of media industries. This is essential for achieving visibility and building relevance for the broadest cross section of publics as audiences and users. In this view, universalism in the digital environment can be operationalised by embracing three strategic priorities: 1) datafication to enable the automated nuancing of content; 2) increased collaborative production via networked technologists; and 3) creating more agile organisational structures that are not only less rigid internally, but with porous boundaries to encourage robust external involvement.

## Conclusion: Paradoxes, challenges, and development

This anthology provides a timely discourse on the universalism mission in the twenty-first century, making a case for continuing relevance while acknowledging an enormous range and degree of complication in realising the mission in practice. Far from being an anachronistic conceit, the mission has both ethical and instrumental importance today. It has ethical importance for the normative justification of the public service orientation in the digital media environment. It has instrumental importance for pursuing every reasonable avenue for enabling that orientation to achieve legal mandates to ensure every citizen is fairly served by contemporary media systems. This is especially important given the downgrading of social responsibility as a principled priority in media systems as whole.

Thematic to the collection is an essential paradox we have highlighted in this introductory chapter as a persistent tension between collective needs and individual rights – between the societal and the individual. The two are inseparable in practice and can thus be described as a dialectical tension. The contributions to this anthology treat that paradox from varied perspectives that are useful for developing theory and supporting practice; the first in normative conceptualisation and the latter in strategic legitimation.

At the same time, the collection makes clear that the universalism mission is more than an idea – it is an ideal, a conceptualisation of something most suitable, even perfect. As such, the universalism mission has never been as fully achieved as ideally conceived and desired. That does not lessen its importance. The pursuit of universal public service is aspirational, and for those who embrace this, it is also inspirational.

Universalism is a complex ideal, a complicated pursuit, and a considerable challenge – more so today than before the digitalisation of media systems and products. It is also a new frontier ripe for redevelopment in both conceptual and operational terms.

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