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**Title: Public service broadcasting in a digital, international and polarised context**

From its inception in the 1920s until the 1970s, public service broadcasting was – albeit firmly rooted in a project of political power maximisation – concerned with emancipation. Following the idea of empowerment and believing firmly in the fundamental role of public service broadcasting in contributing to a democratic public sphere, pluralism and universality were central elements. Public broadcasters had the task to educate, inform and entertain the audience. Despite neoliberal pressure on both the idea of public service broadcasting and the organisation of public broadcasters in the 1980s the public broadcaster ‘axis’ remained firmly rooted in most European countries. Indeed, the distinctiveness of public broadcasters’ offers versus commercial media became more important. Nevertheless, from the 1930s until the beginning of the new millennium, a series of shared values that stand for the public interest in media that public service broadcasting is about were placed central in policy frameworks and have steered – at least in theory – the functioning of public broadcasters:

- **universality** of content to all citizens, regardless their geographical location, their ability/willingness to pay, ethnical background, and so on;
- **quality** compared to content offered by others; public service broadcasting as a free haven for creativity and innovation;
- **identity construction and diversity**, albeit that many scholars have observed a tension between the process of unification around a nation, language, community and/or culture on the one hand and reflecting the growing cultural and ethnic fragmentation in society, with catering to minority interests, and with celebrating the diversity of cultures on a global scale, on the other hand;
- **accountability** to citizens and legislators.

Although public service broadcasting and public broadcasters have appeared to be more resilient than perhaps expected, several trends have put the *acquis* under pressure.

1. First, late modernity questions the emancipatory project of public service broadcasting itself. The **core values of public service broadcasting**, mostly defined by academics and policy-makers, are often transposed in ways that do not appeal to **younger, more diverse and fragmented audiences**. Values and practices related to public service broadcasting are also affected by the rise of **new technologies** and social media.
2. Second, some remain convinced that, especially in a digital era, **the free market** can deliver public value to citizens in a more efficient manner than public broadcasters. The popularity of **platform services** of, for example, Netflix, Amazon and Facebook also puts into question the continued relevance of public service broadcasting for society and its citizens.
3. Third, public broadcasters are **imperfect institutions**. While scholars defend the institution fiercely, they are legacy players that often lack flexibility, transparency and efficiency required to anticipate market dynamics while still holding true to their core task. In some countries, one can even wonder whether a public broadcaster exists, specifically when the basics of liberal democracy are under duress.

Needless to say research on public service broadcasting, an idea and institution that reaches over 80% of all EU citizens, is necessary. Post-doctoral researchers that want to study one of the abovementioned elements related to public service broadcasting, are invited to submit their application.

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