PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND THE GLOBAL FRAMEWORK OF MEDIA DEMOCRATIZATION

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Abstract / Public broadcasting remains a key institution of democratization in the context of globalization, marked by the shift from the national to the transnational as the site of media power and, increasingly, media activity. In the face of rampant commercialization of media, public broadcasting is essential to the promotion of pluralism in the public sphere. In a multichannel environment, public broadcasting must find its particular place. At the same time, multilateral politics present a specific new challenge to public broadcasting. As media politics go global, public broadcasting must be rethought and new structures and mechanisms put in place at the global level.

Keywords / democratization / globalization / media policy / public broadcasting / television

In recent years, the trials and tribulations of public service broadcasting worldwide have led commentators to declare – either deploring it or with approval – the imminent demise of this venerable institution. However, among the many available strategies and mechanisms for fostering a sustainable and democratic cultural environment, I would argue that public service broadcasting still deserves a place of choice.

The June 1997 inclusion of a Protocol on Public Service Broadcasting in the 'Amsterdam Treaty' of the European Union has highlighted a number of key aspects about public broadcasting on the eve of the 21st century:

- what was originally a strictly 'national' service, although similar in many countries, has become increasingly transnational and 'regional' (in the multinational sense), in the new context conveniently known as globalization;
- in light of the growing commercialization of all media, public broadcasting continues to designate a strong value of social worth, the 'last best hope' for socially purposeful media acting in the public interest;
- public broadcasting is also profoundly political insofar as it is an object of concern and intervention for political actors of all sorts;
- it is also increasingly part of a complex of economic targets of the audiovisual industries.

The bottom line, however, is that the *issue* of public broadcasting is clearly part of the overall problematic of mass media democratization, so clearly outlined

in the charter documents of the Cultural Environment Movement (CEM) that constitutes the theme of this special issue of *Gazette*.

In this article, I examine how public broadcasting is situated with respect to the global framework of media democratization.

Public Broadcasting and Media Pluralism

Let me begin by looking more closely at the above-mentioned EU Protocol (Council of the European Union, 1997). This document considers 'that the system of public broadcasting in the Member States [of the European Union] is directly related to the democratic, social and cultural needs of each society and to the need to preserve media pluralism'. This in itself is important in terms of *legitimation* of public service broadcasting at a time when its basis is under attack on both ideological and economic grounds. It links public broadcasting to the question of democracy, emphasizes its sociocultural nature as a public service, and underscores the distinctive role of public broadcasting in an otherwise monofunctional system.

The political nature of the issue emerges when the Protocol attempts to move beyond generalities towards establishing the legal basis of public broadcasting within the framework of the EU. Thus, it specifies 'the competence of Member States to provide for the funding of public service broadcasting'. This 'competence' has been an issue in the EU (and could, theoretically, become one in other contexts, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA]), where privately owned broadcasting organizations and their supporters have argued that such funding constitutes unfair competition in a market-driven environment. In fact, it will be left to the courts to decide on an ad hoc basis where this is or is not the case.[1]

An analysis of the Protocol produced by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) remarked that this was 'the first time that the role and specific nature of public service broadcasting have been explicitly recognized within the legal framework of the European Union'.

> The Protocol strengthens the dual broadcasting system, for which all European states have opted, and provides legal security for public funding. Moreover, it conveys a strong message about Europe's approach to the information society and responds to the calls of the European Parliament and the Council of Europe for the independence of public service broadcasting to be safeguarded through an appropriate, secure and transparent funding framework. (European Broadcasting Union, 1997: 1)

The Protocol represents a political consensus and sends an important signal, according to the EBU, but 'the effectiveness of this guarantee will probably depend on a clear, sufficiently broad definition being set out by each Member State of the public service remit conferred upon the public service broadcasting organizations'. In order for a complaint to succeed, says the EBU, public service funding would have to be shown to be seriously affecting the internal market *and* going beyond what is justified by the public service remit.

I have gone on at some length with this example to illustrate the extent to which public broadcasting is a *contested* issue in the new transnational

environment in which media policy decisions are being made. But is it still relevant as an institution for promoting social and cultural development?

Public Broadcasting and Globalization[2]

When the International Commission on the Study of Communication Problems chaired by the late Sean MacBride reported to UNESCO in 1980, the structure of the world's broadcasting systems was a relatively unproblematic affair. The subject occupied a mere two pages in the MacBride Report, where public service broadcasting did not even require a separate index entry (UNESCO, 1980).

In 1980, national broadcasting systems could be typed according to the prevailing political systems in each of the countries concerned. Most European countries had a single monopoly broadcaster – although operating according to very different sets of principles in the West and in the East. In Africa, too, national broadcasting was strictly government owned and operated. At the other extreme, the American free enterprise model of broadcasting was operational in most of Asia and the Americas (with notable exceptions). The number of countries with 'mixed' systems was small (the MacBride Report mentioned the UK, Japan, Australia, Canada and Finland). Where it existed, community broadcasting was a strictly local, marginalized phenomenon with few links to the mainstream. In 1980, the letters CNN (Cable News Network) did not have the evocative authority they do today.[3]

Since that time, the world has changed. The evolution of broadcasting has been marked by three sets of parallel developments: (1) the explosion in channel capacity and disappearance of audiovisual borders made possible by new technology; (2) the disintegration of the state broadcasting model with the collapse of the Socialist bloc and the move towards democratization in various parts of the world; and (3) the upsurge in market broadcasting and the introduction of mixed broadcasting systems in the countries with former public service monopolies.

Far from being distinct from one another, these phenomena are in a complex interrelationship with respect to the emergence of new forms of broadcasting, locally, nationally and internationally. The consolidation of a world broadcasting market has been abetted by the collapse of the Iron Curtain, just as that process was accelerated by the technological obsolescence of attempts to control access to information and the means of communication.

At the same time, the re-evaluation of welfare capitalism – spurred on by an uneasy marriage of ideological and economic considerations – coinciding with the arrival of the new generation of broadcasting technologies, has further strengthened the market model and undermined the view that broadcasting is a sphere of activity analogous to education or health care – that is to say, a primarily social and cultural rather than an economic or political activity.

Until the 1980s, television was mainly limited to the OECD and Soviet bloc countries. Since then, the number of sets has tripled, although still unevenly distributed, and the number of satellite stations has gone from none to 300 (although there are still only two really global channels, Turner's CNN and Viacom's MTV).[4] In 1980 there were 40 channels in Europe; by 1995 there were 150.

But despite the rapid move towards globalization, broadcasting is still legally constituted within the confines of national borders. Every national government is at some point faced with some basic decisions about broadcasting, if only to consider the allocation of frequencies to which it is entitled by international agreements. The immediate result of these decisions is a *national broadcasting system* in every country, made up of one or more component parts.

One encounters a variety of existing broadcasting institutions in this global environment. Despite a great variation from one country to the next, however, there are only three basic types of system, each of which, while possibly encompassing different institutions, is built around a 'core' in which one particular institutional form is dominant. These three main types are what I call 'public service core systems', 'private enterprise core systems' and 'state core systems'.

Most of the countries we think about when we talk about public broadcasting in the conventional sense have established public service core systems. These are the systems in which the BBCs, CBCs, ABCs and so forth have flourished over the years. These are also the countries in which the question of financing has been most difficult recently. For obvious reasons, we have all been anxiously watching the evolution of these broadcasters and their efforts to adapt to the challenges of the new environment.

Public broadcasting has been relatively underdeveloped in those countries with what I call private enterprise core systems – such as the USA, where public broadcasting was never intended to be the central component of the system. In private enterprise core systems, public broadcasting has been positioned as a marginal 'alternative' to commercial broadcasting.

The state core systems include the 'residual' systems of countries which have not yet broken with the tradition of a single, monolithic national broadcaster, as well as 'emergent' systems which, although built around a state-owned and controlled broadcaster, are opening up to alternative commercial and community voices, such as one finds in parts of Asia and Africa where democratization is on the agenda. They also include the former Soviet bloc countries, which can also be described as 'transitional', insofar as they seem to be inclined towards the existing dominant models.

Having said all this, I think the most important thing to recognize now is that, in the context of globalization, *all of these hitherto national systems are merging into a single global type of mixed public, private and community broadcasters*. This is why the traditional public service broadcasters are all facing pressure to diversify funding sources and increase mass-market programming at the very time that all broadcasters' market shares are inevitably in decline (due to the sheer multiplicity of channels) and that competition for revenues, both public and commercial, is more intense than it has ever been.

It is now apparent that, in order to survive, every broadcaster needs to find a place for itself within an overall broadcasting system that is simultaneously both local (which, in most cases, still means 'national') and global. There is still no substitute for independent, publicly funded public service broadcasting organizations, as the Council of Europe acknowledged in 1994 when it identified public broadcasting as essential to the functioning of the media in a democratic society (Council of Europe, 1994). But at the systemic level there is an important shift

underway: more and more, public authorities are looking towards the capacity of national broadcasting systems *as a whole* to meet public interest goals and objectives. In the very near future we are going to see a lot more attention being paid to the *global ecology of broadcasting* as a public service environment.

In this environment, it is going to be increasingly difficult to distinguish clearly between the conventional categories of 'public' and 'private' broadcasters. This is already the case, as critics are quick to point out, with many traditional public broadcasters 'dumbing down' parts of their programming in order to compete directly with the commercial sector. But as the ecology of broadcasting becomes more complex, private broadcasters will also have to take on public responsibilities – either to meet regulatory requirements, in exchange for public policy privileges, or merely as a way of adding value to their product in a highly competitive environment. Indeed, among the plethora of new specialized television services that have emerged in the private sector in recent years, one finds a good number whose programming goals are close to those of conventional public broadcasters.

Public Broadcasting in the Multichannel Environment[5]

In its simplest terms, the multichannel environment represents a *structural change* to which all broadcasters, public and private, must adapt. It has a number of characteristics:

- *technically*, the multichannel environment is characterized not only by the proliferation of channels, but also by the convergence of communication technologies;
- *politically*, this coincides with the globalization of issues and phenomena, in which broadcasting is playing an integral role;
- *economically*, it is marked by the move towards the removal of cross-border trade barriers and the consequent difficulty to protect national markets;
- *ideologically*, it appears at a time which is not favourable to suggesting measures that depend on increased involvement of the state; and
- *socioculturally*, it is accompanied by changing needs and expectations of audiences and the individuals who compose them.

So, not surprisingly, the appearance of this very complex new communications environment has upset conventional ideas about the way we think about broadcasting. Yet, more than ever, public service broadcasters have a unique role to play (UNESCO, 1997).

The main problem then is that it becomes increasingly difficult for those responsible for the public treasury to justify funnelling money to venerable institutions which are simply no longer the exclusive delivery vehicles for public service programming. The challenge, in these circumstances, is to demonstrate that they are still *the most appropriate* ones. So, what strategies should public service broadcasters employ as the multichannel environment continues to expand?

In general, every broadcaster can find an appropriate answer to this question by applying the following three points:

1. Think globally, but programme to *local* needs and interests. Globalization notwithstanding, broadcasting still succeeds or fails at the point of consumption, that is to say, locally. Regardless of where and how programmes are produced, competition for audiences takes place in local markets.
2. Think of and target audiences as *citizens*, who wish to participate more fully in the public life of their society. This will distinguish public service broadcasters from their commercially driven counterparts, who, by definition, conceptualize audience members as consumers.
3. Be sensitive to expressions of *social demand*, as well as to the more obvious expressions of economic and political demands. This is not easy to grasp because it cannot be measured or quantified. But it goes to the heart of the purpose of the public broadcaster.

This means somehow managing to *stay close to the public*, and making that the top priority, absolutely and unequivocally. It means intuitively knowing how to distinguish between 'wants' and 'needs', when to lead and when to follow, when to reflect the audience back to itself and how to help it make up its mind.

Concretely, in the multichannel environment, this means developing new services, making bold and innovative partnerships, and remaining focused on first principles.

Broadcasting, whether publicly or privately owned, can no longer be reasonably expected to be a force of cohesion; it can, however, be highly effective for distributing programmes of importance to the communities it serves. For this to occur, public broadcasting needs to adapt to a new public culture which is global in scope but experienced locally. The idea of public broadcasting is not intrinsically tied to that of nationhood, but rather to that of the public. The agenda of public broadcasting must be the public agenda.

Only public broadcasting can position itself as a public resource for social and cultural development. This is not something any broadcaster can achieve on its own. It requires public support. The history of broadcasting everywhere up to and including the present has shown that only through sustained public policy action can the medium begin to fulfil its potential. Historically, a combination of public pressure, enlightened self-interest and a favourable sociopolitical moment led governments in various countries to create public broadcasting institutions, placing them at arm's length from politics and sheltering them from the effects of commerce. Wherever this model was followed, public broadcasting became the central institution of the democratic public sphere, taking on increasing importance as broadcasting came to occupy more and more public space and time, and playing an important role in the democratization of public life.

Today, no broadcasting organization can function oblivious to market pressure and if politics is more acutely present in some situations than others, it is never far from the centre. More significantly, public broadcasting has had to face a rising tide of scepticism and political will. At the same time, however, the limitations of market broadcasting, wonderful as a delivery vehicle for popular mass entertainment, have become strikingly evident. The multichannel environment therefore provides a double-barrelled challenge for public broadcasting, as it

obliges conventional broadcasters to adapt and opens the way to new possi-
bilities. It is a tricky balancing act to rejuvenate (or, as in the case of the emerg-
ing democracies, create) public broadcasting institutions amid the pressures for
integration into the global broadcasting market.

Broadcasting was conceived for commercial purposes, but *public* broad-
casting was introduced for purposes of cultural development and democratiza-
tion. By creating appropriate institutions and developing public policy
accordingly, various state authorities placed broadcasting in the public interest.
There is no reason why this cannot continue to be done today.

For this to occur, every jurisdiction first of all needs to have clear public
policy objectives for broadcasting. Next, authorities need to recognize the neces-
sity of independence for broadcasting organizations. Broadcasters, in exchange,
need to accept accountability mechanisms which ensure the responsible exer-
cise of their mandates. Finally, the broadcasting environment needs to be organ-
ized and structured in such a way as to maximize the use that can be made of
all the resources flowing through the system.

This would require something akin to the socialization of the broadcasting
sector. There is no justification for the removal of surplus value from the lucra-
tive branches of broadcasting activity as long as public interest broadcasting
objectives cannot be met without public subsidy. Private sector broadcasting
should have statutory obligations to contribute to overall systemic objectives,
and public broadcasters should be allowed to engage in commercially lucrative
activities – without being obliged to compete with themselves in order to make
ends meet.

Especially given the new technological context of the multichannel environ-
ment, it is possible to organize broadcasting to encompass both market activi-
ties and public service, to maximize both consumer choice and citizenship
programming. People watch programmes, not channels, and consequently the
appropriate point for competition in broadcasting is the point of programme
supply, with independent production companies vying for programme contracts
from public service broadcasters.

Private broadcasting, as I suggested earlier, can also fulfil public service
goals. However, it is unlikely that it would bother to try, if it were not pushed
in that direction by the competition and example of public broadcasters. This
points to one of the most subtle arguments in favour of public broadcasting:
public broadcasting sets the overall tone of the market, acts as a catalyst and
serves as an example to all broadcasting services. The balance that until recently
was guaranteed by the distinction between public and private services, is now
threatened by the systemic disequilibrium shifting strongly towards private
commercial services and the effects of commercialization on public services.

All broadcasting, in order to be successful, must be programme driven. But
only public broadcasting can be driven by non-market public policy objectives.
Public broadcasting must therefore be broadcasting with a purpose: to enhance
the quality of public life, empowering individuals and social groups to partici-
pate more fully and equitably. Broadcasting that is primarily profit motivated
is *only* interested in large audiences. Public broadcasting, on the other hand, is

interested in reaching the largest possible audience the most effectively, in light of the specific objective of every single programme.

Public Broadcasting and Multilateral Politics

To consider this question, I turn now to look at how public broadcasting has been framed in recent debates at the multilateral level.

The World Commission on Culture and Development (WCCD) was created in 1991 by the UN and UNESCO to make 'proposals for both urgent and long-term action to meet cultural needs in the context of development'.[6] Within the context of the UN system, it is important to note that this commission had 'independent' status, on the one hand providing it with great leeway with respect to the political *rapports de force* governing relations between member states at any given point in time while, on the other hand, freeing the sponsoring organizations from any responsibility for its findings or commitment to implement its recommendations.

The WCCD reported to the UNESCO General Assembly in November 1995 (UN/UNESCO, 1995). In a broad review of cultural issues ranging from ethics to the environment, the WCCD proposed an international agenda for developing global policy with respect to cultural development. Several chapters and proposals relating to mass media and new global issues in mass communication were framed by the following question: 'How can the world's growing media capacities be channelled so as to support cultural diversity and democratic discourse?'

The WCCD recognized that while many countries were dealing individually with various important aspects of this question, the time had come for a transfer of emphasis from the national to the international level. 'There is room for an international framework that complements national regulatory frameworks' (UN/UNESCO, 1995: 117). While many countries still need to be incited to put in place or modernize existing national frameworks, the justification for the proposed transfer of attention was to be found in a single word: globalization.

> *Concentration of media ownership and production is becoming even more striking internationally than it is nationally, making the global media ever more market-driven. In this context, can the kind of pluralist 'mixed economy' media system which is emerging in many countries be encouraged globally? Can we envisage a world public sphere in which there is room for alternative voices? Can the media professionals sit down together with policy-makers and consumers to work out mechanisms that promote access and a diversity of expression despite the acutely competitive environment that drives the media moguls apart? (UN/UNESCO, 1995: 117)*

The WCCD admitted that it did not have ready answers to these questions, but that answers had to be sought through international dialogue:

> *Many specialists have told the Commission how important it would be to arrive at an international balance between public and private interests. They envision a common ground of public interest on a transnational scale. They suggest that different national approaches can be aligned, that broadly acceptable guidelines could be elaborated with the active partici-*

> *pation of the principal actors, that new international rules are not a pipe-dream but could emerge through the forging of transnational alliances across the public and private media space. (UN/UNESCO, 1995: 117)*

The WCCD's international agenda contained a series of specific proposals aimed at 'enhancing access, diversity and competition of the international media system', based on the assertion that the airwaves and space are 'part of the global commons, a collective asset that belongs to all humankind' (UN/UNESCO, 1995: 278). Just as national community and public media services require public subsidy,

> *. . . internationally, the redistribution of benefits from the growing global commercial media activity could help subsidize the rest.* As a first step, and within a market context, the Commission suggests that the time may have come for commercial regional or international satellite radio and television interests which now use the global commons free of charge to contribute to the financing of a more plural media system. New revenue could be invested in alternative programming for international distribution. *(UN/UNESCO, 1995: 278; emphasis added)*

The WCCD called for a feasibility study, to be conducted under the auspices of the UN system, to determine the possibility of establishing international alternative broadcasting services, including funding requirements. The study should begin to explore appropriate global mechanisms analogous to national models of public service broadcasting, the report said.[7]

One of the most crucial aspects of this question that needs to be addressed is how to avoid such a discussion becoming yet another debate among states, each representing its own national interest and those of its partners in the private sector, rather than among a global public dealing with global issues, across national borders and in quest of a global public interest.

The WCCD Report, in its tone and its substance, opens the door to this. But its fate is typical of the scope of the problem. Two years after its tabling, the report had attracted almost no attention outside the immediate circle of UN/UNESCO diplomacy. A handful of national commissions for UNESCO had made timid overtures to publicizing some of its less controversial aspects (steering shy of the media chapter, most notably), and UNESCO itself was clear to point out the report's 'independent', non-binding nature.[8]

In considering the cool reception that has greeted the WCCD Report, there is no overlooking the obvious subtext of the deep-rooted politics of the UN system and particularly UNESCO with respect to media. The obvious question that comes to mind is to what extent is this a sequel to the MacBride Report of 1980, and is the UN system prepared to entertain a debate of the type that accompanied the preparation and publication of that report. The corollary question is can such a debate responsibly be avoided? The WCCD Report guardedly recognizes the lineage between the issues it raises and the analysis it makes of them. 'The world has transcended the mindset that spawned the strident debate over a "New World Information and Communication Order" [NWICO] over a decade ago. Yet some of the questions that set off that debate have still not been answered' (UN/UNESCO, 1995: 106). In this respect, it in

fact picks up where the debate on the NWICO left off after it was detoured by the bipolarization of the Cold War and the subsequent withdrawal of the USA and Great Britain from UNESCO in the 1980s. And that may be enough to explain the obscure circumstances that have greeted its publication.

Public Broadcasting and the New Global Framework for Media Policy[9]

Until quite recently, communication policy was made and executed for the most part by national governments. Countries borrowed and adapted organizational models for structuring and regulating media from one another, but national communication systems by and large reflected the societies within whose national boundaries they operated. Issues requiring international agreement, such as the allocation of radio frequencies, were resolved between governments, with the implicit assumption that those governments were then free to use those resources as they wished.

That general framework has now changed. Communication policy is now made in a global environment where, for the time being, there is no institution equivalent to the national state. National governments have lost important parts of the sovereignty they once enjoyed in communication, and at the global level, accountability is loose, where it exists at all. National communication systems still exist, but they resemble one another more than they ever did, and their evolution is increasingly determined by developments beyond the control of any one government.

It was only with the invention of the printing press that the nation-state became possible, enabling the consolidation of power and authority within the reach of the official state 'gazettes'. But the printing press also enabled the proliferation of struggles for freedom of expression, public debate and democratic institutions. Different types of national states gave rise to different models of mass media (Nerone, 1995). But the separation of state and press was fundamental to the development of the democratic nation-state.

A fundamental shift occurred with the introduction of broadcasting. In the decade following the First World War, an activist, interventionist state integrated the sphere of broadcasting into its realm of activity. The discourses of legitimation for the regulation of broadcasting ranged from the scarcity of frequencies to the idea that broadcasting was a cultural and educational resource too important to be left to the marketplace. In the name of social values and the public interest, institutional structures were set up in the 1920s in most countries of northern and western Europe as well as in many of their colonial dependencies such as Canada and Australia. Nationally based public broadcasting, for example, continues to serve as an inspirational model for democratically inclined communication in many parts of the world (Raboy, 1996).

Now we are on the verge of a new shift. National states are seeking to redefine their raison d'etre. It is clearly too early to write them off entirely, but they will no longer exercise the kind and degree of sovereignty they have known for the past 300 years or so. What is taking their place? On the one hand, conventional mass media activity as well as trade and commerce is centred in vastly

more autonomous transnational business enterprises tied into the world capitalist system; on the other hand, new and intricate communication networks have begun operating across boundaries in manners as yet uncontrolled and, some say, uncontrollable.

In response, new structures of governance are beginning to emerge to complement the nation-state, at the global, regional, international, subnational and local levels. As these structures consolidate, they will inevitably give rise to new mechanisms for media regulation (Melody, 1997). The nature of these is in no way predetermined. The media structures of the year 2000 and beyond will emerge from the convergence of a range of social struggles, entrepreneurial strategies, geopolitical developments and diplomatic negotiations. They will also be tied to prevailing communication technologies and, most importantly, to the uses to which those technologies will be put.

Where can we begin to discuss questions such as how to transpose the media policy issues which have occupied national agendas since the invention of the telegraph to the transnational level – where, to all intents and purposes, the most important issues are henceforth being played out?

The global media system is developing according to its own logic, requirements, protocols and rules. National governments and groups of states are trying to influence the activities of this transnational system in their own countries or regions as best they can. But global issues require global approaches, and global problems call for global solutions. Where can we begin looking for these?

The various dimensions of globalization and the problems it raises are being increasingly well documented in the work of distinguished scholars in political economy, sociology, anthropology and international communication (e.g. Appadurai, 1993; Robertson, 1992; Wallerstein, 1991; Mowlana, 1996). Meanwhile, activists – and I include a handful of academics in that category – are developing new normative perspectives, new programmes and proposals, and building and mobilizing new networks of support and promotion of a *global public space* whose outline we are just beginning to make out.

The emergence of a global communication policy environment and the extension of national debates on communication policy to the global level have both limitations and possibilities. Debates on communication policy issues in local (i.e. national) contexts are not only constrained but also enhanced by global policy developments. Globalization, I would like to suggest, should be viewed as a policy *challenge* rather than a justification for 'the end of policy' arguments presented in neoliberal, deregulationist discourses – or even the apocalyptic views that often predominate with some obvious justification in progressive circles. In fact, the struggle to create socially driven communication systems on a global scale is no more or less than the contemporary version of the nationally based struggles that surrounded the introduction of press, radio, television and other earlier communication technologies (McChesney, 1996).

All around us there is ample evidence that people have not given up the struggle to appropriate the means of communication in their efforts to influence the course of their own histories (His, 1996). Until we are prepared to write off the value of democratic politics altogether, we have to create and occupy the

spaces in which to strengthen the democratic capabilities of communication systems. What is new today is the extent to which this has to be done by finding ways to give expression to local concerns at the global level.

In order to begin developing a global framework for democratic media, we need to begin thinking about global public policy mechanisms, legislative, regulatory and supervisory structures for media. We need to establish the parameters of a truly global media framework, that supersedes increasingly phony 'national' interests while protecting cultural diversity at its own level of expression – be it territorial, linguistic, ethnocultural or gender based. This framework must empower an emerging global civil society which will otherwise remain disenfranchised at the hands of corporate interests.

I am talking about a framework for democratically developing global media policy and eventually launching and sustaining public interest media on a global scale. Transnational free enterprise media will need to be countered with global public service media. The structural basis of such institutions is not immediately evident, given that these have traditionally operated exclusively at the national level. Hence, it is all the more important that such questions be discussed in democratic, multilateral fora. The role of existing world bodies such as UNESCO and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is crucial to this, but these will have to be opened up to include participation by a broader range of actors than the present assortment of member states. New structures will need to be developed in order for media to fulfil their potential as the central institutions of an emerging global public sphere (Keane, 1995).

Credibility will need to be given to the idea that the global media environment, from the conventional airwaves to outer space, is a public resource, to be organized, managed and regulated in the global public interest. This implies recognition of the legitimacy of public intervention on a global scale. Broadening access will require appropriate transnational regulatory mechanisms, as well as mechanisms for a more equitable distribution of global commercial benefits. There is a need for the international appropriation of some air and space for the distribution outside the country of origin of viable creative products that currently have no access to the new global *agora* that figures so prominently in utopian discourses on the new information technologies.

The convergence of communication technologies requires a parallel convergence in programmes and policies. This is going to require the invention of new models, new concepts and a general new way of thinking about communication. In the new media environment, public policy will need to promote a new hybrid model of communication, which combines the social and cultural objectives of both broadcasting and telecommunications, and provides new mechanisms – drawn from both traditional models – aimed at maximizing equitable access to services and the means of communication for *both* senders and receivers (Hadden and Lenert, 1995). This implies the need to develop a new working model for public broadcasting.

In this article, I have tried to show that there already exists a general strategy as well as an important knowledge base for beginning to elaborate a socially progressive global regulatory framework for mass media, information and communication technologies. A reconceptualized model of public broadcasting is a

central element of such a programme. Before it is likely to take shape, however, there will have to be a transnational political constituency. Therein lies the importance of an initiative like the CEM.

Notes

1. Private sector lobbying and an ensuing political compromise forced the Protocol to integrate a subclause which introduces an important degree of ambiguity, by adding 'insofar as such funding does not affect trading conditions and competition in the Community to an extent which would be contrary to the common interest, while the realization of the remit of that public service shall be taken into account'. According to the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), 'This limitation was highly controversial until the very end of the negotiations and its interpretation may give rise to some questions.' The EBU notes that the last part of this clause (beginning with 'while the realization') was added at the final stage of the negotiations and 'does not seem readily understandable', in its English version. In German, 'which may be the original', it means clearly that 'when it is considered whether funding "would be contrary to the common interest"', due account must be taken of the need to fulfil the public service remit'.
2. This section is based on Raboy (1997a).
3. CNN was founded in Atlanta in 1980, and launched its international satellite channel five years later.
4. The 1 billion television sets in the world in 1992 were distributed roughly as follows: 35 percent Europe (including the former USSR); 32 percent Asia; 20 percent North American (and Caribbean); 8 percent Latin America; 4 percent Middle East; 1 percent Africa. Set ownership was rising at a rate of 5 percent a year, and world spending on television programmes was US$80 billion (*The Economist*, 1994, based on UNESCO figures).
5. This section is based on Raboy (1997b).
6. This undertaking was part of the UN/UNESCO 'Decade of Cultural Development', an operation launched in 1988 with the central claim that processes of 'development' could not be isolated from their cultural dimension.
7. The report gave one example of such an alternative global service, the Canadian-based international satellite network, WETV (UN/UNESCO, 1995: 121).
8. The report finally surfaced in a global public forum, just as this article was going to press, as the basis for a UNESCO-sponsored Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development, held in Stockholm from 30 March to 2 April 1998.
9. This section is based on Raboy (forthcoming).

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