

The Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Manifesto

Edited by
Christian Fuchs and Klaus Unterberger



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Contents

1. Introduction	1
<i>Christian Fuchs and Klaus Unterberger</i>	
2. The Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Manifesto	7
3. The Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Utopias Survey Report	19
<i>Christian Fuchs</i>	
4. Public Service Media for Critical Times: Connectivity, Climate, and Corona	69
<i>Graham Murdock</i>	
5. The Future of Public Service Media and the Internet	113
<i>Alessandro D'Arma, Christian Fuchs, Minna Horowitz and Klaus Unterberger</i>	

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Christian Fuchs and Klaus Unterberger

This book presents the Public Service Media (PSM) and Public Service Internet Manifesto and associated materials that were created in the work process that led to the manifesto. The book's overall goal is to stimulate discussion about and ideas on the future of Public Service Media, the Internet, democracy and the public sphere.

This publication is a result of the *Research Network InnoPSM: Innovation in Public Service Media Policies* that was led by Alessandro D'Arma (University of Westminster) and Minna Horowitz (University of Helsinki) in the years from 2019 until 2021 and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (see <https://innopsm.net/>). The two of us (Christian Fuchs and Klaus Unterberger) were steering group members of InnoPSM. In the first meeting of the InnoPSM steering group, we generated the idea of a workshop that was to be focused on the future of Public Service Media under the title "Public Service Media Utopias" to stimulate discussion about how the future of Public Service Media and the Internet can and should look like. Alessandro D'Arma and Minna Horowitz kindly agreed to host and support such a workshop as

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the fourth major event of the InnoPSM network. The Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Manifesto is the outcome of InnoPSM's focus on Public Service Media and Internet utopias.

Our basic starting point was the insight that the survival of Public Service Media is in danger, that the dominant form of the Internet and Internet platforms undermines the democratic public sphere and that we need new forms of the Internet and the media to safeguard and renew democracy and the public sphere.

There were several steps that led to the creation of the Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Manifesto. As the *first step*, Christian Fuchs organised an exploratory survey on Public Service Media utopias (Public Service Media/Internet Utopias Survey). The exploratory survey was focused on gathering ideas about the future of the Internet and Public Service Media. The survey was qualitative in nature and focused on three themes:

- communication, digital media and the Internet in an ideal world;
- progressive reforms of Public Service Media;
- Public Service Media and the Internet in 2030.

There were 141 responses. The results are documented in a survey report that forms Chapter 3 of this book. They informed and structured the further work process that led to the Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Manifesto.

The second step should have been a 2-day-long workshop held at the University of Westminster on May 18 and 19, 2020. The overall goal was that individuals interested in Public Service Media utopias come together and co-write a Public Service Media Utopias Manifesto. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to change plans so that the workshop was replaced by online events and activities that led to the Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Manifesto.

The actual *second step* was short video interviews organised by Klaus Unterberger with technical support by Julius Kratky on the question of how the future of Public Service Media and the Internet should look like. We thank Julius Kratky from ORF (Österreichischer Rundfunk) for his support in this step and

for utilising his skills and his switchX technology that supports the conduct and recording of video interviews over a distance. InnoPSM published these videos online (see <https://innopsm.net/2021/03/05/envisioning-public-service-media-utopias-video/>). We thank Graham Murdock (Emeritus Professor of Culture and Economy at Loughborough University), Atte Jääskeläinen (Director General at the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland), Julie Mejse Münter Lassen (researcher, University of Copenhagen), Jockum Hildén (researcher, University of Helsinki) and Thomas Steinmaurer (Professor and Head of the Center for ICTs and Society at the University of Salzburg's Department of Communication) for their video contributions.

The *third step* was an online webinar that featured a talk on “Public Service Media in Challenging Times: Connectivity, Climate and Corona” by Graham Murdock, one of the world’s leading critical scholars in the field of media and communication studies. There were around 300 participants. The talk has been documented as online video (see <https://innopsm.net/2021/01/23/murdock/>, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4dJSzyW_GM&t=3s). The talk was followed by an audience debate. A written version of Graham Murdock’s talk and the audience debate form Chapter 4 in this book. The event informed the next step.

The *fourth step* consisted of an online debate utilising the eComitee platform (<https://ecomitee.com/en>). eComitee is an online discussion and collaboration platform that supports constructive digital debates. We thank Andreas Kovar and his team for providing us access to and support in using their eComitee platform. We invited a group of 82 scholars and Public Service Media professionals to engage in an online debate focused on the future of Public Service Media and the Internet. The overall discussion theme was “Envisioning Public Service Media Utopias”. There were four clusters of discussion:

- Cluster 1: PSMs’ Challenges
- Cluster 2: Visions of Change
- Cluster 3: PSM Utopias
- Cluster 4: Public Service Internet

Each cluster posed a series of questions for discussion:

Cluster 1: PSMs' Challenges

What are the biggest challenges for PSM at the moment?

Please describe (at least three) the most important challenges PSM is facing currently.

What obstacles prevent PSM from changing?

Please focus on external and internal issues, in media policy as well as in corporate structure and culture.

What would they have to overcome to improve performance?

Cluster 2: Visions of Change

What elements of media production are in/dispensable for PSM in the future?

Please focus on PSMs' remit currently in place: culture, information, diversity, education and democratic communication. Is there anything PSM should NOT deliver in the future? Or something it is not delivering now and should deliver and enable in the future?

What is your most radical idea for transforming PSM?

Please address the role of PSM in society, being a media producer, a curator, a media infrastructure and so on.

IMAGINE: You are the Head/CEO of the European PSM-sector: What would you start doing (initiate, create) immediately?

Cluster 3: PSM Utopias

How can PSM achieve to be relevant in the future?

Please focus on media perception, on PSMs' mission and remit to reach out to the whole society, its role as information provider.

Should PSM withdraw from or focus on providing entertainment media?

Please focus on the role of entertainment for the audience, its relevance as mirror of daily, societal life.

IMAGINE: 20 years from now: PSM is a successful European infrastructure: What has been changed? What is the reason for its success? How does the public perceive and use PSM?

IMAGINE: The best world ever: How do PSM look like?

Cluster 4: Public Service Internet

Why do we need public digital spaces and a Public Service Internet in Europe?

How could such spaces look like?

What kind of Public Service Internet initiatives could be useful: a platform, a network, a cooperation between several, national 'spaces' or a European project?

How should a project like that best be financed?

Who should participate: PSM, quality media, public institutions, NGOs, civil society, the public?

Utilising the eComitee platform, an active group of scholars and PSM experts discussed these questions for a time period of 2 months. We thank all the colleagues who participated in the discussion. We thank Michael-Bernhard Zita for the facilitation of the discussion and eComitee process. After the discussion in the four clusters was closed, Alessandro D'Arma, Christian Fuchs, Minna Horowitz and Klaus Unterberger created a summary of the discussion. This summary is documented as Chapter 5 in this book. Based on the summary, we created a first version of the manifesto. We thank Graham Murdock for his inputs to the early manifesto version.

The manifesto draft went through subsequent editorial stages before it was put up to the eComitee platform for discussion and for gathering inputs and editorial suggestions. The online debate of the manifesto lasted for 3 weeks. We then reviewed all suggestions

and edited the document, which led to the final version of the Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Manifesto.

The *fifth step* consisted in the launch of the manifesto and the gathering of signatures. We launched the manifesto in an online event on 17 June 2021. A video of this event is available online (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0kiilUrF9o>). The manifesto can be signed here: <http://bit.ly/signPSManifesto>, <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Mxb1yKT7S0lzC6ftfpXj3HTbiH6R6D-m6s5hkf50tyY>.

The Manifesto was originally published in English and has been translated into several languages, including Chinese, German, Portuguese, and Spanish. Please see https://archive.org/details/@public_service_media_and_public_service_internet_manifesto.

A manifesto is not a document and is never finished. A manifesto is an open-ended process. The Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Manifesto is an open-ended public debate process that wants to inspire envisioning democratic futures of society, the Internet, the public sphere and the media landscape. Democracy needs a Public Service Internet and Public Service Media.

CHAPTER 2

The Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Manifesto

#PSMIManifesto <http://bit.ly/psmmanifesto>
Please sign the Manifesto: <http://bit.ly/signPSManifesto>



Key Principles and Messages

Principle 1

Democracy and digital democracy require Public Service Media. We call for the safeguarding of the existence of Public Service Media.

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Principle 2

A democracy-enhancing Internet requires Public Service Media becoming Public Service Internet platforms that help to advance opportunities and equality in the society. We call for the creation of the legal, economic and organisational foundations of such platforms.

Principle 3

Public Service Media content is distinctive from commercial media and data companies. It addresses citizens, not consumers.

Principle 4

Public Service Internet platforms realise fairness, democracy, participation, civic dialogue and engagement on the Internet.

Principle 5

The Public Service Internet requires new formats, new content and vivid co-operation with the creative sectors of our societies.

Principle 6

Public Service Media should continue to be supported and funded so that they have the resources they need to realise and further develop their remit. In addition, the Public Service Internet requires sustainable funding that is based on mechanisms such as the licence fee, the Nordic model of a public service tax, and transnational funding mechanisms.

Principle 7

The Public Service Internet promotes equality and diversity.

Principle 8

The Public Service Internet provides opportunities for public debate, participation, and the advancement of social cohesion.

Principle 9

The Public Service Internet is a driver of change in the creation of new content and services while creating a sustainable ecosystem for media innovations.

Principle 10

Public Service Media and the Public Service Internet contribute to a democratic, sustainable, fair, just, and resilient society.

1. Crisis and Utopia: Renewing Public Service

The original idea was simple and changed society: A public broadcasting service that is paid for out of public funds, independent of government, equally accessible to all, provides trusted information and analysis of issues that are of common concern, makes programmes that reflect the diversity and complexity of contemporary life. Introduced first in Great Britain, with the launch of the BBC in the 1920s, this vision of public service broadcasting was adopted and adapted around the world. After the devastations caused by the Second World War, public service broadcasting re-emerged in Germany where it helped to restore democracy. It was a cornerstone in further waves of democratisation.

In 2021, the world again faces a global crisis: a pandemic crisis, accelerating climate change, persistent and deep social inequalities, increasing political polarisation, and an infodemic crisis where lots of misinformation is spread online. The dominant forms and uses of digital technologies and the Internet endanger democracy. They undermine the indispensable resources of trusted information, in-depth analysis, rational debate and diversity of representation that allow us to fully understand the challenges we face.

That Public Service Media simply moves to the platforms operated and controlled by the commercial digital giants is not a sufficient option. Establishing a public service channel on YouTube or Facebook supports the digital major's cultural centrality and offers no alternative to their operating procedures and business models. Public Service Media requires a Public Service Internet.

This Manifesto is a call to save and advance democratic communications by renewing Public Service Media and creating a Public Service Internet.

2. The Way Forward

The Internet and the media landscape are broken. The dominant commercial Internet platforms endanger democracy. They have created a communications landscape dominated by surveillance, advertising, fake news, hate speech, conspiracy theories, and algorithmic politics that tailors and personalises commercial and political content according to individual tastes and opinions. As currently organised, the Internet separates and divides instead of creating common spaces for negotiating difference and disagreement. Commercial Internet platforms have harmed citizens, users, everyday life and society. Despite all the great opportunities the Internet has offered to society and individuals, the digital giants led by Apple, Alphabet/Google, Microsoft, Amazon, Alibaba, Facebook, and Tencent have acquired unparalleled economic, political and cultural power.

However, public communication is more than business. It is a public purpose. This is why we call for action.

We have a vision. **We strive for a revitalisation and renewal of Public Service Media in the digital age.** Public Service Media that are fit for the 21st century. We dream of a different Internet and a different media landscape. We envision the creation of a Public Service Internet: an **Internet of the public, by the public and for the public**; an Internet that advances instead of threatens democracy and the public sphere and an Internet that provides a new and dynamic shared space for connection, exchange and collaboration.

The Public Service Internet is based on **Internet platforms operated by a variety of Public Service Media, taking the public service remit into the digital age** in co-operation with civil society, individual media users, citizens, and the creative, cultural and educational sector. The Public Service Internet advances democracy. It enhances the public sphere. It supports active citizenship by providing comprehensive information and analysis, diversity of social representation and creative expression and extended opportunities for participation. Public Service Internet platforms

can support new and young creatives who will build the cultural industries of tomorrow and foster social cohesion.

Now is the time for a Public Service Internet and revitalised Public Service Media.

3. Public Service Media-Visions

The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated the continuing indispensability of Public Service Media. Locked down at home and faced with the constant danger of infection, audiences have turned to Public Service Media for trusted sources of objective and impartial information; high-quality educational materials for home-schooling; diverse entertainment and drama and a reference point in times of crisis. Since its foundation, public service broadcasting has been defined by a commitment to universality and independence. These core values must be retained and extended.

Public Service Media must provide a universal service equally available to everyone. This requires a continuing commitment to guaranteed **public funding** to ensure that Internet access and Public Service Media are **available to all** as a right of citizenship.

Public Service Media must defend its independence and ensure that editorial and creative decisions are independent from governmental and business interests. Safeguarding Public Service Media's role as a trusted and independent source of information and analysis and as a responsible mediator and moderator of user-generated comment and content requires transparent procedures of accountability. Such procedures need to be based on clear ethical principles.

Public Service Media must promote diversity. To ensure that it provides a service that is universally relevant and engaging, Public Service Media must aim to reflect the social, regional, economic, political, cultural, and religious diversity and complexity of every day life. Ensuring that the full range of experiences and voices are

seen and heard requires a renewed commitment to widening the social bases of recruitment to creative and institutional positions opening opportunities to minorities underrepresented in the mainstream commercial media.

Public Service Media must be a driver of change in the creation of new content and services. Public Service Media news and entertainment affairs production should pay particular attention to developing innovative styles of media production that highlight, explain, and contextualise issues with far-reaching social implications and their possible consequences.

Public Service Media must build on its proven strengths to produce innovative programmes and online content that supports children's educational development, speak to the full range of young people's interests and concerns and provides comprehensive resources for life-long adult learning. In the digital future, as in the past, entertainment, drama and sport events will remain central sites of public cultural expression and social solidarity.

Public Service Media must play a central role in maximising the social value of public cultural resources. Public service broadcasting emerged alongside an array of other publicly funded cultural institutions: museums, libraries, art galleries, universities, archives, and performance spaces. Public Service Media offers a readily accessible platform for collaborative ventures. Public Service Media are ideally placed to create and house a new public service search engine and platform, directing users to the full range of freely available relevant materials produced and curated by public educational and cultural institutions.

Public Service Media must provide new opportunities for participation to safeguard inclusion and democracy. Civil society supports a rich variety of self-organised, collaborative, activity-producing shared collective resources, from community

choirs to groups protecting wildlife habitats and campaigning for disadvantaged groups together with new forms of digital action, from creating open source software to contributing to citizen science projects. Public Service Media must use the full range of voluntary engagement and develop new forms of popular participation in key areas such as the production of programmes and the creation of public Internet resources.

4. Digital Public Service Media: Towards a Public Service Internet

The digital giants have weakened democracy and the Internet. We need a new Internet. We need to rebuild the Internet. While the contemporary Internet is dominated by monopolies and commerce, the **Public Service Internet is dominated by democracy**. While the contemporary Internet is dominated by surveillance, the Public Service Internet is privacy friendly and transparent. While the contemporary Internet misinforms and separates the public, the Public Service Internet engages, informs and supports the public. Although the contemporary Internet is driven by and drives the profit principle, the Public Service Internet puts social needs first.

- **Data privacy** is a core aspect of the Public Service Internet. The Public Service Internet provides role model practices of data processing. Public Service Internet software and its contents are a common good that can be reused for non-commercial purposes. On Public Service Internet platforms, users can manage their data, download and re-use their self-curated data for reuse on other platforms. The digital giants store every click and every online move we make to monitor and monetise our behaviour. Public Service Internet platforms **minimise and decentralise data storage** and have no need to monetise and monitor Internet use. Public Service Internet platforms experiment with new forms of content licencing that advance the cultural and digital commons for not-for-profit and non-commercial purposes.

- Realising the Public Service Internet requires **new ideas, new technologies, new policies, and new economic models**. Public Service Media has the potentials it takes for becoming the key force that advances democratic communications in the digital age. Public Service Media and their Public Service Internet platforms need support and enablement. The licence fee that sustains Public Service Media is not a mechanism of the past but one for the digital future. The digital licence fee will extend and transform Public Service Media's licence fee in the digital age.
- **Public Service Media** should continue to be supported and funded so that they have the **resources they** need to realise and further develop their remit. In addition, the **Public Service Internet requires sustainable funding** that is based on mechanisms such as the licence fee, the Nordic model of a public service tax and transnational funding mechanisms.
- Public Service Internet platforms **treat users and workers fairly**. They are independent from corporate and political power. They are spaces where critical, independent journalists make high-quality news and where creative professionals make high-quality programmes that educate, inform and entertain in ways that reflect the affordances of the digital age. They engage citizens in new forms that build on the experiences, structures and content of the public service broadcast model. Public Service Internet platforms build on the broadcast model and go beyond it by making full use of and transforming the creative potentials of digital technologies and user participation. Public Service Media's remit will thereby be transformed into a new digital public service remit.
- The Public Service Internet's algorithms are **public service algorithms**. Such algorithms are open source and transparent. They are programmed in ways that advance the digital public service remit. Public service algorithms are algorithms by the public, for the public, and of the public. Public service algorithms help organising the platforms, formats and contents of the Public Service Internet by making recommendations and suggestions based on transparent procedures and without advertising, commerce, and surveillance. Public service algorithms are committed to reflect the diversity of the public and advance accessibility, fairness, and inclusivity.
- **The Internet is global**. The public sphere is global. The Public Service Internet and its platforms should be **global, regional and local**.

Such platforms can be accessed by anyone at any time and from anywhere. Public Service Internet platforms maximise the availability and permanence of Public Service Internet contents that contribute to humanity's cultural heritage. Public Service Internet platforms are ideally operated as international networks of Public Service Media organisations. For operating Public Service Internet platforms, Public Service Media organisations co-operate with others, including public organisations (universities, museums, libraries and so on), civil society, civic and community media, artists, digital commons projects, platform co-operatives, and so on. There is a sharing of content between such public and civic organisations on a joint platform. As a result, Public Service Media organisations together with public interest organisations create public open spaces that are mediated by Internet communication and that together form the Public Service Internet. An example for advancing the Public Service Internet is that European Public Service Internet Platforms based on the already existing infrastructures of the European Public Service Broadcasters could co-operate in creating a European Public Service Internet platform.

- The public service Internet requires a **global communications infrastructure**. Such a global infrastructure is independent from commercial and governmental interest and serve citizens and democracy.

5. Imagining Public Service Media Utopias in 2040

The contemporary Internet is the Internet of the corporate digital giants. However, an **alternative Internet** is possible. A **Public Service Internet** is possible. In fact, a Public Service Internet is needed. We envision a world where the Internet serves the public and advances democracy.

Imagine 2040

- In 2040, Public Service Media will have remembered its future. It has adapted and transformed its **public service** mission to inform, educate and entertain according to an open and transparent digital society. It advances cultural citizenship and renew its contract with society.

- In 2040, Public Service Media's quality is **distinctive from commercial media and data companies**. It reaches the majority of the population. It serves humans' daily personal and societal needs. It will address citizens, not consumers.
- In 2040, Public Service Media is **sustainably funded** and will be based on a **reformed licence fee** that is accepted by citizens. The Public Service Internet's value for money is comprehensively documented, evaluated, publicly controlled, and transparent to the public.
- In 2040, a new, radical governance structure has made **Public Service Media independent from any external influences** like government and business interests. There are public hearings. There is quality control. Individuals feel represented by Public Service Media and its programming. They feel that Public Service Media's reporting is as neutral as possible, not influenced by any external pressures. Public Service Media news features public opinion.
- In 2040, Public Service Media is **universal**. It reaches out to all parts of the society, including fragmented and less educated audiences, info-avoiders, and minorities.
- In 2040, Public Service Media organisations are wealth creators for the creative sector that provide visibility to many artists such as musicians and filmmakers. In 2040, Public Service media delivers and creates high-quality entertainment to reflect and represent **the culture and diversity of everyday life**.
- In 2040, Public Service Media operates on the **local, national, regional and global level**. It invests into quality journalism, including investigative journalism, innovative formats and new technologies with appealing user experience for different groups in the society. Young people see public service journalism as an attractive and viable environment of information, communication, collaboration, and participation.
- In 2040, Public Service Media is **present, accessible and discoverable** on all relevant platforms. In 2040, Public Service Media is fully present in the digital sphere and provides the right content at the right points of time tailored to a plurality of devices and user habits. Public Service Media stays connected to and will closely listen to all of its audiences and stakeholders. It answers to society's important challenges and issues. It effectively communicates its own contribution to society, and its public value.
- In 2040, Public Service Media has developed a **collaborative programme** with schools, focusing on **media literacy and digital**

literacy through online courses and educational kits developed by Public Service Media. The advancement of digital and media literacy in society, including in schools, based on the values of public service media is a key aspect of education.

- In 2040, Public Service Media's **workforce is highly diverse** in terms of social class, ethnicity, gender, age, cultural background and geographic origin. Public Service Media's hiring mechanisms are inclusive and transparent.
- In 2040, Public Service Media has transformed from one-to-many broadcasting institutions into a **network infrastructure** that is guided by principles of public network value. Public network value means the use of digital communication networks such as the Internet for advancing Public Service Media's remit to facilitate public benefit, information, education and learning, democracy, citizenship, culture, civil society, creativity, and entertainment. The Public Service Internet is a networked infrastructure that advances the digital commons and digital citizenship. It strengthens universal access, communication, participation, co-operation, inclusion, and democracy.

A **different media world** is possible. A Public Service Internet and revitalised Public Service Media are urgently needed for sustaining democracy. We call on all audience members, citizens, users, readers, experts and non-experts, inside and outside of Public Service Media, in fact all citizens who care for the future of democracy in our countries to **participate in the quest for strengthening Public Service Media and creating a Public Service Internet**.

You can sign the Manifesto here <http://bit.ly/signPSManifesto>
The full list of the Manifesto signatories can be seen here: <http://bit.ly/psmmanifesto>

New names of the signatories are regularly added.

CHAPTER 3

The Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Utopias Survey Report

Christian Fuchs

3.1. Background

Slavko Splichal provides the following definition of Public Service Media: “In normative terms, public service media must be a service *of* the public, *by* the public and *for* the public. It is a service *of* the public because it is financed by it and should be owned by it. It ought to be a service *by* the public – not only financed and controlled, but also produced by it. It must be a service *for* the public – but also for the government and other powers acting in the public sphere. In sum, Public Service Media ought to become ‘a cornerstone of democracy’” (Splichal 2007, 255).

Public Service Media are publicly owned organisations. They are not controlled by the state but enabled by Public Service Media legislation. Their decisions are independent from the state and private corporations. They do not operate for profit and do not rely

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primarily on selling advertisements or other commodities. The licence fee is a frequently used means for funding Public Service Media. Public Service Media advance the democratic, the cultural and the social good by providing opportunities and service for information, education and entertainment. Public Service Media's high-quality content supports individuals in acting as informed, active and critical citizens who reflect on society. Public Service Media ensures that content is produced and made available that is unlikely to thrive under capitalist market conditions, such as arts programmes, children's television, minority programmes, educational and documentary programmes and so on. Public Service Media strive to innovate new ideas, make viewers think, produce original content rather than buying content and make sure that there is easy access for everyone.

Public Service Media and the media in general have faced a number of challenges, including the following:

- *Young people*: In many countries, especially young people prefer the use of the services of Internet platforms such as YouTube, Netflix, Spotify, Amazon Prime, Apple TV, Apple Music, Disney+ or Facebook Watch to public service television and radio. Young people are more interested in online, streaming and on-demand content than scheduled content (Ofcom 2018, 7–9).
- *Commercial broadcasting*: For-profit, commercial broadcasters have argued that they partly also provide Public Service Media content that helps advancing Public Service Media remits and that the licence fee should therefore be top-sliced and be split between Public Service Media organisations and those commercial broadcasters that publish Public Service Media content.
- *Commercial publishing*: Traditional commercial publishers (newspapers, magazines) and broadcasters (radio, television) that operate to yield profit have argued that the licence fee distorts competition and that the operations of Public Service Media should therefore be limited.
- *Online services*: For-profit Internet platforms such as Google, Facebook, Amazon and Twitter dominate the use of online services, whereas Public Service Media can and do due to legal and other limits not offer innovative online services.

- *Internet monopolies*: For-profit Internet platforms monopolise the markets for online services and avoid paying taxes while the market tests of public service tests keep Public Service Media from offering competing audio-visual online services. Given their high profits, online platforms such as Amazon, Netflix, YouTube, Facebook and Apple have started to produce and disseminate their own television series and programmes. They have budgets that vastly exceed the ones of Public Service Media (Ofcom 2018, 10). There is the danger that Public Service Media “are priced out of the market for making high-quality television” (House of Lords Select Committee on Communications and Digital 2019, 3).
- *Neoliberalism*: The dominance of neoliberalism has created the logic of the commodification and marketisation of everything, including public services. This has resulted in increasing pressure on Public Service Media to behave like private companies and in questioning of licence fee-funding.
- *Authoritarianism*: Authoritarian tendencies in politics have tried to curb the independence of Public Service Media and to turn them into state-controlled media that act as mouthpieces of governments.
- *Fake news, filter bubbles, post-truth*: The spreading of false news online, filter bubbles and a culture of post-truth politics where distrust of facts, emotionalisation and dominant ideology have posed new challenges for producing content and news that clearly distinguish between fact and fiction, truth and falsity and objectivity and ideology and check facts in a transparent manner. The Cambridge Analytica Scandal has shown how the combination of fake news, surveillance and digital capitalism poses a threat to democracy.
- *Tabloidization*: Commercial, for-profit media have advanced a media logic that tries to accumulate attention and profits by focusing on scandalisation, simplification, personalisation, emotionalisation, superficiality, a strong focus on entertainment that displaces educational content (e.g., reality TV) and the focus on celebrities as news. Tabloidization has not just transformed entertainment but has also colonised news, politics, culture and education.
- *Individualism*: Alongside neoliberalism, the logic of individualism that focus on the egoism and the accumulation of fame has displaced the focus on the social good that has advantages for everyone in mind. Individualism has expressed itself as celebrification (a strong focus on celebrities and individuals striving to imitate, act like and

become like celebrities), the accumulation of likes, visibility and followers on social media, or the ideology that reality TV and social media are democratic and participatory and therefore enable everyone to become famous.

- *Acceleration in the attention economy*: Along with tabloidization, the speed at which information is produced, disseminated and consumed has massively increased. There is often a lack of time and space for in-depth reflection, engagement and debate. An attention economy has emerged where there is heavy competition for public attention and where corporations and celebrities form strong hubs of attention.
- *Algorithmification*: Commercial digital companies have advanced privately owned algorithms whose operations are patented, intransparent, proprietary (privately owned) and closed. Such algorithms have come to shape more and more aspects of everyday life and decisions that affect individuals' lives. It has become more difficult to discern what activities originate from humans or from algorithms.

In the light of these challenges, the question arises how the future of Public Service Media can and should look like. Dystopian views argue that there isn't a future for Public Service Media because the economic, political, cultural and technological pressures and changes are so vast that Public Service Media cannot keep up and have become outdated. In contrast, utopian views argue against both defeatism and defensiveness. Defeatists give up any active hope for a better world and better media. Those who focus on defensiveness purely try to defend what already exists. Utopianism takes a transformative and radical view that argues for the radical renewal, updating and improvement of Public Service Media as a part of societal transformations. Utopian thinking allows us to think about how Public Service Media can be different and can be made different. Talking about Public Service Media utopias does not mean inventing implausible illusions as the use of the term "utopia" in a derogatory manner often implies. Talking about Public Service Media utopias should instead be conceived of as concrete utopian thinking that envisions alternatives to the contemporary media system that help advancing a good, fair

and just society as well as ways and steps towards the realisation of such alternatives.

3.2. Methodology

3.2.1. *Innovation in Public Service Media Policies*

“Innovation in Public Service Media Policies” is a network funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) that is hosted and run by Alessandro d’Arma (University of Westminster) and Minna Horowitz (University of Helsinki). Its goal is to “to facilitate exchange between academic experts and key PSM stakeholders and develop a research agenda across national and disciplinary boundaries with a view to advancing our thinking about innovative policy solutions and strategies to respond to the major digital challenges confronting PSM.” It is organised in the form of four workshops.

The fourth workshop’s topic was “Public Service Media Utopias” and was hosted by Christian Fuchs (University of Westminster) and Klaus Unterberger (Austrian Broadcasting Corporation ORF). The overall goal was to advance utopian thinking about the future of Public Service Media, the Internet and the society. The work took on three stages:

- Stage 1: The exploratory Public Service Media/Internet Utopias Survey
- Stage 2: Public Service Media utopias videos
- Stage 3: Events and activities that led to Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Manifesto

The basic idea of the first stage was to conduct a qualitative survey with open questions to generate ideas about Public Service Media utopias and identify important themes and topics. The survey was exploratory, which means that it explored topics in a qualitative manner. It was not an opinion survey aimed at analysing to what quantitative degree audiences are aware of, favour or oppose certain utopias. As a consequence, the survey was not designed as

representative poll of individuals in a certain country or region, but as a purposive survey aimed at individuals whom we expected to be able to and interested in thinking about the future of Public Service Media and the Internet.

Klaus Unterberger (Austrian Broadcasting Corporation ORF Public Value) facilitated the second stage of the process. First, visionaries who have something to say on the future of Public Service Media were identified. Second, they were invited to explain their ideas on Public Service Media utopias in a video interview. Third, the videos were edited and published. switchX is an app that was developed by Julius Kratky at ORF. It is a software tool that can be installed on a smartphone. The app supports conducting video interviews and video conversations. The conversations are recorded in high-definition video quality and are when finished transmitted to a server run by ORF. switchX allows television production over the Internet. ORF conducted a number of video interviews utilising switchX focusing on Public Service Media utopias.

Stage 3 should have been a 2-day long workshop held at the University of Westminster on 18 and 19 May 2020. The overall goal was that individuals interested in Public Service Media utopias come together and co-write a Public Service Media Utopias Manifesto. The results of stages 1 and 2 (survey results, video interviews) should have fed into the workshop and informed the discussions. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to change plans so that the workshop was replaced by online events and activities that led to the Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Manifesto.

The survey focused on three themes:

- communication, digital media and the Internet in an ideal world;
- progressive reforms of Public Service Media;
- Public Service Media and the Internet in 2030.

The first question focuses on radical changes and the long-term future, the second question on potential immediate reforms, the third question on the medium-term future 10 years from the point of time when the survey was conducted.

The survey was implemented with LimeSurvey (<http://www.limesurvey.net>). An expert licence was purchased for 1 year. The Public Service Media/Internet Utopias Survey was created on LimeSurvey under the URL <https://psmutopias.limequery.net/>. Also the short URL <http://tiny.cc/psmutopias> was created. The core of the survey consisted of three open questions. The following questionnaire was used:

3.2.2. Public Service Media/Internet Utopias Survey Questionnaire

This short survey is a co-operation of the Communication and Media Research Institute and ORF Public Value.

Please join us in creating visions for the future of Public Service Media, the Internet and communication *by answering three short questions!*

There is a need to empower the Internet and Public Service Media by visionary thinking, including provocative, radical and utopian perspectives.

We ask: How will Public Service Media/Internet in the future be able to attract citizens, to empower democracy and in doing so be successful and relevant?

We are interested to collect and give a voice to diverse, heterogenic ideas about the future of Public Service Media/Internet and society.

The survey wants to identify utopias *and visions that will guide the future* of the Internet and Public Service Media.

The authors of the most visionary contributions will be invited to participate in the *Public Service Media/Internet Utopias-workshop in 2020*, an event in London organised and hosted by the *AHRC Research Network* “Innovations in Public Service Media Policies” that is led by Dr Alessandro D’Arma (University of Westminster) and Dr Minna Horowitz (University of Helsinki).

Survey organisers/contacts:

Prof Christian Fuchs, Director of the Communication and Media Research Institute

Dr Klaus Unterberger, Head of ORF Public Value

Future Media/Internet: Communication, Digital Media and the Internet in an Ideal World

IMAGINE:

The best world ever:

What kind of media are you using and why?

How is it beneficial for citizens, society and democracy?

How would the Internet look like in the best of all worlds?

Making Public Service Media Better

IMAGINE:

You are elected as the Director/CEO of a Public Service Media (PSM) provider (such as the BBC, ORF, Yle, ARD, ZDF, RTVE, France Télévisions, RAI, RTÉ, PBS, CBC, SRG, NPR, NHK, etc):

What new projects and initiatives would you immediately like to implement?

How would media and communication be different from today?

Public Service Media/Internet in 2030:

IMAGINE:

It's 2030: Public Service Media have experienced a remarkable development and a renaissance. A very successful, radically new media ecosystem has developed:

What has been changed in comparison to 2020 (10 years ago)?

How was it possible to achieve these changes?

How do Public Service Media look like in 2030?

I would like to receive updates about this survey and events related to it and want to be considered as an invited guest to the 2020 Workshop Utopias of Public Service Media. YES/NO

Name:

Country:

e-mail:

Do you know any other visionary individuals who could help us developing Public Service Media utopias? If so, can you please let us know their names, organisations (if any) and contact e-mail. Thank you!

3.2.3. Survey Data Collection

The survey was promoted with the help of a variety of channels. The basic idea was to invite both audience members and experts who have an interest in the future of Public Service Media. The focus was on young people/students, media professionals, science fiction fans, media, cultural and Internet researchers, activists and online influencers. The following steps were taken by the survey organisers:

- presentation of the survey and distribution of a handout at the first workshop of the AHRC network in November 2019;
- an invitation was posted on the following Facebook groups: British Science Fiction Association, Futopia – Futuristic Thinking for a Utopian World, RIPE: Public Media Researchers, Global PSM Experts Network/PMR, Kim Stanley Robinson Group, Science Fiction and Fantasy Book Readers, Science Fiction Fans, Fully Automated Luxury Communism;
- an invitation was disseminated in the weekly newsletter of the Communication and Media Research Institute;
- invitations were posted on a number of mailing lists: Association for Cultural Studies, Association of Internet Researchers, International Association for Media and Communication Research, Giganet: Global Internet Governance Academic Network, GNU Project Information, Greater London Linux User Group, ICTs & Society, Kritische Kommunikationswissenschaft (Critical Communication Research), Liberation Technology, Science Fiction Research Association, tripleC, UK Network Operator Community, Wikimedia Research, World Social Forum Discussion.
- an e-mail invitation was sent to all undergraduate, master's and doctoral students in the field of media and communication studies at the University of Westminster;
- an invitation was disseminated via the newsletter of television production company Open Media that created the discussion programme After Dark (<http://www.openmedia.co.uk/>);

- an investigative journalist working for the BBC forwarded an invitation to their network of investigative journalists;
- a fact-checker forwarded an invitation to the International Fact-Checking Network;
- 30 political vloggers (video bloggers) were identified and individual invitations to participate were sent to them;
- the Public Media Alliance (<https://www.publicmediaalliance.org/>) added an invitation to participate in the survey to its weekly newsletter;
- invitations were posted on the Web sites of the Communication and Media Research Institute (<http://www.camri.ac.uk>), ORF Public Value (<http://zukunft.orf.at>), the AHRC project (<https://innopsm.net/>).

The answers to the survey were provided between 10 November 2019 and 26 December 2019. A total of 818 users started the survey, of which 141 completed it and provided answers. This means that 17.2% of those using the link to the survey engaged with it. Thinking about utopias is complex and not part of most individuals' everyday work and life. It requires to focus on imagination. Given this was an exploratory survey, the number of responses (N = 141) is a very reasonable and satisfactory number for generating insights into key aspects of Public Service Media utopias and Internet utopias.

3.3. Results

The survey was exploratory, which means that it was interested in identifying important themes for thinking about Internet utopias and Public Service Media utopias. We were not interested in quantifying to what degree users agree or disagree with certain visions but wanted to identify potential features of the utopian Internet and utopian Public Service Media.

The results were analysed using thematic analysis as method (Bryman 2012, 578–581). The three basic research topics each formed one unit of analysis. In the survey, each topic was represented in the form of one survey question. For each topic, themes were identified and the survey answers were coded on paper so that each topic was mapped with the corresponding participants'

IDs. The original IDs, as generated by LimeSurvey, were used for coding and are also employed in the presentation of results.

3.3.1. Topic 1: Communication, Digital Media and the Internet in an Ideal World

The survey's first topic focused on the question of how communication, digital media and the Internet should look like in an ideal world. The survey asked: "IMAGINE: The best world ever: What kind of media are you using and why? How is it beneficial for citizens, society and democracy? How would the Internet look like in the best of all worlds?"

The survey participants generated a multitude of interesting and important ideas that are imaginary and critical. One participant remarked that there "is such a contrast to reality in thinking about these visions that it makes me sad..." (345). But Internet users who imagine utopias aren't defeatist, but often stress that "[a] better society is required in order to implement a better use of any technology" (362). A better Internet in a better society is "will look like a lovely garden" (787). The utopian Internet is not a walled garden but a multitude of interconnected community gardens where citizens together create plants, fruits and vegetables as commons and act in this environment as friends.

The survey participants had many interesting ideas on the future of the Internet and public communication. Using thematic analysis, 12 themes related to topic 1 were identified:

- the Internet is run not-for-profit, is advertising-free and there are no corporate Internet monopolies;
- the Internet has a decentralised technological and social structure;
- the Internet economy is an economic democracy built on worker- and user-owned infrastructure and platform co-ops, the digital commons and democratic governance;
- parts of the Internet are run and owned as public utility by Public Service Media in the form of Internet platforms;
- platform co-ops and Internet providers co-exist and co-operate in synergetic ways;

- there is gratis access to the Internet and digital technologies, free software and open content are the standard;
- digital technologies are environmentally sustainable;
- there is no authoritarian state-control, state-censorship and surveillance of the Internet; The Internet is privacy friendly and based on the principle of data minimisation;
- education includes critical digital media literacy; on the Internet, there is lots of engaging, critical educational content;
- users are enabled and encouraged to participate in the production of media content; the Internet and face-to-face encounters support democratic debate and decision-making in the public sphere; the democratic public sphere advances internationalism and solidarity and weakens hatred, fascism, nationalism and racism;
- on the Internet, there is fact-based, fact-checked news and high-quality content, critical online media report the truth and expose power;
- on the Internet, there is a diversity of media content, platforms, audiences, opinions and a representation of diverse groups from all social backgrounds and realms, regions and parts of the world.

Next, characteristic and interesting answers for each of the sub-topics are documented.

The Internet is run not-for profit, is advertising-free and there are no corporate Internet monopolies:

“The internet is not manipulating me into buying things” (115).

Users “are not forced by digital companies to share their privacy for commercial and advertising purposes” (137).

“Everyone can access an ad-free Internet, through a combination of taxation and licenses. [...] An international treaty has banned companies like Facebook and Tencent from holding online media oligopolies” (202).

“Can you imagine the internet without ads, without money twisting everything, without Facebook being the largest media outlet in the world while completely hiding it? Without bullshit ‘news-feed’ algorithmically built to provide targeted content to your half-awake brain in the morning?” (211).

“It informs, entertains, holds power to account, is free of advertising and corporate bias” (392).

“Hyper-commercialization of the Internet is history!” (407).

“[I]n the best possible world, the internet is entirely demonetized, that is nobody even thinks of making money off it. Furthermore, it is fully transparent and everybody can change it, that is, all code is open to everybody and is treated as common property” (507).

“There is no media industry, neither large conglomerates nor individual wannabe stars. Advertising and intellectual property are banned, or at least heavily taxed” (523).

“The media should be free from powerful commercial interests and any form of surveillance. It should operate using the business model of WikiTribune (WT)” (649).

“I would want no filters or algorithms to guide me or manipulate me. I would want the world of markets and commodities to leave the platform alone” (673).

“Journalist co-ops, public service and small-to-medium private media companies, with the state actively breaking up large media conglomerates and promoting a pluralistic ‘market’ (of sorts), is the way forward” (689).

“[I]t would be necessary, then, also to imagine a new social organisation. It is, in fact, very difficult to merge the present neoliberal capitalism with the dream of an Internet of people” (696).

“No ads. An internet that does not suck you into it and waste your time, but instead gives you the information and content you need then lets you go about your day in the real world” (766).

“The Internet will evolve to a large Wikipedia” (817).

“Without a profit incentive driving the development of these various digital media, ethics, transparency, and user governance are now firm guiding principles. [...] ethics, not profit, drives the development and design of digital media for all” (829).

The Internet has a decentralised technological and social structure:

“Decentralization is the key to the future of the Internet” (543).

“A centrifugal approach in organization of Internet interactions, that is quite compatible with its distributed nature, would bring back hope to the net that is heavily hurt by populist governmental hegemony and super power of economical monopolies” (768).

“I use decentralized federated media, and community-based infrastructure. It is beneficial to citizens because it brings us to self-organize and structure our communities, to society because it is one of the many conditions to a diversity of voice to be heard, democracy because it voices many more opinions than representative democracy [...] data information would be collectively managed and consciously updated” (839).

The Internet economy is an economic democracy built on worker- and user-owned infrastructure and platform co-ops, the digital commons and democratic governance:

“The Internet would be subject to forms of collective governance that would place the production and circulation of knowledge, meaning and sense in the hands of the powerless” (91).

“Facebook was communalized, i.e. taken over by its users as a user co-operative. In 2026, online advertising disappeared. [...] In Commontopia, there is no need for online ads or any other ads attached to media because the idea of selling something does not occur in this non-profit society. Rather, humans are producing goods and services that are distributed in a gift economy and are available as gratis goods in gift shops.[...] After the general working time had been reduced globally to 5 hours per week in 2032, which became possible reality because of technological progress and the collective political will, and a multitude of spaces of interaction and collaboration had been created, co-production, co-creation and a variety of new forms of co-operation emerged. Humans were no longer compelled to work to earn a living, but rather started to co-operate in order to create beauty. Commontopia is not just a fair, just and democratic world, it is also a beautiful world. It is more beautiful than William Morris could have ever imagined” (94).

“Decentralized federated platforms such as Mastodon, Peertube or Pixelfed. Those are platform run and built by people, completely open and censorship-resistant. You have communities of people sharing common interests and no-one is profiting from it. [...] Remove those monopolies, go decentralised, go federated” (211).

“In the best world, the Internet would be open and regulated by the people. Internet companies would be worker-owned. Users would have control over their information” (223).

“In an ideal world, the media is owned only by the people/users/citizens” (767).

“[B]asic services (e.g. search services, networking services) are provided by non-commercial platforms devoid of advertising and with clear terms and conditions of usage of user data, which are not owned by any commercial agent or deployed for any profit-making purposes. The data are owned by each individual and can be used for social purposes provided that the owner of the data gives their consent” (808).

“[P]ublic access to cultural productions, scientific knowledge, and technological innovation is crucial, facilitating a political change towards social democracy and a fundamental shift towards a co-operative mode of social production. This requires a socialization of the capital of corporations, the formation of an international state, a combination of centred and decentred democratic discussions through real forums and digital platforms, and the creation of innovative socio-cooperative economic units” (816).

Parts of the Internet are run and owned as public utility by Public Service Media in the form of Internet platforms:

“Countries desirous of an informed citizenry should set up and fund public institutions run by independently appointed persons to commission content designed to meet social needs unmet by market providers and to arrange its distribution on whatever platforms they deem appropriate” (28).

“The big challenge today is serving the public good on the Internet – preserving it from monopolisation by the private sector and surveillance capitalism. Public Service Media could create a protected space whereby media and services for public good can be nurtured and citizen’s privacy protected. The value of citizen’s data has been appropriated by private corporations and needs to be returned to citizens” (33).

“Google was renamed into PublicSearch and is today run by a global network of public universities. Its algorithms are open source and

transparent. Twice a year, there is a user forum deciding on how to further develop PublicSearch's algorithms as public service algorithms, i.e. algorithms by the public, for the public and of the public: It is a service of the public that finances it (through taxes, licence fees or subscription). It is a service by the public because the concept of public open innovation encourages user participation in the development and update of technologies. And it is a service for the public because it advances the public interest" (94).

"Public media environment. The ideal media environment would be much more local and definitely not market-based. I would love to get all my information from PSM media – from radio to entertainment and culture and socializing! PSM could provide also the strictly necessary digital components" (345).

The "media would be usable on a public and freely available worldwide information network that was collectively governed and open to all" (388).

"Public service media services across all platforms. Universal service, free to all at the point of reception, content catering to a full range of communities and needs, driven by civic not commercial imperatives. The Internet would be operated as a public utility with universal accessibility, net neutrality, with provisions for anonymity and user-control over personal data coupled with checks and balances to prevent abuses (e.g. attempts to manipulate elections through targeted fake news, proliferation of extreme/hate-based ideologies, mass surveillance)" (695).

"In the best world ever, there would be a publicly owned audio-visual music platform that is an all-in-one public music service: a streaming service; a radio and music TV with multiple thematic channels and both a live and a pre-recorded programme; a personal music library with options to publicly share with, and download from, others rare material; a public archive/library with access to repositories around the world and that receives music donations from citizens to their catalogue; an online school for musical education where accredited teachers and prospective students can work remotely; and finally, an academic forum/magazine/journal for musical expertise of various genres, cultures and musical

traditions of the world where citizens, government agencies or journalists can look for consultants and information resources. It would be accessible for free for anyone in the world with an Internet connection. [...] It would allow not only a democratised access to music resources, but also the public ownership of those resources. It would also enable the collaboration between music makers and music learners, professionals and amateurs, academics and students and the general public” (748).

“In the ‘best world ever’, I am a happy user of community-developed/governed federated media supported by the financial and intellectual resources of university and library consortiums. Though it had seemed an unlikely possibility, universities realized that they could invest their enormous IT budgets into supporting and developing non-commercial digital media (social media, email, collaborative platforms, etc) that served their institutional populations along with local communities and broader publics. [...] What perhaps was most exciting about this change, however, is that it granted institutions the opportunity to turn their media services into sites of participatory digital governance and research, where students and academics could study and transform these services according to the needs and interests of the communities they served” (829).

Platform co-ops and Internet providers co-exist and co-operate in synergetic ways:

The “Internet is decentralized, the basic infrastructure is common and public, part of the standard infrastructure of houses” (87).

“In Commontopia, there is a vivid non-commercial media sphere consisting both of public service media services and platforms as well as community media organized as platform co-operatives. Public service media runs services that require storage of vast amounts of audio-visual data such as video platforms. Platform co-operatives run popular services such as the social network OurBook and the instant messaging app OurChat” (94).

“I would like to see all digital platforms in the hands of either Common-based peer production projects, platform co-ops or

state-funded agencies' (of the more independent types). The state should economically and policy-wise support these platforms for democratic and service ends. These platforms should also work within a reformed legal framework where the more radical license family substitutes Creative Commons. The new license family should have as default some characteristics in [Dmytri] Kleiner's Peer Producer License, but it has to be further adapted" (318).

"In my ideal world, platforms have taken the role of public service media – they work for the good of society and for eudaimonic entertainment. Under the roof of these European Public Open Spaces (EPOS) media with a clear focus of non-commerciality are gathered. People were at the beginning reluctant to use these, but they experienced that online hatred and fake news declined. They are beneficial for society in the way they open up a space for democratic debate and public-public partnerships on a European level, i.e. schools, museums, etc cooperate with PSM providers, social economy with NGOs" (407).

"[I]n the best world ever, everyone can participate in a digital commons, where people can meaningfully contribute to society through the public sphere" (493).

"I think of the Internet in public and in common. Projects like Guifi.net should be a reference and reach an Internet where the public interest and citizens connect. Why not think of powerful pan-European infrastructures, devices and public platforms at the service of citizens? Until 1996 in Spain the telecommunications infrastructure was public (Telefónica) and was privatized. If citizens had been informed that these infrastructures would be vital for the development of our democracies, would this privatization have been allowed? But the logic of some twentieth-century public services must be overcome. We must go to public services that are more decentralized and open to the real participation of citizens, beyond the elites" (782).

"I'm using a mix of public and civic/non-profit/community media. Both public and civic/community media distribute their contents via radio, TV and digital platforms. Public service media are no more evaluated for the number/size of their audience, but for the

social benefits they provide to society. Advertising is banned on public service media” (785).

“In a best world scenario, we should be using decentralized alternative public media. [...] it would make sense to create public services that ensures the access and participation of all citizens in society, as well as creating healthy competition with existing private provision. Ideally, it would be desirable to have decentralized citizen platforms such as Mastodon. However, given the disproportionate competition they face from large multinationals, a viable alternative would be state support for the creation, regulation, or at least, sustainability of such alternatives, provided that the necessary measures are taken to ensure the security of citizens’ data” (815).

There is gratis access to the Internet and digital technologies. Free software and open content are the standard:

“I would be using ecologically sustainable media that are built with free and open source software, thereby reducing their overall cost while preserving the freedom of users to tinker, adapt, modify, etc. the technology for their own purposes. These media would be easily upgraded through modular (and, again, sustainable) components. These media would be usable on a public and freely available worldwide information network that was collectively governed and open to all. This would reduce barriers to communication, prevent the ‘Balkanization’ of different information and communication networks” (388).

“Transparency and openness in public data. [...] Internet as a universal service and connectivity (same as health, education and homing) as a basic human right, respected and accomplished” (499).

“I am using open source open innovation open x media designed by vulnerable groups (like people with disabilities) beneficial for all groups of people” (644).

“Most of the content is free. [...] I think the ideal internet should be accessible to all citizens; not restricted to the rich” (649).

“There is no competitive market for handsets and these are offered for free or on a low subscription to all members of the population.

[...] There is no paid for knowledge of information and access to the Internet” (808).

“Media access to communicate, creatively express ourselves, and gather information should be universal (meaning both that the infrastructure should be universal, but also either free or heavily subsidized so that everyone can engage with it)” (842).

Digital technologies are environmentally sustainable:

Society would “reduce the need for waste because the technologies would be ecologically sustainable” (388).

“The possibilities that the Internet throws up are boundless and they could be harnessed for global peace and control of our ecosystem for sustainable futures of the human race” (701).

“The production is sustainable with minimal harm for the environment, no risk for the workers involved and under humane and ethical working conditions” (808).

“Computers would be used with scarcity in the full duration of their life and systems adapted for less consumption of resources” (839).

There is no authoritarian state-control, state-censorship and surveillance of the Internet. The Internet is privacy-friendly and based on the principle of data minimisation:

“Citizens should be empowered to make informed and impactful choices about how they want their data to be used” (33).

“Unnecessary data storage that is not needed in order to run the service is avoided. In the old times of digital capitalism, every click and every online move was stored on vast server farms and never deleted. Commontopia’s media environment is privacy friendly. Users choose with whom they share information. Along with the emergence of privacy-friendliness digital and other forms of political and economic surveillance ceased to exist a long time ago” (94).

“Fully encrypted/Tor integrated/ using some kind of quantum encryption, [...] incorruptible/cannot be shut down/built firewalls around” (392).

“In the best world ever, I’m using privacy-by-design social media that truly focus on connecting people together and not on increasing profits” (493).

“In an ideal world, everybody would experience equal human rights and no violation thereof by digital technology. Privacy would be respected by enterprises and the state alike and freedom, liberty and free knowledge would be the major driving values of society. [...] The internet would be free from commercial as well as from state surveillance, would not violate but enforce human rights and would be backed by a global community of democratic states, NGOs and enterprises that are committed to safeguarding net neutrality, freedom of information, privacy and other human rights to ensure that the Internet is a democratic core infrastructure with global impact to spread ethics and democratic values worldwide” (558).

“Media are free from state or corporate censorship, except for clearly identified reasons (propaganda for barbarism, i.e. Neona-zism or fundamentalist propaganda)” (568).

“An internet utopia will come when we talk not about big data but about big non-data” (677).

Education includes critical digital media literacy. On the Internet, there is lots of engaging, critical educational content:

“The Internet would be a tool for education, a vetted knowledge base” (74).

“knowledge from universities would be made public – like MIT does – to propagate global increase in life quality through education” (167).

“The Internet would allow citizens to become educated and participate in democracy – the people cannot have power without being educated on issues” (223).

“In an utopian concept, all citizens are well educated in media, communication and information literacy which are fundamental for the usage and evaluation of communication channels. In this world, the abovementioned literacies are part of the teaching plans from elementary over high school as well as in universities

and all other institutions of third level education. Media, communication and information literacy are also part of a lifelong educational approach in which all people have the guarantee to inform themselves on recent communication topics and to learn all necessary skills to use media technologies. In this utopian view, literacy is not limited to media and communication topics but also includes consensual values how people interact with each other in their media use” (244).

“[T]he conditions for such a true empowerment do not exist as long as citizens are not properly equipped with critical thinking, information and digital literacy, adequate financial and technical resources, sense of responsibility and intellectual honesty. A better society is required in order to implement a better use of any technology” (362).

“Hateful and fake discourses on platforms had been diminished, because of comprehensive media literacy education that begins in Kindergarten. People perceive these platforms as ‘theirs’, hence refrain from hateful comments” (407).

“Individuals are having high information and media literacy skills” (549).

Users are enabled and encouraged to participate in the production of media content. The Internet and face-to-face encounters support democratic debate and decision-making in the public sphere. The democratic public sphere advances internationalism and solidarity and weakens hatred, fascism, nationalism and racism:

“PSM should open specific platforms – organize and curate mediated communication (VoD) and develop attractive forms of UGC (user-generated content). Such multilingual platforms could stimulate the conversation between users and experts, like that in think tanks, NGOs, civil society. The initiative should support the empowerment of people with valuable ideas for Europe and its regions. [...] the implementation of smartphone-based participation in sessions of HD-video-communication (technical solutions already realized) as urgent impulse for the needed development and modernized understanding of democracy” (11).

“Utopically, then, debate should be uncoupled from the profit motive, and the means of production/dissemination collectivised. There are many compromise positions — break up monopolies, increase public oversight (people’s commissions, transparency over e.g. search algorithms, advertising funding, etc), etc, but these are not utopic. They are desirable, even essential fixes, but, as long as profit drives content/dissemination, the problem would remain” (20).

“The wiki software enables collaboration and participation from the community” (63).

“Nowadays, humans engage in multiple forms with each other via the Internet and face-to-face in the global public sphere. Com-montopia has a vivid public sphere where humans meet in local, regional and global forums and interest groups to exchange ideas and organize themselves according to joint interests. These forums often take place face-to-face, which resulted in the weakening of alienation and isolation. In between forum meetings, participants continue to debate online and their joint work on projects of digital co-production” (94).

The Internet nurtures “a synergy-seeking ‘syndividualism’” (161).

“The Internet in future will serve as mouthpieces for voiceless to make the voice heard” (608).

“In the best of all worlds, I will be using a media that enables me to converse directly, in real time, with any human being in any part of the world regardless of the fact that we speak different languages and inhabit different life-worlds. This kind of media will enable human beings to grow views of citizenship and society that include the greatest possible range of human experience across human histories and human geographies. This kind of mediated conversation will significantly reduce the disproportionate determination of the democratic process by diverse elites [...] In the best of all worlds, there would be no barriers to participation in the Internet by any human being in any part of the world” (261).

“I would still like an Internet that nurtures public participation, debunks misinformation, and erodes established power dynamics. Folks would be able to use the Internet to participate in public processes without the need to attend meetings in person, yet

guard against brigading by privileged groups and the dissemination of misinformation” (284).

“The Internet would still enable connections between people but facts would be authenticated by external trusted and transparent authorities. [...] [M]aybe we would use the internet to share only love instead of hate” (399).

“Brecht’s ideal of a ‘great communication channel of public life’ has finally come true. And, why not add a little more Startrek utopia, let’s ignore commercial interests, hatred and populism and replace them with curiosity, research urge, enrichment through exchange. Who knows, perhaps in this way we will abolish borders and find a gentle murmur, not unisono, but diversity, respect and togetherness” (402).

“translation tools have reached a quality in which cross-language communication is seamlessly enabled. [...] On a technological level, functions that today are segregated have been integrated into one global communication platform, allowing for structured debates (today’s mails and forums) and quick communication (Instant Messenger/Social Media)” (568).

“Governance depends less on institutions of representation and more on a wider participation from citizens. [...] more participation and contribution for a wider number of citizens can increase engagement, commitment to public good, accountability of public policies and efficiency of public decisions. In a sense, a converging, connected society is more prone to function as a digital public sphere that enables citizenships to have informed takes on issues that matter. However, convergence is expected to have no limits in form or function” (599).

“The universal declaration of human rights and the EU conventions on the same will strike an appropriate balance between freedom of speech and countering fascist hate speech etc” (711).

Public platforms would “counterbalance racist and neo-orientalist approaches to audio-visual musical content and thus protect citizens from the normalisation of racism and misinformation (and more generally cultural imperialism and fascism)” (748).

“There’s a growing body of evidence showing that improvements in public-interest, non-commercial news and information lead

to growth in civic engagement and decreases in political polarization. Conversely, the faltering of commercial news, the layoffs of reporters, and the rising power of social media platforms are not just systemic market failures. They are social issues with profound implications for democracy. A more civic-minded media and internet ecosystem has ‘positive externalities’ that act as catalysts for a more just, equitable and democratic society as a whole” (819).

On the Internet, there is fact-based, fact-checked news and high-quality content, critical online media report the truth and expose power:

“The news reports would set out what is happening in context and based on clear evidence, not sensationalising accounts. The opinion presented would challenge people’s views without seeking simply to enrage or shock. [...] In an ideal world, what you see would set out clearly the identity of the news or content provider is and what biases and/or reporting structure and values they have. One of the major problems with the way platforms today present information is it is difficult for users to judge the credibility of one source of information against another. That has to end” (32).

“As for the concept of impartiality in public service media, this needs to be re-imagined as truth-seeking and verification. The tired construct of balance needs to be put to bed and public service journalists given a mandate to contest ideas and challenge falsehoods in the name of empowering the public. Public service journalism needs to rise above the social media–driven impetus to be the first to disseminate a development and focus more on shedding light on the melee. This goes back to the idea of being a trusted guide in a confusing landscape” (33).

The Internet “should be a tool for the exchange of knowledge and progressive thinking, not the trashcan it is now” (314).

Media and an Internet “that entertains, educates and tells the truth; true and objective information” (429).

“In the best world ever, I pay for digital media that offers well-researched, high-quality, and professional journalism that offers no-less than three external fact checks of the content. Any

misinformation is automatically be removed or filtered by artificial intelligence, a team of trained staff, as well as the public themselves (verifying factual information and debunking fake information in the digital space)” (432).

“The AI multi-agent system assures that (a) I am only receiving each piece of news once, regardless of how many media outlets may have copied a press release and published on their own Web sites/in their own apps; that (b) I can immediately reach out from this one piece of news I am reading to other news or informative Web sites regarding the same context, but without being caught in the network of one single media outlet and without having to switch to a search engine to display results for my search; that (c) has flags and indicators regarding the institutional, political, or media background of the author(s) of the piece of news I am reading; and that (d) has sophisticated mechanisms to nudge me out of my own content bubble. [...] It is beneficial in that it no longer works with exaggerated emotions, but with informing the people where they need to be informed and entertaining them where they want to be entertained. The line between information and entertainment is drawn much clearer to avoid media interfering with democratic policy, thanks to the AI-based network that regulates media attention” (466).

“Media would act as a check and watchdog that educates and speaks truth to power” (495).

“As the field of film classification moves towards a global ratings system, so too there will be regulation for fact as opposed to lies and propaganda on a regional then global scale” (711).

“The media is informing me of what is happening locally and globally – with the issues that matter. It’s also giving a critical look at what is happening, exposing some of the power dynamics and adding some constructive ideas” (814).

On the Internet, there is a diversity of media content, platforms, audiences, opinions and a representation of diverse groups from all social backgrounds and realms, regions and parts of the world:

“The mixture of media allows benefits such as informed debate, including on international as well as national, and including very

different social groups to one's own. This includes, importantly, groups who may have less hold over power by social class, gender, ethnicity, age, etc, complex pictures of whose lives and positions is essential for the means to collectively address social issues which could otherwise lead to misery and injustice, conflict and disaster: the purpose, surely, of democracy" (20).

"Information provided online would represent a far wider cross section of news and opinion than at present. Far too much of the content online is controlled by a small handful of organisations, and presents a world view shaped in Silicon Valley, and does not well represent the world as it is" (32).

"reversing the concentration of production in London and a few cities designated to represent the voice of the regions and nations" (33).

"rich variety of content with public interest focus" (429).

"All kinds of people would be represented, in entertainment as well as news" (495).

"A utopia is one where we do not (ever) benefit from the poverty of others. We do not levy the costs of technology on the Third World" (677).

"In an ideal world, citizens would hear of many diverse topics from multiple perspectives and views" (689).

"The media is made by people with similar backgrounds and experiences to the audience – it reflects the demographics of wider society" (814).

3.3.2. Topic 2: Progressive Reforms of Public Service Media

The survey's second topic was focused on how Public Service Media should be reformed. For this purpose, the following question was asked: "IMAGINE: You are elected as the Director/CEO of a Public Service Media (PSM) provider (such as the BBC, ORF, Yle, ARD, ZDF, RTVE, France Télévisions, RAI, RTÉ, PBS, CBC, SRG, NPR, NHK, etc): What new projects and initiatives would you immediately like to implement? How would media and communication be different from today?"

Respondents made a multitude of interesting suggestions. Using thematic analysis, 12 themes related to the second topic were identified:

- Public Service Media should develop and offer Internet platforms.
- Public Service Media should ensure diversity of its programmes and its organisational structures and make sure ordinary people and local life are adequately represented.
- Public Service Media should create new formats of debate and communication.
- Public Service Media should establish and maintain high standards of fact-checking and objectivity.
- Public Service Media should advance new forms of audience participation and co-operation with civil society.
- Public Service Media should internationalise its services.
- Public Service Media should challenge tabloidization and scandalisation and publish high-quality documentaries and educational programmes.
- Public Service Media should have democratic forms of governance.
- Public Service Media should abolish all space and time access limits to its contents and maintain archives that are available forever and accessible from anywhere.
- The licence fee should be maintained and further developed and be complemented by new funding mechanisms.
- Public Service Media should be independent from corporations and governments.
- Public Service Media should be advertising free.

We will next give typical examples of suggestions respondents made in respect to the 12 themes having to do with Public Service Media reforms.

Public Service Media should develop and offer Internet platforms:

“I would like to see the development of what one might call interactive movies (Lara Croft provides hints) or interactive games that can bridge the generations (e.g. based on current quiz shows perhaps) and indeed also probably more interactive politics (e.g. from BBC Parliament out) going beyond the local to further afield” (35).

“After the network of directors of PSM media in 100 countries had been established, the network in 2022 convinced the governments in these 100 countries to change legislation in such a way that: * public service value market tests were abolished; * national and international media policies stopped imitating and admiring the Californian digital giants, but started taxing them and started to create policy initiatives that enabled the creation of Internet and Internet platforms; * a global digital services tax of 20% of the digital giants’ profits was introduced and used to fund the development of new digital public service media platforms/services and public/common digital services partnerships; [...] * a multitude of public/commons partnerships was started, where public service media, public service institutions (libraries, museums, post offices, universities, etc), and not-for-profit civil society organisations/co-operatives cooperate and co-create new services” (94).

“With an empowered public sector role I would aim at maximum possible public skilling in and access to the Internet. Free broadband for all but I would also establish well-staffed open media centres at local authority level and run by local authorities for the purpose of education, support and provision of the means of communication” (171).

“A People’s Platform: A nationwide consultation project where citizens would be encouraged to recognise those practices they appreciate from current private online platforms and those they reject. From this consultation, an alternative platform environment would be launched, which would grow according to audience expectations. Public Service Streaming Services: Rather than selling products to private streaming platforms, I would encourage alliances with other PSMs to build a transcontinental streaming platform, where these contents would be exclusively shown. Laws would limit competition from private providers” (202).

“Improved platforms for citizen journalism with little gatekeeping. Buy Reddit and Twitter and establish stronger moderation, treat them as public utilities with more robust and transparent oversight” (284).

“European public service media content platform; European content of high quality from every country available to all” (429).

“There’s no point in being a new Netflix. There might be a point in being a new Reddit or Flickr” (452).

“I’d [...] explore opportunities to develop a public service social media platform and online search engine with the same functionality of other social media/engines but with transparent algorithms (with publicly accountable reviews) and no advertising and personal data harvesting” (695).

“My project is related to the de-commercialized development of social media platforms. By suppressing the commercialized content of social media platforms, the Internet public space will be freer and purer, and everyone can express their own voice, which is conducive to the development of a more democratic society” (752).

“Provide decentralized and alternative platforms to YouTube or Netflix and create citizen relevant content and make it freely available in these platforms. This could be an effort made at international level, where PSMs from different countries could collaborate to implement this vision” (815).

Public Service Media should ensure diversity of its programmes and its organisational structures and make sure ordinary people and local life are adequately represented:

“I would initiate programs that are inclusive of all classes of people, and that would give the ordinary man the opportunity to question the legitimate authority in a Q&A session” (59).

“More diversity and inclusion, one big NO to hate rhetoric, representation of all sides and marginalised areas of Britain” (115).

“I would find voices that do not always appear on radio/television from institutions and places in society that are not represented today. To do this would require acknowledging how class reproduces itself. I would look for organic intellectuals to contribute about their daily lives. Instead of finding the easy sources, I’d find the people who have lived through the miseries of capitalism” (223).

“Our media is too controlled, I think, and too distant from the public. [...] One of the first things I would really push is to recruit

a group of people for a ‘slice of life’ type program: the PSM staff would help them film a day in their lives, or something they feel is important to them” (288).

“Local news presenting possibly all stakeholders’ different perspectives” (305).

“The PSM could do a much better job of engaging with younger people, focusing on the growing social movements within that generation, and begin engaging those people and their movements to radically transform the coverage by making it more relevant for future generations” (388).

“having a 50:50 gender and race quota for each desk; [...] Different from today – more representative, democratic, less current affairs debates and more facts” (392).

“I would base projects on values, such as human rights, cultural diversity, solidarity, and biodiversity” (596).

“would start an initiative to build trust in the media again. Part of that can include creating a more inclusive and diverse body of voices on the platform, or opening the door to more unorthodox ideas. I think it’s important for the people to realize the media works for them, and by engaging in more outreach, and giving people more opportunities to contribute, they may feel a greater sense of ownership. I’d also like to see new ways of people engaging with the content, to broaden things beyond ordinary video, audio, and text” (694).

Public Service Media should create new formats of debate and communication:

“People’s fora to debate and implement information practices – to hear from experts, call witnesses, and investigate issues. These practices to be disseminated through various channels – live, documentary, etc.” (20).

“One important initiative would be to allow a Reddit-style commenting apparatus – though one that requires identity confirmation so as to prevent spam and coordinated inauthentic posts. This would allow for those with certain perspectives judged by the audience as popular to help drive strategy. Someone who’s

counter-interpretation to a particular article, for example, could be tapped to work with existent talent to produce an article for debate amongst the audience” (76).

“Create real social media – i.e., media that builds social connection by its use. That would include designs that involve facework, sharing, and human contact environments rather than fostered isolation. [...] Rather than creating virtual communities, we will be reconnecting real communities” (161).

“A well moderated public forum would be great” (452).

“BBC would come to mean ‘Building a Better Conversation’. Every aspect of media would be in scope, and we would be asking continually how the shared inquiry and communion could improve. [...] I like Jeremy Corbyn’s idea of universal broadband, but just as important would be ways of improving communication in local communities off line” (505).

“to transform political debate promoting real discussions among all political actors in each community/state and on a global scale” (816).

Public Service Media should establish and maintain high standards of fact-checking and objectivity:

“I think the key change I would make would be to ensure both that the organisation I ran (a) provided clearer evidence for the public about the accuracy of information in the public domain (fact-checking it) and (b) ensured its own news and information set the complex world we live in, in more context. There is a lot of ‘heat’ in most media production and not so much ‘light’. Putting information in context, and setting out the evidence for different positions is important” (32).

“I will also mainstream live and on demand fact checking into news coverage, in addition to mapping the news more with fact/figures/location and references. This will help news consumers in their news literacy and train them to avoid falling for Fake News stories and deep-fakes. The media and communication landscape will be more immersive and fact-checking based” (137).

“Utilizing AI to report on issues would remove the human bias and allow only facts to be presented as they should be. Any

conclusions should be based of those facts and nothing more” (167).

“Every infographic would be linked an open version of the data and code that produced it, using something like Jupyter where editing and re-presenting the work is cheap and straightforward. Every scientific paper mentioned would be linked. Every part of the archive (excepting possible legal constraints) would be put online and be freely available” (545).

“Media and communication are important, and the media and communication process of Public Service Media in a best world is critically triple checked (facts, other possible interpretations, other possible significances that can be assigned) by colleagues before it goes public” (570).

“The newsrooms and presenters/journalists will not be afraid to call out lies when they are articulated. For example, Trump claimed that the pipe line to Germany from Russia was more than 60% of Germany’s energy needs when it was that percentage of Germany’s needs for gas which are 20% of their energy needs. The claim was fact checked later in the bulletin but the headline was what most folk would see/read/hear and it was also repeated without comment. Facts are sacred: comment free hence when it is not a matter of interpretation but factual and incorrect, it needs to be called out at that point even with the current POTUS” (711).

Public Service Media should advance new forms of audience participation and co-operation with civil society:

“viewer participation in selection of topics of interest [...] Possibility of users to choose interest areas for which they can receive in depth info (based on global newstickers) to enable viewers to select stories of interest (on demand media)” (175).

“more participatory programs” (343).

“I would call for civil society actors and movements on both national and regional level to join in and form a new collaborative process. I would see the PSM media as a part of societal common knowledge architecture. The aim would be to formulate common goals and co-operation mechanisms for media and these

other actors, in order to be integrally part of democratic and participatory actions in societies” (345).

“I would get as much citizen involvement as possible” (452).

“open to nonprofessional producers and productions from communities, neighbourhoods, supporting them with technical means to achieve Hollywood level productions” (499).

“Partner with academics and communities on programming and production” (523).

“I will frequently ask our audiences to suggest program types, program contents and program modifications to meet their expectations. [...] viewers will have accounts in an interactive platform that insures direct interaction between the production and reception sides of PS” (599).

“I would also introduce more phone-in programmes for BBC to engage more effectively with its viewers and listeners” (649).

“Contents would be co-created with various communities, with professional writers/actors working with non-pro people: news would be steered by local participants, fictions written in cooperation with now students, then workers from a certain company, then by residents of a certain neighbourhood, etc. So that editorial choices, contents and forms wouldn’t appear as falling on society from an above and detached world with alien interests and codes, but would rather give form to dynamics immanent to communities in their diversity” (663).

“I will focus on community initiatives and give them visibility so that grassroots democracy gets wide publicity” (673).

“I would develop partnerships with community-based and independent news media perhaps with collaborative investigative journalism projects” (695).

Public Service Media should internationalise its services:

“Transnational PSB partnerships to compete with the global reach of, for example, Netflix, but with the quality of series of, for example, BBC” (20).

“more global news coverage rather than same news around the clock with in depth analyses of topic selected by editors” (175).

“Less nationalism. PSM need to become global” (596).

“More international news: there is a lack of information about countries from Africa, Asia and Latin America. The eurocentrism of news is huge but also is centred in a few countries” (681). “I’d also look at developing international partnerships with other PSM providers to (a) develop a reliable news-pool of international news and current affairs and other factual content and (b) explore opportunities to develop a public service social media platform and online search engine with the same functionality of other social media/engines but with transparent algorithms (with publicly accountable reviews) and no advertising and personal data harvesting” (695).

“to transform political debate promoting real discussions among all political actors in each community/state and on a global scale” (816).

Public Service Media should challenge tabloidization and scandalisation and publish high-quality documentaries and educational programmes:

“I would like to educate people and show programmes about nature, other parts of the world, etc.” (19). “European content of high quality from every country available to all” (429). “In my country, for instance, it would be interesting to have projects designed to help citizens access better education so they can improve their lives” (511). “Rather than mutilating content to make it more “digestible” and oftentimes copying the formats of commercially successful media corporations, public service media should serve an educational purpose. As such, more time (and at more attractive times of the day!) would be dedicated to documentaries dedicated to enlightening public debate, particularly regarding questions of today’s political economy and global human civilisation” (568). “I would then commission a project that link resources from the broadcaster (e.g. the BBC) with resources from major educational institutions around the world, so that the archival material can be freely used for public education. More importantly, the broadcaster and the educational institutions would work together

towards designing and implementing an educational programme that would be free to access and follow online for anyone in the world, and that would be available in several languages” (748). “I will create partnerships with independent producers to ensure I have access to content that responds to diverse needs of different audience niches. This would include children’s programmes, young audience TV, ethnic minority programmes, local programmes addressing local problems. The content would have a balance of news, entertainment and education. I would also place strong emphasis on the arts, music, theatre and cinema. [...] more opportunities for documentary, film-making and independent production to enter PSM” (808).

Public Service Media should have democratic forms of governance:

“media policy reforms turned Public Service Media organisations into fully independent organisations. PSM’s boards from then on have no longer been appointed or partly appointed by governments but are now elected by both licence-fee paying audiences and PSM employees. Candidates for PSM directors are suggested by the board and elected by employees and audiences” (94).

“Organisational structures are designed horizontally. Equality, diversity and inclusion are applied everywhere, quality of product is a priority” (203).

“I’d suggest to set up a programme supervision body composed of a representative sample of the population. It would have a non-renewable mandate of a few years. it would be responsible for collecting on a regular basis opinions and suggestions of the citizens (as opposed to listeners or members of audience) regarding the scope, contents and process of the various programmes” (362).

“I would first undertake an initiative of various citizen assemblies all over the country about what the citizens would expect from my PSM, and then use that as my mandate. Given the media I’d be the director of its public, I’d want to get my mandate directly from the public rather than from any government or other official” (507).

“1. Make the workers of the BBC the owners of BBC. Let them make the decisions. They know it better than the management.

Use something like Holacracy or loomio to facilitate the decision-making process. 2. Make the CITIZENS the owners” (546).

“Audiences will equally be allowed to partake in deciding on TV dramas, given their popularity. They will be allowed not only to suggest which dramas should be offered in terms of binge-watching, but also which dramas to buy and which to neglect. To allow all this, viewers will have accounts in an interactive platform that ensures direct interaction between the production and reception sides of PSM. In that platform, laws will be uploaded, the production processes can be followed, audience opinions are expressed and suggestions for improvement are gathered. In the same platform, citizens can receive media literacy courses to equip them with adequate knowledge and skills” (599).

“I would also change the PSM governance, involving civic associations, third sector organizations, schools and Universities: in other words, I would be a Director promoting a more horizontal and pluralistic governance” (696).

“Rather, a utopia requires a future without corporations. As such, I cannot imagine a future utopia where I would be CEO of the BBC or RAI or any other corporation. There cannot be CEOs in a utopia. These top-down visions belong to apartheid” (677).

“my first decree would be to abolish the CEO position, unless the CEO is subjected to common election and approval of her/his decisions. A sort of ‘ayllu’, a social unit of economic production, political discussion, and social administration, where all decisions are taken by the community and realized by those appointed” (816).

“any transformation I would propose would first aim to suppress the position of CEO itself, and secondly open the channels to independent media” (839).

Public Service Media should abolish all space and time access limits to its contents and maintain archives that are available forever and accessible from anywhere:

“anachronistic legal limits such as the limited temporal availability of PSM content and the limited spatial access to PSM were abolished. PSM started to be available for unlimited time and to be

accessible from anywhere in the world. It was recognized that such spatial and temporal limits are out of sync with the affordances of digital media” (94).

“make archive publicly available, and not just for 4 days or in my own country, like easily watchable, no account, no bullshit, not YouTube hosted” (211).

“First of all, I would open a huge back catalogue of old TV and radio productions for free access in the media centres. People have already paid for it, so why hide it in the archives? Then I would open this internationally, so that people from abroad can see and hear the content, too. Then I would structure and tag and organize these huge amounts of content data so that it can be used efficiently, and so that meaningful research will be possible in the media centres. Then I would link them with each other. An open software would be needed so that latecomers could join, too. In the end, we would have general access to humanities’ arts, science and journalism, including films, documentaries, news, music, paintings and even games. Of course, new stuff would be produced daily” (540).

The licence fee should be maintained and further developed and be complemented by new funding mechanisms:

“a global digital services tax of 20% of the digital giants’ profits was introduced and used to fund the development of new digital public service media platforms/services and public/common digital services partnerships” (94).

“New funding mechanisms and business models to eliminate dependencies and roles of private sector interests” (148).

“Some of the initiatives I’d like to see would need to come from government, not just the public service media provider themselves. These would include the introduction of a marginal media levy (say 1%) on the commercial turnover of (i) subscription media such as SVoDs or pay-TV), (ii) telecommunication services (including internet and mobile phone), (iii) audio-visual retail goods (including televisions, phones, computers, lap-tops) and (iv) advertising (on companies with revenues over a set benchmark). The revenue collected could then be ring-fenced and used

to expand the PSM services including subsidy of independent journalism” (695).

“I would explore a new funding model that would retain the license fee but would also create some variation inside this scheme. For instance, I would make the license fee means tested and would tier it according to household income. The result would be a progressive license fee charge. Additionally, I would seek ways to channel taxpayers’ money into the funding of the PSM. One way of doing so would be to provide state-based advertising of public and community initiatives (e.g. sports or culture)” (808).

“a tax on global corporations may finance the change towards public media” (816).

“I would call on legislative bodies to create a new, multibillion-dollar Public Interest Media Endowment funded by taxing the purveyors of targeted advertising. The endowment would direct tax revenues to fund independent and non-commercial news outlets” (819).

Public Service Media should be independent from corporations and governments:

“I believe these services should be regulated by organizations that are not connected to political power” (81).

“I would encourage the news functions of say the BBC to uncouple itself from the press. Too often the broadcast media merely reproduce the arguments of what is a seriously politically unbalanced press” (331).

“Reinforce the role of public media for society and democracy and combat the tendency to privatize public media” (558).

“I believe a media without powerful commercial interests can only be reimagined under a PSM” (649).

“I would advocate for: free the selection of the PSM board from political control” (785).

Public Service Media should be advertising-free:

“I’d prohibit political ads” (555).

“Future media and communication would be without advertisements” (679).

“I would get rid of corporate sponsorship on PBS which limits the kinds of programming it can broadcast” (766).

“I would advocate for: ban all advertising on PSM” (785).

3.3.4. Topic 3: Public Service Media and the Internet in 2030

The survey’s third question focused on the assumption that Public Service Media develops very well in the 2020s. Given this assumption, we asked the respondents how they thought the media and Internet landscape would look like in 2030.

The corresponding question in the survey read: “IMAGINE: It’s 2030: Public Service Media have experienced a remarkable development and a renaissance. A very successful, radically new media ecosystem has developed: What has been changed in comparison to 2020 (10 years ago)? How was it possible to achieve these changes? How do Public Service Media look like in 2030?”

Using thematic analysis, a total of nine themes related to this question were identified:

- In 2030, corporate media and Internet monopolies have been weakened.
- In 2030, advances towards Internet have been made.
- In 2030, noncommercial, advertising-free, not-for-profit media are more important than in 2020.
- In 2030, Public Service Media provide diverse content and have a diverse organisational structure.
- In 2030, Public Service Media and the Internet advance and sustain democracy and are democratically organised.
- In 2030, fact-checking, high-quality information and educational programmes are key aspects of Public Service Media.
- In 2030, Public Service Media are critical media that co-operate with the independent media sector, support citizen journalism, are well funded, and are independent from political and economic power.
- In 2030, Public Service Media advance dialogue and debate.
- In 2030, Public Service Media focus more on global and international cooperation than in 2020 while at the same time focusing on local issues.

In 2030, corporate media and Internet monopolies have been weakened:

“Ideally we would witness a diversification of the social media providers” (175).

“Diversity of owners would be key” (331).

“Privately owned media empires have been curtailed, esp. through the success of the Global Competition Authority (first suggested by Hutton and Giddens 2000). Not only electronic media: print media and news agencies too are flourishing with increasing diversity” (596).

The “regulation and non-concentration of ownership of networks by some people is crucial. We will need to create internet services and not private communication companies” (643).

“Decentralized alternative public media were created since 2020 and transnational regulation was introduced to prevent the market monopoly of big tech companies such as Google and Facebook” (815).

In 2030, advances towards the Internet have been made:

“‘Facebook’ no longer exists, having been transferred to public ownership by popular demand, and so transformed that a name change was required. ‘Social media’ as a term means what it says: it refers to publicly owned media driven by democratically determined social needs and wants and constituted to serve those needs and wants alone” (20).

“A network of 100 public service media organisations established PublicServiceTube, a public service alternative to YouTube. [...] In 2025, a network of 100 public service broadcasters started an international video streaming service under the title of PublicPlus” (94).

“The key change is that in 2030 there is now a public sector internet as well as a commercial one” (171).

“PSM media is in 2030 local, sustainable, and provides an alternative digital infrastructure to societies” (345).

“Public Service Platforms or protocols have been implemented” (407).

“Public service has moved beyond being media. Instead they’re platforms for innovation done by regular people” (452).

“Every person is an operator of the SERVER for their own media. [...] every neighbourhood has pooled-up resources and are operating their own ‘ISP’” (546).

“The new media ecosystem of 2030 is more integrated, where broadcasters, archives/libraries, and educational institutions are constitutive parts of their activities and projects, rather than separate domains of society. This was possible through changing the ways in which public service media is understood and managed, and how governments understand their role in society as a whole. [...] What has radically changed between 2020 and 2030 is the exponential increase in the number of publicly owned platforms and initiatives to replace private corporations in the archiving, provision and access to media (including music)” (748).

“The platforms have dropped much of their toxicity. We have not become perfect angels online, but the media no longer draws out the worst in people. This happened by turning old platforms into public utilities. They no longer try to keep people logged on for as long as possible in pursuit of clicks and ad revenue. Instead users decide what kind of behaviours the platforms promote” (766).

“University and library IT budgets (with increased state funding) are used to support federated public digital media services with community governance structures” (829).

In 2030, noncommercial, advertising-free, not-for-profit media are more important than in 2020:

“We are less concerned with profitability, just to begin with. It is impossible to create quality content where our ‘success’ line is focused on monetary gain rather than community goals” (288).

“When [we have] journalists free from commercial dependence and user generated content free from surveillance than we can have cooperation instead of competition” (305).

“content is PRODUCED and CONSUMED by the FREE CITIZENS, not burdened by the ‘propaganda’ and ‘marketing’ of people trying to SELL useless STUFF to others...” (546).

Public service media “are also much less commercial: i.e. fewer ads (whether paid-for time or space, product placement, advertorial

or other), if any. Because people voted against advertising in global referenda” (596).

“the changes in the Internet structure have generated a more democratic and less commercial Internet in the wake of the general uneasy with advertising, surveillance and violation of private data” (808).

In 2030, Public Service Media provide diverse content and have a diverse organisational structure:

“Binary conceptions of balance will have been replaced by pluralist modes in which a diversity of voices and perspectives are represented” (91).

“Hire more young and diverse staff – class, race, gender, ability, native language. This helps to broaden the perspectives and refresh the agenda. Free training on progressive values” (115).

“new generation of journalists allowed to take the helm of orgs thus allowing new editorial lines to be created that can distinguish between objectivity and neutrality” (392).

“In 2030, the voices of the oppressed are the main voices heard in PSM. Instead of speaking with talking heads about a strike, they talk to the workers. PSM deals with the problems of working-class people” (223).

“The networks have been structured along lines similar to the Indymedia networks, with local stations and reporters preserving their autonomy and reporting on stories of local importance. More specifically, these stations amplify the voices of the poor, the working class, and communities of colour who are struggling for justice” (388).

“Public Service media in 2030 are fluid and open organisations, reflecting the dynamics of society” (407).

“Public service media experienced its renaissance due to a combination of pushing forward items in the public interest, and integrating the public better into the content it delivered. Rather than using a uniform authoritative voice, it permitted itself to present multiple, sometimes disagreeing voices, from many different perspectives, demographic, regional, identity-based” (545).

“PSMs are less organized in national units and more in cultural ones. For example, there are 190 nation-states today, but 6000 living languages” (596).

“PSM in 2030 [...] present diverse content meeting a variety of needs of a constantly changing population” (808).

“People stated to practice their ‘ideals’ when it comes to ‘diversity’ and hired people representative of the audience. Now, the people doing the hiring are also representative” (814).

In 2030, Public Service Media and the Internet advance and sustain democracy and are democratically organised:

In 2030, Public Service Media “are organised as self-managed public companies, where audiences and public service media workers together take key decisions independent from governments and for-profit-corporations” (94).

“PSMs are beacons of innovation, quality, transparency, accessibility and of democratic values” (203).

“The internet has now become a basic human right. Net Neutrality came back into style and people receive quality internet through public utilities instead of grotesquely overpriced and manipulative corporations” (288).

“The public media have reinterpreted their role as the fourth pillar of democracy” (402).

“Society and media need to be reconfigured into smaller units, what I would describe as producer-consumer co-operatives” (655).

“Public Service would be more participative and deliberative than today, possibly through direct viewer (consumer) participation or some other way” (689).

“Public service media in 2030 are intertwined in the daily lives of everyone for the better. They help fortify the health of our communities and are essential to our functioning democracy. [...] Not only have we reimagined the role independent, non-commercial media plays in healthy and diverse democracies, we have rebuilt support structures for civic-minded journalism to make it resilient and thriving. These changes were made possible from the bottom-up, by a well-organized and large population of advocates

who took charge of the decisions shaping the media landscape and sounded the alarm when people's rights to connect and communicate were in danger" (819).

In 2030, fact-checking, high-quality information and educational programmes are key aspects of Public Service Media:

"There are many programs of educational nature and less advertising, crime, scandal, horrifying messages" (19).

"In the past 3 or 4 years, many mainstream media organisations have launched projects carrying out fact checking for debates that take place around elections. I believe that over the coming 10 years, this trend will continue and move even more into the mainstream – responding to a pressing demand from the public for greater honesty in public debate. The role of public service media organisations worldwide is more to sift and explain the news than to simply report it, since so much 'noise' reporting takes place already" (32).

"Public service Media in 2030 remains the only factual source of news" (137).

"Trolls and fake news bots have finally been overcome by social bots" (397).

"more and more inclusive and educational (political and cultural) formats are produced" (402).

"more quality assured content, less fake news, flexibility in supporting the changing needs" (555).

In 2030, Public Service Media are critical media that co-operate with the independent media sector, support citizen journalism, are well funded, and are independent from political and economic power:

"In 2030, PSM are publicly funded, independent organisations enabled by public service legislation and the licence fee" (94).

"PSM are better funded, but also reminded to be very transparent and efficient" (361).

"The media is neither controlled any more by corporations, nor by the state and citizens have access and can publish media relevant that enables their full participation in society" (815).

“Broad commitment by all political sides to invest in responsible independent media with high-quality standards. Stable, sufficiently funded PSM in 2030 carrying out a recognisably indispensable service for society” (429).

“Public service media was able to support Indy media creators in all kinds of media, thus creating a radically liberal media ecosystem” (466).

“Public media provides the infrastructure for citizen journalism” (506).

“strong public funding, neither political nor commercial influence” (558).

“A larger presence of citizen journalists who are socially involved and inspired by the desire for social change” (673).

“What must change is this framework, through public service media focusing on non-data and the data of non-data – showing that Grenfell matters before the fire and that the millions of murdered Iraqi children and women can curse the world into a recession, a depression and a revolution. In 2030, as Gil-Scott Heron would say, the revolution will be televised. In 2030 public service media will be different because I hope that they will (i) televise the revolution and (ii) offer a humanising alternative based on ‘less media, more time’ and ‘less, better media’” (677).

“Increased partnerships between PSM providers and community/indi media, funded by a levy on commercial media services” (695).

“The funding basis for PSM remains civic: in the UK the licence fee remains but is also applied to anyone using a computer: a universal fee and is set by an independent body. Private providers such as BSKyB and Netflix pay providers for showing PSM content. There are taxes on the tech giants such as Facebook and Google which are then used for a fund to support PSM creative economy” (711).

“It was decided to put the Internet, as a great mediator, and the public services of cultural creation at the service of citizens. It was possible to finance this reform from the taxes to the big companies and with a high control of the new commission of Global competition that abolished the tax havens and established exhaustive measures against the monopolistic practices” (782).

“PSM is now free from political control and a representative of the citizens is elected in the board” (785).

“Public Service media is well funded” (814).

In 2030, Public Service Media advance dialogue and debate:

“PSM will have to learn to create dialogous forms of media. [...] To become a PSM of dialogue, bringing people together. In my eyes this would be the development of a successful media ecosystem. Within the next decade we have to master this step to interact with our communities, the share- and the stakeholders of PSM. We have to learn and to develop possibilities to interact more intensive with our audiences, to involve the communities and to make them part of the programmes we deliver – in future also in closer cooperation with our audiences” (11).

“Public service media is now a trusted resource where people can believe that facts that are being put out. It is interactive, dynamic and open, where public service media is closely linked to online discussions and discourse” (493).

In 2030, Public Service Media focus more on global and international cooperation than in 2020 while at the same time focusing on local issues:

“the rebooted BBC and the Open University would operate not just along national boundaries but globally. This would not be a form of rebooted colonialism, but of diverse local forms of relating all geared towards what humans do best: learning” (505).

“Compared to 2020, media is more global, unencumbered and accessible to the public. Media is truly global now. This was possible as the wide range of divides that were the characteristic of 2020 were bridged successfully. A healthy debate on the ethics of public service media in 2020 resulted in the adoption of global standards for media praxis. This has resulted in a high participation of citizens across the world in the knowledge practices and efforts for sustainability. Public service media is now free from the predatory tendencies that undermine the globality of such media” (767).

PSM “are based on partnerships with other PSM for sharing rights in international content and thus provide mutual benefits for all PSMs” (808).

3.4. Conclusion

This report presented the results of an exploratory survey that focused on the identification of ideas for Public Service Internet/Media utopias. The three main themes in the survey were communication, digital media and the Internet in an ideal world; progressive reforms of Public Service Media; and Public Service Media and the Internet in 2030.

There were a total of survey participants. Lots of interesting ideas and positive visions for the short-term, medium-term and long-term future of the media were identified. A total of 141 respondents completed the survey and provided answers.

The future of the Internet and digital media was the most commented on theme in the survey. Many users were critical of the corporate domination of the digital media economy by digital giants such as Google/Alphabet, Facebook, Apple, Amazon and Microsoft. They pointed out the need for anti-monopoly measures such as taxation, regulation, the limitation and break-up of monopolies and the creation and support of alternatives. They were also very critical of digital surveillance, state control and censorship of the Internet.

Many users envision an alternative, advertising-free, non-commercial, not-for-profit Internet, where platform co-operatives that are owned and run by users and workers as well as Internet platforms play an important role. Respondents imagined Internet platforms such as alternative video streaming services, alternative user-generated content services, alternative search engines, new debate and discussion platforms, etc. They stressed that such services should be available for everyone without time and space constraints. They also envisioned digital archives of public service content available to everyone for an unlimited period from anywhere at any time. They pointed out the potentials for international collaboration in the provision of Internet platforms.

Survey participants stressed the importance of Public Service Media for providing high-quality news, information, educational programmes, documentaries and critical reports. They pointed out the importance of Public Service Media for democracy and a vivid public sphere. Many respondents stressed the importance that Public Service Media also in the future give significant attention to fact-checking information, providing transparent information on how facts are checked, and critically scrutinising power.

Many respondents stressed that Public Service Media and Internet platforms should enable and encourage citizens to participate in the production of media content and democratic debates.

Many survey participants pointed out that they thought it was important that Public Service Media's contents, programmes and organisational structures are diverse, represent everyday people and diverse groups from all social backgrounds and realms, regions and parts of the world.

It was often mentioned that Public Service Media should focus on local life as well as global matters and that international collaboration of Public Service Media organisations is important in providing new services. Respondents also pointed out the potentials of Public Service Media co-operating with other not-for-profit organisations, especially other public organisations such as libraries, museums, archives, universities, etc as well as not-for-profit civil society organisations such as independent media, community media, citizen media/journalism, not-for-profit Internet platforms, etc.

Respondents stressed that Public Service Media should be independent from corporate and state power. They pointed out the importance of securing continued funding of Public Service Media. Many respondents welcomed the licence fee, argued for its continued existence, its further development and its complementation by new funding mechanisms.

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CHAPTER 4

Public Service Media for Critical Times: Connectivity, Climate, and Corona

Graham Murdock

4.1 Envisioning Real Utopias

The institutions and animating ideals of public service broadcasting have been under escalating pressure since the 1980s as neoliberal economics and authoritarian populist politics have migrated from the margins to the centre of debate and decision-making. Advocates of marketisation have argued long and hard that comprehensive public service provision is no longer relevant or needed in a media marketplace offering unlimited digital choice, whereas populist pundits complain incessantly of liberal and left bias and lack of national pride and patriotism. These assaults have fuelled a deepening sense of anxiety among defenders of public service. The open letter sent to Britain's Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport from supporters of the campaigning group, British Broadcasting Challenge, reaffirms the central fault line.

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[...] the very principles of public service that have served us so well are under severe threat [...] We believe that this is the time to stop short-sighted political and financial attacks; to provide a vision for the future that enables our PSB system to grow as a trusted, independent and worthy network of the UK, its citizens and the world (British Broadcasting Challenge 2021).

The sustained political and economic assault on public broadcasting from the Right has coincided with the emergence of the Internet as a pervasive presence in everyday life. The increasing concentration of control over digital connectivity exercised by a handful of mega corporations has sharpened debate on how best to construct a robust alternative, building on the base provided by public service broadcasting and using the potential offered by digital platforms to create Public Service Media. Discussions around this project have been underway for some time but under current conditions they must now confront three intersecting crises that are reshaping social and cultural life at a fundamental level; the populist destruction of deliberative democracy, the endemic threat of recurring coronavirus pandemics and the intensifying climate and environmental crises.

Addressing these challenges requires us to reimagine the pivotal role of public service in supporting the cultural resources, social relations and personal capacities that sustain a social order based on equity, justice, recognition, respect and care. Our task, to borrow the late Erik Olin Wright's resonant phrase, is to envision real utopias (Wright 2010). For many advocates of public service this will appear as an impossibly unrealistic proposal in the current political climate.

4.2. Waving Goodbye?

Faced with the continuous economic and political battering from the Right supporters of public service broadcasting in Britain are increasingly coming to share the pessimism voiced by Russell Davies in a recent interview when he admitted: "I'm sitting back thinking, I'll be 60 soon. I had the best of it, well done, bye bye" (Russell Davies quoted in Wolfe-Robinson 2021).

Davies speaks from experience having produced his best-known work for Britain's two publicly owned television services, BBC and Channel Four. One of the country's most popular and critically acclaimed television dramatists his career has coincided with the period of increasing pressure. He joined the BBC in 1985 to work for the innovative children's channel, CBBC, returning in 2005 to oversee a successful revival of the Corporation's long running time travel series *Dr Who*. In between he moved to Granada, the ITV franchise holder for the North West of England, and began mining his personal involvement in Manchester's gay community. *Queer as Folk*, his 1999 series for Channel Four was ground breaking in its celebratory portrait of youthful gay hedonism, followed over two decades later, in 2021, by *It's a Sin*, a delayed reckoning with the ravages of AIDS, again for Channel Four.

Evidence in support of his claim that he has "had the best of it" and that we may now finally be waving goodbye to comprehensive and challenging public provision is not difficult to find. Proposals to privatise Channel Four are once again under serious consideration. The BBC is caught in an intensified pincer movement, required to meet a number of additional costs from steadily shrinking funds. "By 2019, the real (inflation-adjusted) public funding of the [Corporation's] UK services had already been cut by 30% since 2010" (Barwise and York 2020, xv) while the licence fee was required to cover the cost of activities previously funded by government departments. In 2014, the BBC assumed major responsibility for supporting the World Service, previously financed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, followed in 2020 by the requirement to fund the Welsh language Channel 4 (S4C). 2019 saw the launch of a £60 million contestable fund to support the production of programmes for children and young people aged 4 to 18 years. The money came from sums unallocated in the BBC's 2010 licence fee settlement. The majority of payments have gone to Britain's commercial terrestrial channels, who had responded to pressures on profits by withdrawing from making children's programmes. As the government report introducing the scheme notes. "The removal of children's programming quotas for commercial public service broadcasters and

restrictions on advertising around children’s television, compounded by the often limited resale value of UK focused content, makes children’s television difficult to monetise for broadcasters and potential investors” (DDCMS 2018, 7).

The fund represents a direct subsidy from the BBC to advertising financed operators (ITV, Channel 5 and Channel 4), which although routinely designated as “public services” in official reports had signally failed to meet their obligation to maintain comprehensive provision. A more broadly based plan for contestable funding was central to the 2016 Government report *A BBC for the Future* which announced: “It is the government’s view that [...] a small proportion of the licence fee may be available to organisations other than the BBC to help deliver quality and pluralistic public service content, using competitive forces” (DCMS 2016, 71).

This would involve a further raid on the BBC's resources by directly “top-slicing” the licence fee. Alongside cuts to funding, successive governments have intervened to restrict the BBC's plans to respond proactively to the rapidly changing broadcasting environment. In 2007, the Corporation announced plans for a pioneering Video on Demand venture, Project Kangaroo, in collaboration with ITV and Channel 4. The proposal was referred to the Competition Commission for an evaluation of its market impact. Announcing their decision, the Commission Chair, Peter Freeman, declared:

After detailed and careful consideration, we have decided that this joint venture would be too much of a threat to competition in this developing market and has to be stopped [...] we expect alternatives to be much more likely to develop in the light of our decision (Competition Commission 2009, 1–2).

“Alternatives” have indeed developed but the cancellation of Kangaroo, and with it the possibility of ensuring a strong, nationally based, public service presence in a major emerging market for programme distribution, left the field open to comprehensive capture by the leading US based players. Research conducted during the first COVID-19 national “lock down” in 2020 reveals a streaming

market now dominated by three operators, Netflix subscribed to by 43% of households, Amazon Prime with 35%, and Disney with 13% (Ofcom 2020b, 25). In 2019, the idea behind Kangaroo was revisited with the launch of Britbox, an on-demand service majority owned by ITV with the participation of BBC Studios. It was too little too late with only 5% of households surveyed subscribing, although it may be more successful in overseas markets which cannot access the UK catch up services led by BBC iPlayer and More4.

4.3. Postcards from the Pandemic

For much of 2020, everyday life came to be lived increasingly online. With travel restricted, entertainment venues shut and schools and many workplaces closed, households came to rely on digital networks to access cultural resources and maintain social connectivity. Alongside the explosive growth of commercial streaming services, the virtual meeting facilities offered by Zoom and the short video productions enabled by TikTok emerged as preferred means for conducting business and demonstrating creativity remotely. These much publicised platforms are all owned and operated offshore but the conditions that have supported their rapid rise have also reaffirmed the indispensable role of public service broadcasting in addressing market gaps and limitations. During the pandemic, public service broadcasting has provided information, education and drama that spoke to the values of equity, representation, solidarity and care where market-driven provision signally failed.

4.3.1. *Information*

Political scrutiny of public service broadcasting tends to focus concertedly and often exclusively on news. This is not surprising. News is the area of programming most centrally concerned with politicians' personalities, policies and performance, and with providing basic information resources to support participation in democratic processes. The principle of relative independence from

government and the obligation of journalists to hold power to account are under constant pressure from partisan political positions masquerading as the public interest. Intensified competition for audiences can push reporting over the line of legitimacy as it did with the use of forged bank statements to help secure an exclusive interview with Lady Diana Spencer for the BBC (see Tobill 2021). But as the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic confirmed, faced with conditions of national crisis and uncertainty, the BBC remains many people's first port of call for news and information. The major survey conducted by the British media regulator, Ofcom, in week 3 of the first mandatory "lockdown" revealed that BBC services were "the most used source by some margin." They were mentioned by 78% of respondents with 35% claiming BBC News as their most important source and a further 11% nominating BBC Online. In sharp contrast only 5% nominated social media. This figure rises to 10% among 18- to 24-year olds but is still less than half of the 22% in that age group who nominated BBC TV. The BBC was also the most trusted source among competing television channels with trust levels three times those of the major online platforms (Ofcom 2020a, 2,5).

The BBC's national and international news services are supplemented by its network of 39 local radio stations which have played a key role during the pandemic, not only as trusted sources of local information but as organising nodes of social action. The "Make a Difference" initiative, launched in March 2020 at the start of the first national lockdown, has, among other initiatives, co-ordinated contact between volunteers and people needing support and arranged for 46,000 digital devices, essential for remote learning, to be reconstituted and distributed to children in low-income households. In marked contrast, in the middle of the pandemic, Bauer, the leading operator of local commercial stations with a 38% market share (Media Reform Coalition 2021, 22), moved to close a number of its regional outlets and integrate them into a single national music channel, Greatest Hits Radio. A rump of local news bulletins and traffic reports remain but the sustained relations with local audiences and local issues have disappeared along with the teams of local presenters (Waterson 2020).

4.3.2. Education

With schools closed for long periods during 2020, teaching and learning was confined to the home with many parents facing the challenge of organising home schooling for their children for the first time. Throughout the pandemic, they could call on the educational resources provided by the BBC's Bitesize initiative offering engaging video, quizzes and practical activities tailored to the curriculum followed by children from four to eighteen. Material was made available both online and through daily broadcasts. This double mode of delivery was an essential support for the principles of equity and inclusion since, as successive lockdowns demonstrated with brutal clarity, a significant number of low income households had no access to the internet. Ofcom's Technology Tracker research found only 2% of households with children younger than 18 years headed by someone in a professional or managerial occupation with no desktop, laptop or tablet computer in the home. The figure for households headed by an unskilled or unemployed worker lacking these essentials was 10 times this, at 22% with 9% relying instead on a smartphone and paying more for data access (Digital Access for All 2020). I will return to this argument presently since it is central to the case for retaining broadcast programming as an essential building block for a digital commons.

The BBC's commitment to honouring the core public service principle of universal provision stands in marked contrast to the predatory behaviour of some commercial publishers who saw university campus and library closures and the move to online learning during the pandemic as an opportunity to reap excess profits. In January 2021 almost 300 academics and librarians released an open letter calling for a public inquiry into the "unaffordable, unsustainable and inaccessible" academic book market (see Fazackerley 2021). Take the case of *An Integrated Play Based Curriculum for Young Children*, ironically, exactly the potential source of ideas and advice that parents, with no teacher training, struggling to devise educational home schooling activities might benefit from. The regular print edition was priced at £36.99 but

Routledge were charging £410 for the e-book version and insisting that it could only be read by one person at a time. This is price gouging on an industrial scale.

4.3.3. Drama

On 25 May 2020, a black man, George Floyd, detained by police in Minnesota on suspicion of passing a counterfeit \$20 banknote, died after the officer holding him on the ground, handcuffed and unresisting, knelt on his neck for 8 minutes and 15 seconds, failing to release him even after he had lost consciousness choking him to death. Two weeks later on 8th June, a crowd in the English port of Bristol tore down a statue of the slave trader, Edward Colson, and threw it into the harbour. Footage of both incidents circulated internationally dramatising the roots of present-day racism in the unresolved legacies of slavery and fuelling claims for recognition and respect crystallised in the demand that “Black Lives Matter”.

Comprehensive information and analysis are essential but a full understanding of events and the tangled relations between biographies and histories that animate them also requires the ability to enter other lives and see the world from their perspective. This is the essential role of fiction. In December 2020, Netflix released the historical drama series *Bridgerton*. Based on the long-standing speculation that Queen Charlotte may have had African ancestors, it presents an alternative vision of Regency England with black characters among the social elite. It trades on the instantly recognisable template of lush settings and intrigues in aristocratic England familiar from *Downton Abbey* and dramatisations of Jane Austen’s novels investing it with a novel twist. It has been immensely successful becoming Netflix’s most watched series to date and achieving record audiences in 76 countries, with three further series planned. It goes some way towards addressing the urgent issue of unequal representation on screen by extending opportunities for black actors but contributes little to a fuller understanding of Britain’s imperial past and its continuing resonances.

The previous month the BBC had broadcast *Small Axe* Steve McQueen's sequence of five films chronicling the experiences of London's West Indian community from the 1960s through to the 1980s. They present vivid portraits of police harassment and official discrimination, struggles for recognition and respect, and community celebration and solidarity.

The screening of *Small Axe* coincided with McQueen's major exhibition at Tate Britain, *Year 3*, organised around specially shot year group photos of classes of 7- and 8-year olds in every primary school in London at a key turning point in their development as they engage with the wider world. The collection is a powerful portrait and affirmation of a multicultural, polyglot, city as it carries the past into the future. Hanging them in one of London's most prestigious cultural institutions affirms each individual's equal entitlement to be paid attention to and to participate fully in public culture. The same insistence on recognition and respect and a place in the historical record informs the films that make up *Small Axe*. As McQueen has noted, "it's brought things back, things which never got looked at before on that scale, to reflect back on you that I am, I exist. [...] I am real" (quoted in Naidoo 2021, 21).

Small Axe was screened with the 2018 Windrush scandal, named after the *Empire Windrush*, the first ship bringing West Indian migrants to Britain after the War, still raw in collective memory. Despite being British citizens a number who had arrived as children, and had lived and worked in the country all their adult lives, lacked the necessary papers and under the government's "hostile environment" policy towards illegal immigrants were stripped of their legal rights and welfare entitlements. Some were deported (see Gentleman 2019). The BBC responded to the revelations with an investigative documentary series *The Unwanted* (2019) and a searing drama *Sitting in Limbo* (2020).

Interrogating the national condition in all its complexities and contradictions and detailing the forces that have shaped it is one of public service broadcasting's distinctive responsibilities. The logic informing commercial companies points in another direction,

prioritising productions that can achieve maximum international reach by combining a degree of novelty and surprise with the comforts of familiarity.

4.4. Citizenship in the Land of Knowledge

I recently came across the photo of my own year 3 class staring hopefully into the future. We were welfare state children, beneficiaries of a social contract of citizenship that presented enhanced opportunities for personal self-realisation as inextricably bound up with the quality of collective life and provision. The promise of full and equal participation in social and political life was underwritten by an extended array of material and cultural resources. The practical supports delivered by publicly funded health care, housing and transport; guaranteed holidays; and a revised benefits system were accompanied by a great arc of public cultural resources paid for collectively out of taxation and freely available at the point of use: education, public libraries, museums and galleries and public radio and television services. Growing up I was an avid reader of Charles Schulz's comic strip, *Peanuts*, printed in the *Daily Sketch* my parents' newspaper of choice. In one episode his young hero, Charlie Brown, proudly brandishes his newly issued library card declaring; "I have been given my citizenship in the land of knowledge". That phrase captures perfectly my own experience of access to publicly funded culture.

BBC radio and television programmes were a constant presence throughout my childhood and teenage years. The entirely admirable drive to democratise specialist knowledge and expertise and debate on pressing issues relied, rather too often, on officially mandated opinion but it was cross-cut by critique and subversion. Kenneth Clark's unashamed celebration of the accepted canon of western art in *Civilisation* (1969, BBC2) was undercut by John Berger's brilliant deconstruction of dominant modes of representation in *Ways of Seeing* (1972, BBC). Official claims of unprecedented opportunity and mobility were subverted by social realist dramatisations of poverty and dispossession. Dashed hopes

of betterment were dissected in the comedy of *Steptoe and Son* (1962–1965, BBC1). Satirists and comedians buried deference to authority with jokes and sketches propelled by disrespect bordering on contempt.

Public broadcasting introduced me to ideas, issues, viewpoints, experiences and aspects of creative expression and the human condition I would never have otherwise encountered, prompting me to want to discover more. My searches took me to my local library on a weekly basis and to London's free museums and galleries but also to the grassroots activity in my local area. There were accomplished photographers and artists, dedicated astronomers and naturalists, community choirs, skilled potters and quilt makers, tinkerers with machines and electronic equipment, and committed groups campaigning on social issues. All these activities were self-organised. Participation was voluntary and unpaid, combining collaborative support for developing personal skills and self-realisation with the production of resources and services circulated and shared within the community. They were practical enactments of citizenship's invitation to contribute to public life.

They did not fit entirely comfortably with institutionalised public broadcasting's historic mission to construct a "common culture" around symbols of national identity however (Murdock 2020a). These all too easily favoured officially mandated valuations in pursuit of an imagined community of national unity and exceptionalism. The result was a formation inclined towards the marginalisation of dissent, the suppression of difference and dismissal of the vernacular. Alternatively, as Raymond Williams argued, the search for solidarity can promote "culture in common", working with a conception of collective meaning making taking place across multiple spaces of representation and expression, open to all, but continually modified "under the pressure of experience, contact and discovery" (Williams 1989, 4).

In response to mounting pressure for greater popular access and representation in April 1973 the BBC's newly formed Community Programming Unit launched *Open Door* offering underrepresented groups from across the political spectrum, from black

teachers to anti-immigration campaigners, the opportunity to make their own programmes. In 1991, the Unit introduced *Video Diaries* taking advantage of the new easy-to-use portable video equipment to enable selected individual participants to tell their stories with minimal editorial interference. However, the intervention of arguably most relevance to the argument I wish to make here was the Domesday Project that ran between 1984 and 1985. Designed to celebrate the 900th anniversary of the Domesday Book, it invited mass participation in assembling a thick description of the nation. Published by BBC Enterprises in November 1986, the assembled material was stored on two discs, the map-based Community Disc showing “Britain as seen by the people who live there” and a topic-based national disc providing and provides an overview of Britain (The National Archives 2021). The combination of professional and amateur contributions marshalled 200,000 images alongside video clips from the BBC and ITV, and covered a huge range of contemporary events including the miners’ strike and pit closures.

4.5. From Digital Spaces to the Digital Commons

The choice of the Philipps’ laser disc as the storage format almost consigned the Domesday archive to oblivion when the disc was discontinued. Fortunately the archive was later retrieved and reconstituted. Recalling the project prompted me to think about possible ways of combining resources produced by professional programme makers with materials generated by grassroots participation to pursue Raymond Williams’ conception of a culture in common animated by discovery and contact. My speculations coincided with a major conceptual revision to the critical political economy framework I had been working with up until then.

Political economy emerged as a field of inquiry in the late 18th century as part of the wider intellectual endeavour to conceptualise capitalism as a material and moral order and specify the role of the new forms of government developing within the emerging political formation of the nation state. Adam Smith’s defence of the

Table 4.1: Three moral economies of the media.

Spheres	Capital	Government	Civil society
Goods	Commodities	Public goods	Gifts
Arenas	Markets	Polities	Networks
Payments	Prices	Taxes	Reciprocities
Relations	Personal possession	Shared access	Co-creation

primacy of markets, the *Wealth of Nations*, appeared in 1776 within months of the American Declaration of Independence. From that point on political economy centred around capital-state relations with the critical tradition pressing for public ownership of core resources, including communication systems, and for stringent regulatory controls to curb corporate exploitation and prioritise public over private interests. Faced with accelerating corporate concentration and the regulatory retreat from principled defence of the public interest, these arguments have remained indispensable. But I increasingly came to see the binary division they worked with excluding the multiple voluntary transactions that operated outside prices and payments and sustained the networks of care, co-operation and mutual aid central to much everyday activity. I added these gift economies as a necessary third term generating the tripartite schema of political economies shown in Table 4.1.

I presented them as moral economies (Murdock 2011) to underline the argument that all transactions entangle us in the lives of others and entail responsibilities for their welfare. Some we know as family members, friends, neighbours and colleagues, but most are strangers. As the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate emergency demonstrate, reconnecting our everyday activities to the lives of distant others is an essential first step towards a just and equitable response. I will unpack this argument a little more presently.

The ascendancy of aggressive marketisation, propelled by neo-liberal economic orthodoxy since the 1980s, has been a forcible reminder that the history of capitalism is a history of progressive enclosure, as more and more of the resources held as public goods or gifts are translated into profit-generating assets. Observing

this posed an obvious question. Was it possible to arrest the commercial enclosure of public communication by building a robust countervailing force that combined the moral economies of public goods and gifts?

The opportunity to develop the argument came in 2004 when I was invited to give the annual memorial lecture in Canada in honour of Graham Spry, who was instrumental in resisting colonisation by US commercial operators and championing public service. It was less than a decade since Tim Berners Lee had launched the World Wide Web as a public utility in April 1993. There were signs of the drive towards commercial enclosure but Facebook's opening to users beyond its original student base and Google's acquisition of YouTube were both 2 years away. Activity was expanding rapidly in the alternative economies of public goods and gifts, however. Public libraries, museums and galleries were digitalising their collections, liberating access from set times and fixed locations and making their holdings and expertise generally available. Self-organised collaborative ventures were proliferating. Wikipedia, compiled entirely from on voluntary contributions, had launched in 2001, and was rapidly heading towards becoming the world's most comprehensive encyclopaedia. I saw these developments offering public service broadcasting the chance to reassert its indispensability by becoming the central node in a network of non-commercial connectivity conceived as a digital commons (Murdock 2005).

Later commentary built on this idea to propose incorporating "a public service social networking platform – one freed from the commercial imperatives [...] and a well-crafted public service search engine whose algorithms are driven by the goal of creating a more informed citizenry, rather than one more likely to click on advertising links or visit commercial sites" (Andrejevic 2013, 130).

My decision to include public goods in my conception of the digital commons met with objections from commentators who insisted that only forms of self-organised, collectively administered activity, independent of both markets and states, properly qualify as true commons. This is a misreading of history. The state has been integral to the constitution of the commons from the

outset. Disputes over access and use of the original agricultural commons in England were settled in the manorial courts. Grass-roots activity and activism in the urban commons depended on hard won legal rights to public assembly and protest and was supported by public resources. Marx would not have been able to develop the devastating critique of capitalism that played such a central role in the working-class movement without the reader's ticket giving him access to the unparalleled public collection of books and papers in the newly constructed reading room in the British Museum (Murdock 2018).

Ellen Goodman and Anne Chen's expansive definition of public service is useful here. As they note:

Sometimes public service media is produced by public broadcasters; sometimes by museums, libraries, and community groups; and sometimes by individual citizens. What [they] share is not membership in an organization but the principal mission of [...] improving lives as lived in particular communities and shared polities. To be clear, what is distinctive about this mission is that it eschews the agendas of profit-making (Goodman and Chen 2011, 86).

4.6. Enterprising Proposals: From the Digital Commons to Digital Space

The project of reimagining public service broadcasting as the central node in a network of digital connectivity, linking public cultural institutions together and providing resources and spaces for vernacular creativity, was pursued within the BBC by Tony Ageh, one of the prime movers in developing the BBC's successful catch-up service, iPlayer, following his appointment as the Corporation's Controller of Archive Development. His proposal for a Digital Public Space, sketched out in a series of speeches, overlapped in crucial respects with the idea of a digital commons but with one crucial difference.

It shared the same ambition to position the BBC as the central node in a network offering access to the full range of digital resources held by the major public cultural institutions. As

he explained to an audience at Royal Holloway, University of London, in February 2015.

In a nutshell, the ‘Digital Public Space’ is intended as a secure and universally accessible public sphere through which every person, regardless of age or income, ability or disability, can gain access to an ever growing library of permanently available media and data held on behalf of the public by our enduring institutions. Our museums and libraries; our public service broadcasters (all of them); our public archives; our government services. Every person in this country, whether adult or schoolchild, should be able to use the Digital Public Space [...] for research or for amusement, for discovery or for debate, for creative endeavour or simply for the pleasure of watching, listening or reading (Ageh 2015).

This central aim of democratising access to professionally assembled and curated public goods was accompanied by the commitment, also central to the idea of a digital commons, to provide an extended platform for vernacular expression and creativity. His proposed Digital Space, would, he argued “permit, encourage and even require contributions from the whole of our society [...] a place where the national Conversation thrives, where all contributions are welcomed, where every story, no matter who tells it, matters” (Ageh 2012).

As that expansive phrase “no matter who” suggests commercial providers were also welcome to contribute. As he explained: “I’m not excluding profit-making enterprises. [...] I [...] mean a Space that enables companies of every kind to build value, not just the few – contributing to the greater good of the UK as a whole” (Ageh 2012).

Extending hospitality to profit-generation marks a fundamental break with the idea of a digital commons which is defined precisely by its ambition to combine the moral economies of public goods and gifts to create a strong countervailing force to the progressive annexation of public culture by corporate interests, commodification and consumerism.

As mentioned at the outset, the continuing COVID-19 pandemic and the deepening climate and environmental crises have demonstrated that building the digital commons under current conditions now faces three major challenges: repairing deliberative democracy; countering hyper consumerism; and addressing the mounting social and environmental costs of the communications infrastructures and devices we currently rely on.

4.7. Digital Citizenship: Repairing Deliberative Democracy

Democratic politics depends on two fundamental rights: to a vote and to a voice. Elections to the legislative assemblies that devise and debate the laws governing collective life are spaced years apart. Deliberation on pressing issues is integrated into the flow of daily life across a range of locations. Some, from town meetings to meal time discussions take place face-to-face, others are organised on media platforms. Taken together, all the spaces where citizens assemble to talk about issues that affect them make up what Jurgen Habermas, in his landmark book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Habermas 1991) designates as the political public sphere. This is not an arena of debate where contenders with already set positions compete to win support. It is, in Habermas' influential conception, a space of deliberation that participants enter prepared to change their position when confronted with new evidence or superior argument. In deliberative fora rights to speak are matched by responsibilities to listen attentively, and in good faith, to rival claims. The aim is to arrive at provisional agreement on options for intervention and change.

Habermas' account of the public sphere's emergence in 18th century Britain presents London's coffee houses as pivotal nodes in an emerging network of deliberation. They offered access to the reportage and commentary in the collections of newspapers, pamphlets and journals of opinion they kept for customers combined with convivial spaces for discussion. They welcomed tradesmen

alongside landowners and members of the new bourgeoisie but excluded women and workers.

Discussions of Habermas' argument have tended to focus on the role of news and analysis in organising deliberation around political choices but he also emphasises the vital contribution of fiction and drama. Imaginative expression cultivates the essential ability to view the world from multiple perspectives. It also sparks contending interpretations and valuations that inevitably raise wider questions. As Habermas notes, "critical debate ignited by works of literature and art soon extended to include economic and political disputes" (Habermas 1991, 33).

COVID-19 and the accelerating climate crisis present fundamental choices that touch on every aspect of the ways we live now and might live in future. Addressing them, as citizens with shared responsibility for collective well-being, requires universal and equal entry to spaces hospitable to deliberation combined with access to comprehensive and accurate information on unfolding events; analysis of their underlying causes and likely consequences; and expressive forms that foster recognition, respect and empathy for those adversely affected by prevailing arrangements.

The digital commons, as I have sketched it here, has the potential to create contemporary coffeehouses without walls and social exclusions, combining access to the full range of imaginative and information resources that support effective participation with new spaces of encounter and deliberation. The resurgence of authoritarian populism invests this project with added urgency.

By the time the original German edition of Habermas' book appeared in 1962 he had already detected clear signs of a retreat from deliberation. Politicians, he argued, display a "showy pomp" and project an "aura of personal prestige and supernatural authority" reminiscent of feudal lords, and hereditary kings (Habermas 1991, 195). In place of "issue-oriented arguments" voters are presented with "calculated offers" designed "according to carefully investigated and experimentally tested 'psychological parameters'" that "call forth predictable reactions without placing any obligation whatever on the very persons who in this fashion

secure plebiscitary agreement” (Habermas 1991, 217). Donald Trump’s presidential campaign and time in the White House and the Brexit campaign in Britain lend these observations a remarkable prescience.

Authoritarian populism is the antithesis of deliberative democracy. It operates by erecting an absolute opposition between “the people” and those in positions of authority who seeks to denigrate them or do them down. Capitalist exploitation is deleted from this account since contemporary authoritarian populism champions neoliberal conceptions of “free” markets (see Murdock 2020b). Ire is directed instead at public servants who administer laws and regulations limiting individual choice and at intellectuals, and news media that question or fail to endorse foundational beliefs. Trump’s characterisation of the mainstream US media as “fake news” spoke to a generalised populist dismissal of dissent and the pursuit of uncomfortable truths. Faced with radical disagreement on the veracity of foundational information and evidence and a refusal to engage with alternative viewpoints deliberation became impossible.

Trump took full advantage of a US media landscape transformed by two key suspensions of regulation. In 1987 the Fairness Doctrine, introduced at the start of the television age in 1949 requiring broadcasters to provide a balance of viewpoints, was abolished opening the way for partisan channels. Rupert Murdoch’s Fox News, launched in 1996, proved the most effective. Tapping into the constituency mobilised by the Tea Party on the right of the Republican Party it provided Trump with a ready-made repertoire of populist themes and imagery and a welcoming platform with national reach. 1996 also saw the passing of Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act in the United States. This classified Internet platforms as neutral carriers, such as telephone networks, rather than publisher, like newspapers and broadcast channels, absolving them from editorial responsibility for content posted by users.

Taken together these two interventions created a self-reinforcing circuit of misinformation allowing unsubstantiated claims to move rapidly from the outer reaches of right of centre opinion to major Web sites and Fox News and on to President Trump and

senior figures in his administration, lending them renewed credence and circulation. During the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic a number of conspiracy theories purporting to reveal its “true” origins and purposes followed this trajectory attracting considerable support. They included variants of the claim that the virus was produced in the Wuhan virology laboratory and either leaked accidentally or purposely released (see Murdock 2021).

British broadcasting channels remain bound by statutory requirements to ensure that news is reported with due accuracy and impartiality but these rules allow discussion programmes to take partisan positions. The regulatory authority Ofcom has recently granted licences to two avowedly right-of-centre channels, UK TV operated by Rupert Murdoch, owner of Fox News and GB News two of whose major investors, John Malone and the Legatum Institute, have connection with major American right wing think tanks, the Cato Institute and the Koch Foundation, a leading supporter of climate change denialism (see Barnett and Petley 2021). As Ofcom’s head of standards and audience protection has noted, although both channels “are seeking to come from a right-of-centre perspective [...] there’s nothing in the code that prohibits a broadcaster from coming from a particular perspective” (quoted in Sherwin 2021).

Supporters of the channels see them pluralising provision by offering a platform to voices and positions that are disregarded or denigrated by the “liberal” consensus they see dominating mainstream media in general and the BBC in particular. Militant advocates of this perspective cast themselves as combatants in a “culture war” determined to ensure “that plurality of voices and freedom of speech are maintained [...] against a quasi-Marxist movement on the liberal left to snuff out conservatism” (Sunderland and Maddox 2021, 28). Breaking up the BBC “to allow different positions” with “different perspectives” into the marketplace is an essential first step (Sunderland and Maddox 2021, 38). This argument conveniently ignores the fact that two right-of-centre titles, the *Daily Mail* and Rupert Murdoch’s *Sun*, account for 44.7% of the daily newspaper market and have major web

presences and that the majority of other daily titles are right-leaning (Media Reform Coalition 2021, 5). Hardly a conservative culture on the verge of being “snuffed out”.

There is a pressing case for opening news and actuality programming to a wider range of voices but again, public service platforms offer a more egalitarian way forward than partisan commercialism. As Dan Hind has argued: “We can imagine an alternative structure for BBC news and current affairs, in which the people who pay for the BBC, the citizenry, are able to direct some share of the money they contribute to journalistic endeavours they support” with the “BBC’s online platform” making universal “the kinds of activity we currently associate with private sites like Kickstarter” (Hind 2015).

However, pluralising the provision of information and commentary is not enough in itself. It needs to be matched by renewed spaces of deliberation. The years following Habermas’ original account of the public sphere saw the emergence of a range of new social movements, including campaigns on the environment. Their success in forcing issues onto the political agenda persuaded him to revise his conception and argue that from “the perspective of democratic theory, the public sphere must [...] not only detect and identify problems [and] [...] furnish them with possible solutions, [but also] dramatize them in such a way that they are taken up and dealt with by parliamentary complexes” (Habermas 1996, 359). “In periods of mobilization” he added “the structures that actually support the authority of a critically engaged public begin to vibrate [and] the balance of power between civil society and the political system then shifts” (Habermas 1996, 379).

Reactions to the British government’s openness to introducing genetically modified (GM) crops and food offer an instructive case study of this shift in action and the challenges of organising effective public deliberation in a complex mediated environment. From 2000 onwards protestors destroyed crops growing in trial fields, dramatising the claimed risks of GM technology by dressing in decontamination suits or as The Grim Reaper, the Christian harbinger of death (Murdock 2004). In response

the government launched a month-long public debate, *GM Nation*, in June and July of 2003. Focus groups organised as deliberative fora and national and local meetings were supplemented by broadcast programmes examining the main positions in the debate. However, the formats employed left comparatively little space for contributions from the audience. An official Web site was opened for comments but research found that “the most extensively used site was the BBC Science message board attracting “a considerable volume of contributions across a wide range of GM-related issues” (Horlick-Jones et al. 2007, 157). However, possible ways of connecting live, broadcast and Web-based fora remained unexplored. This neglect has been repeated with recent interventions around the climate emergency.

In November 2018, British supporters of Extinction Rebellion (XR), the international movement campaigning for urgent action on the climate emergency and species extinction, blockaded five major bridges across the Thames in London bringing traffic to a halt. The numerous professionals and pensioners involved made the protests difficult to dismiss. As research on participants concluded; “XR’s strength has been to create a new public agency amongst people who are not ‘natural’ protesters [...] but who were already persuaded of the rightness of the climate cause, and frustrated with the inability of ‘politics as usual’ to bring about the kind of transformative political change that the climate emergency demands” (Saunders, Doherty and Hayes 2020, 2).

Following 11 days of protest, on 1 May 2019, the Westminster parliament endorsed Extinction Rebellion’s demand, tabled by the then leader of the Labour Party Jeremy Corbyn for the country to declare a state of environmental and climate emergency. In January 2020, the government acceded to another of XR’s core demands, for “A Citizens’ Assembly” to provide “us, the people, with a way to decide what’s best for our future, even if that requires radical changes in the present [...] because they are informed and democratic, the Citizens’ Assembly’s decisions will provide [...] public pressure for politicians to set aside the usual politicking and do the right thing” (Extinction Rebellion UK 2021).

A representative sample of 108 members of the general population was recruited to participate in intensive weekend meetings during which they were provided with comprehensive and authoritative information and asked to evaluate options for action and decide on priorities for meeting the government's legally binding commitment to reach net zero emissions by 2050. The process demonstrated the practical viability of Habermas's ideal model of a deliberative public sphere confirming that "amid often polarised political debate, ordinary people were able to judge evidence and ideas against their own experiences [arriving] at judgements that balanced competing values, such as freedom of choice and fairness to different social groups (Smith 2020).

Speakers' presentations to the Assembly were live streamed and, together with other resources, made openly available on the Assembly's website (see <https://www.climateassembly.uk/resources/index.html>) but there was no concerted attempt to direct users to them or to convene wider public discussion on the issues under discussion.

Mobilising these possibilities points once again to the pivotal role of public broadcasting in organising popular participation. Christian Fuchs has pointed to the *Club 2* format developed by the Austrian public broadcaster ORF as one possible starting point. Running for almost two decades, between 1976 and 1995, and later taken up by Channel 4 in the UK as *After Dark* and briefly revived by the BBC in 2003, the format reproduced the intimacy of discussion around a dinner table. Between four and eight people with differing positions and experiences gathered in a comfortable room to explore the issues raised by a contentious topic. Discussion was live with no audience to play to and no set time limit, finishing when participants decided. Fuchs proposes to integrate this format with the participatory possibilities offered by the Internet. The live broadcast would run alongside an invitation to audience members to post their response as short videos on a public service video platform. A selection of these would then be incorporated into the programme at regular intervals contributing to the studio discussion (Fuchs 2021, 14–16).

Faced with the urgency of the climate and environmental crises and the scale of the political choices they pose finding new ways of encouraging public participation must be at the core of public broadcasting's response. Another possibility is for public broadcasters to host a series of citizens' assemblies on issues directly relevant to everyday life starting with food, housing, transport, clothes and digital devices. These would follow the established pattern of informing discussion by presenting the range of relevant research and knowledge on the environmental and social impacts and harms of current practices and the actions currently being taken, or not taken, to address them. These professionally filmed contributions would be broadcast and posted on catch-up channels but deliberation would take place online. Inviting contributions from anyone who wishes to comment however, immediately raises the question of how to avoid the abuse generated by polarised positions familiar from commercialised platforms.

An alternative is offered by the Polis software programme. Developed in Seattle in the wake of the Occupy Wall Street, to replicate the movement's openness in searching for collective agreement, it has been adopted in Taiwan where it is integrated into political decision-making. Users are invited to respond to statements posted by others by registering whether they "agree", "disagree" or "pass" and to contribute their own questions and ideas. There is no reply facility so no opportunity to insult or demean. Instead machine learning constructs a visual map of emerging clusters of opinion giving greater prominence to statements that secure support across clusters. As Audrey Tang, a former hacker, who pioneered the integration of digital systems into Taiwan's political decision-making has noted:

[Social media] mostly divides people. But the same technology can also be designed in a way that allows people to converge and form a polity. People compete to bring up the most nuanced statements that can win most people across [...] rather than going down a rabbit hole on a particular issue [...] Invariably, within three weeks or four, we always find a shape where most people agree on most of the statements (quoted in Miller 2019).

Ideas and concerns expressed on Polis are regularly responded to by politicians and scholars on the broadcast talk show *Talk To Taiwan*. In December 2018, Extinction Rebellion called on the BBC to make “the severity of the climate and ecological emergency, and the urgent action needed to address it” and enable “the transformative change” required its “top editorial and corporate responsibility” (Farrell 2018). The BBC’s central role in addressing the current emergencies arises from its unique position as the only major broadcast channel with universal reach, funded out of public money, and anchored in an ideal of shared citizenship and responsibility. In contrast, advertising funded broadcast and Internet platforms are fuelling a culture of hyperconsumerism that undermines responsibility for the collective good and actively conceals the ecological and human costs of everyday commodities and the need for transformative change.

4.8. Destructive Desires: Digital Connectivity and Hyperconsumerism

Politics in Britain, in the years between 1945 and 1975, was marked by an increasing tension between the social contract of citizenship and the promise of personal pleasure and convenience delivered by an expanding consumer culture. Rising real incomes allowed increasing numbers of households to acquire major items: refrigerators, washing machines, television sets, and cars. They were expected to last for some years, to be “durable”. Faults were fixed by local mechanics and repair shops. Replacement was relatively infrequent.

By the mid 1970s mass consumption of “big ticket” items had reached a limit point. There were pockets of dynamism, most notably in the more fashion-oriented youth market, but elsewhere expansion was slowing down feeding into the structural crisis of advanced capitalism that was gathering momentum. One response to regenerating growth was to create new markets by privatising public assets. The other was to intensify and accelerate consumption cycles by encouraging people to consume more, more often,

and to throw items away and replace them more quickly. Like hyperactivity this new regime of hyperconsumption is characterised by constant movement with major consequences for climate and earth systems.

Damage has been gathering momentum since the beginning of industrialisation in the late 18th century. Increasing reliance on the energy released by the compacted carbon stored in fossil fuels, initially coal and later oil and gas has resulted in steadily accumulating emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂), the main greenhouse gas contributing to global warming and climate disruption. The capitalisation of agriculture and food production and the resulting increase in “deforestation, and intensive animal husbandry, especially cattle holding” have also made significant contributions to levels of both CO₂ and the methane discharged by farm animals, the second major greenhouse gas (Crutzen and Steffen 2003, 252). But the years of neoliberal ascendancy have witnessed a sharp acceleration, prompting researchers to identify the period since 1970 as “decisive in further deepening human influence on the climate” (Gaffney and Steffen 2017, 4). The normalisation of hyperconsumption is a major contributory factor.

Britain was the first major European country to introduce advertising funded terrestrial television services with the launch of the ITV network in the mid 1950s. Every innovation since then has been organised on a commercial basis. New cable and satellite channels have created major additional promotional spaces but the primary impetus driving hyperconsumption has come from the mass adoption of digital devices.

The business model devised by the dominant Internet platforms, Facebook and Google, trading unpaid access in return for monopoly ownership of the personal data users generate as they navigate Web sites and apps, has massively extended opportunities for advertising and marketing. The increasingly sophisticated machine mining of user data to identify micro markets allows promotional appeals to be targeted with unprecedented precision. The relative lack of regulation has opened space for new forms of promotion. Advertising is no longer an identifiable persuasive

intervention, clearly demarcated from the editorial and expressive content that surrounds it. Commodities, logos and promotional messages are seamlessly integrated into narratives, conversations and presentations. Advergaming produced by corporations for children and young “influencers” paid to talk about products have been added to the established techniques of sponsorship and product placement to insert commodities and consumption ever more securely at the centre of everyday communication. The gap between desire and acquisition has been progressively closed by the rapid expansion of contactless payment. Instantly registering purchases using a smartphone abolishes the time available for reconsideration provided by the need to count out cash or insert a credit card and pin number.

Consumer culture has always presented market choices as the primary guarantors of enhanced convenience and pleasure and the preeminent arenas of self-expression. It has always championed possessive individualism over the collective contract of citizenship. Hyperconsumerism retains this defining orientation but places renewed emphasis on the need to take advantage of innovations immediately they become available. It requires continual migration to the latest versions of favoured products and the adoption of new ones. It projects attention relentlessly forwards, to the benefits and pleasures of possession and use. The social and environmental damage embedded in the chain of production remain invisible and unremarked.

Promotional campaigns around smart phones have played a key role in normalising hyperconsumerism. Their basic functions have remained the same but rising sales have been driven by a continual stream of minor modifications: larger, brighter screens, fingerprint recognition security, more versatile camera facilities, bendable casing – exhortations to upgrade have been underwritten by compulsion. Previous models resist repair and installed software is no longer supported. The emphasis on replacement and novelty positions existing models as never entirely satisfying, always incomplete, and deficient in ways that the next iteration promises to address.

The human and environmental costs of hyperconsumerism are demonstrated with particular clarity, however, by the chain of connections linking fast foods to pandemic diseases and health risks and deforestation.

4.9. Corona Connections: Forests, Fast Foods and Fatalities

“What kind of times are they and when/A talk about trees is almost a crime/Because it implies silence about so many horrors?”

Bertold Brecht ‘To Those Born Later’, 1939

(Brecht 1976, 318)

The period of neoliberal ascendancy has seen a marked change in diets. Fast foods, ready-made meals and processed foods, high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) have become staples. These “junk foods” combine low nutritional value with additives designed make them addictive. They are quintessential exemplars of hyperconsumption. They are never entirely satisfying. There is always the impetus to reach for the next one, the exhortation to try new flavours or novel combinations. Their proven contribution to rising rates of childhood obesity and increased risks of later chronic health conditions has prompted the British government to propose extending the present ban on junk food advertising on children’s television to all broadcasts before 9 p.m. and all online content where more than 25% of the audience are younger than 16 years.

A US study of the five most watched YouTube channels featuring child influencers (aged between 3 and 14 years) found that promotions for food and drink were viewed one billion times with McDonalds featuring in more than 90 of postings (Airuwaily et al 2020). Fast foods also appear prominently in advergames with US research recording a million children playing them over the course of a month with measurable gains in their consumption of junk meals and snacks (Orciari 2012). As the British government’s initial consultation document conceded, however, the lack of independent audience measurement and the proliferation of

promotional forms makes effective policing of online content virtually impossible. As they note; “the complexity of the online advertising landscape, which incorporates content which has the effect of advertising (e.g. influencers), as well as more traditional forms of advertising such as banner or video ads” produces a “near limitless advertising inventory with low barriers to entry” making “the task of effective monitoring [...] more difficult” (Gov UK 2019, 11).

As this admission confirms, regulation, however organised, cannot deliver communicative spaces open to a comprehensive range of perspectives and ways of seeing. The urgent need for a digital commons as a robust alternative is pointedly illustrated by the wider social and environmental harms associated with fast and convenience foods.

Their rapid expansion has required significant increases in meat production for beef burgers and chicken pieces, in soya for animal feed, and in palm oil, used in a wide range of foods from pizza dough and instant noodles to chocolate and ice cream (World Wildlife Fund 2021). To meet these demands increasing areas of the world’s forest have been cleared for livestock and poultry farming and plantations. The consumption habits of each resident in the G7 group of rich countries is estimated to require the felling of 3.9 trees a year (Hoang and Kanemoto 2021). This loss is escalating. In the 12 months between 2019 and 2020 primary rain forest destruction increased by 12% eradicating a total area the size of the Netherlands (Global Forest Watch 2021). Forest cover provides a vital carbon sink that absorbs CO₂. Its progressive clearance intensifies the climate emergency. Its cumulative loss also erodes vital biodiversity and accelerates species extinction while significantly increasing the risks of animal borne, zoonotic, pandemic diseases.

The origins of COVID-19 remain open to dispute but the likeliest explanation on current evidence remains transmission from bats to intermediate animal hosts to human, a chain of connections followed by the two other recent coronavirus pandemics, MERS and SARS (Afelt, Frutos and Devaux 2018). Destroying forest

habitats and erecting new residential and infrastructure complexes on cleared land significantly increases the chances of contact between displaced species, people and their domestic animals. As the leading authorities on zoonotic transmission point out:

Rampant deforestation, uncontrolled expansion of agriculture, intensive farming, mining and infrastructure development [...] have created a ‘perfect storm’ for the spillover of diseases from wildlife to people [...] a virus that once circulated harmlessly among a species of bats in Southeast Asia has now infected almost 3 million people, brought untold human suffering and halted economies and societies around the world (Settele et al. 2020).

Commercialised communication severs these links. Time set aside for advertising in every broadcast hour is time denied to other voices, ensuring that commercial speech is ubiquitous and insistent. The orchestrated integration of branded commodities into dramas, conversations and games through paid product placements constrains expressive choices. Sponsors and advertisers seek “positive selling environments”. Burgers, French fries and chicken nuggets unfailingly appear in brightly lit interiors and convivial social settings. Devastated forests, dispossessed peoples and displaced wildlife are confined to darkness and silence. The conclusion is clear but continually avoided or denied. Comprehensive engagement with the most pressing issues of our time requires communicative spaces free from the pressures of product promotion and hyperconsumerism and open to critical explorations of all the ways we live now, the social and environmental harms these may entail, and how these might be addressed. Public service provision, reimagined and reconstructed as a digital commons, is indispensable.

This project poses a number of urgent practical choices around financing, organisation and control but it also points to a fundamental underlying tension. The digital commons cannot simply piggyback on the existing array of communication infrastructures and devices since the processes involved in their production, operation, use and disposal are themselves making substantial contributions to carbon emissions and the climate emergency.

4.10. Breaking the Chain: Countering Climate Crisis

Countering the role of commercially saturated broadcast and Internet platforms in promoting a culture of ecologically damaging hyperconsumption remains an essential task but proposals for intervention must avoid privatising responsibility by focusing too concertedly on personal choices. A comprehensive approach to tackling the climate and environmental emergencies must also address the carbon emissions generated by the infrastructures and devices produced and deployed by communication corporations and organisations, including public service broadcasting and digital communing.

The range and reach of digital technologies have expanded rapidly over the last two decades with the increasing take-up of multifunction smart phones, the introduction of digital personal assistants, the shift to video streaming and the expansion of the internet of things. One recent estimate predicts that by 2030 communications technologies as a whole will account for 51% of global electricity demand and 23% of total greenhouse gases (see Andrae and Edler 2015). Public institutions, committed to enhancing the quality of collective life have a particular responsibility to lead by example and move towards eradicating their emissions. As the BBC's 2018 manifesto for sustainability, *Greener Broadcasting*, noted: Since “[e]nvironmental issues affect us all [...] as a publicly funded organisation we have a responsibility to act to limit our impact” (British Broadcasting Corporation 2018, 4).

The Corporation has pursued this project in a series of initiatives. Its landmark software, *Albert*, introduced in 2011, enabling production teams to calculate their carbon footprint from pre- to postproduction is now mandatory for all programmes. Adopted by BAFTA it has become the industry standard, widely used by commercial operators, including Netflix. Commitments to decarbonisation were extended in 2017 with the *Creative Energy* initiative, enabling production companies to switch to suppliers offering energy from 100% renewable sources, followed in 2019 by the *Green Rider* project encouraging a range of practical shifts, from plant-based catering to low-energy lighting. Minimising emissions

and pollution at the point of use while absolutely necessary is not sufficient. A comprehensive approach must also take account of the carbon generated by the prior chain of production.

Between 1990 and 2016, with the reorientation of the economy around services and the growth in renewable energy, greenhouse gases generated within Britain's territorial borders dropped by 41%. Because Britain had outsourced its emissions along with its manufacturing capacity the country's overall carbon footprint only fell by 15%, however. Increasing reliance on production in the low-wage economies opened up by market-led globalisation has meant that 46% of the total carbon emissions embodied in imported manufactured goods have been generated before they arrive in the country (World Wildlife Fund 2020). By 2007 the UK was the largest net importer of CO₂ among the G7 economies, with emissions per head rising from 1.7 tonnes in 1992 to 5.1 tonnes (Office of National Statistics 2019). The greatest volume of imports were products of China's coal-driven industrialisation. By 2018, China had overtaken the United States as the world's leading emitter of CO₂ (Union of Concerned Scientists 2020). By 2019, telecommunications equipment made up 16% of Britain's imports from China, the largest single category (House of Commons Library 2020, 8). Research suggests that emissions embodied in digital products are considerably higher than the average for manufactured goods as a whole. Apple suppliers of the iconic iPhone that are heavily reliant on Chinese labour calculate that 77% of the carbon footprint of their devices is generated "offshore" (Compare and Recycle Blog 2020).

Figures for embodied carbon conceal an extended trail of environmental destruction and social exploitation. Indigenous peoples dispossessed by corporations commandeering land and raw materials. Child miners scavenging for essential minerals in unsafe open cast pits. Young women working in regimented assembly plants. Mariners on container ships flying flags of convenience with minimal safety provisions. Insecurely employed van drivers delivering them to retail outlets.

Public Service Media must break this chain by switching to technologies that avoid environmental and social harms. The

Fairphone, committed to responsible material sourcing, workers' welfare and rights to repair, has provided a counter to the standard smartphone for some time and has recently joined with a range of partners to develop FairTEC, "an alternative ecosystem that addresses numerous parts of the smartphone value chain from the hardware to the operating system, from the network to its business model" (Fairphone 2021).

The BBC has a long history of pioneering technological innovation from the radiophonic workshop's contribution to the development of electronic music to the iPlayer and the Corporation's decisive role in pioneering popular computer use in Britain. In addition to broadcast programming the computer literacy project, which ran between 1979 and 1983, supported the production of a specially commissioned microcomputer, manufactured by Acorn, and a pioneering programming language BASIC (Beginners All Purpose Symbolic Instruction Code). The project was a huge success with Acorn computers becoming the de facto standard in British schools and pupils learning to write their own programs.

Since 2018 the Corporation's Research and Development Department has been working with the open software provider Mozilla, the Open Data Institute and other organisations "concerned about the public good", to revisit the central backbone of digital communication and explore how "today's internet can be re-imagined, changed, or perhaps even re-invented in ways that better support the delivery of public benefits and reduce its potential for harm" (BBC R&D 2021). As Rachel Coldicutt, who was involved in the early development of the BBC's Web site has argued, however, intervention is not simply a matter of tinkering with the technologies. It must be based on a clear "definition of what good technology and responsible innovation look like", securely anchored in a refusal to follow "big business and think back to the social contract" (Coldicutt 2019). As I have argued, under conditions of global pandemic and climate and ecological crisis this contract extends beyond national borders to recognise a general duty of care for the lives of the strangers and environments that support our conditions of life.

This commitment necessarily involves engaging with the emerging technologies that will shape the future digital landscape. It was public investment that funded the risky foundational research that produced the initial wave of core digital technologies including the Internet, global positioning and touch screen navigation. They were only taken up by private entrepreneurs once they proved viable. As Mariana Mazzucato has pointed out, Apple's iPods, iPhones and iPads have appropriated and capitalised on clusters of "technologies that the State sowed, cultivated and ripened" at public expense but have returned only minimal payments to the public purse (Mazzucato 2018, 182).

Involvement in fundamental research is essential. The choice of avenues to explore the purposes envisaged and images of the eventual users are written into projects from the outset, marginalising alternatives and limiting later options. Innovative technologies designed to advance public service ideals require public service engagement in fundamental research into every area, from alternative materials, to design and reuse. Proposals to raise the minimum rate of corporation tax and compel the major digital platforms to pay tax in the countries they operate in, rather than in the locations they are registered in, would generate substantial sums that could be directed to funding public research.

It could also be used to address structural problems of digital exclusion. As mentioned earlier, the COVID-19 pandemic has thrown a harsh light on the disconnection of substantial sections of Britain poorest households. Many elderly citizens are also excluded. More than half (51%) of over 75s and 30% of those aged between 65 and 74 have no home access to a computer, compared to only 2% of those between 16 and 24 (Ofcom 2020c, 10). During the pandemic those lacking access have been doubly disconnected: from personal contact and digital networks. The closure of public libraries and community centres has locked down shared facilities. These inequalities have far-reaching social impacts. Children in poor families without a computer have been unable to access the online learning resources that have replaced teaching in schools while buildings have been shut for long periods. Missing months of education will further widen existing class inequalities

in educational achievement confirming the exclusion of the poor from occupations requiring approved qualifications. Adults being unable to maintain social contacts remotely has compounded the sense of isolation during lockdowns fuelling rising rates of depression and mental illness.

The digital commons can never be a true commons if current levels of digital exclusion continue. The principal barrier remains the cost of both broadband connectivity and access to a home computer. One option is to redefine connectivity as a public utility, an essential support for a decent quality of life, like clean water and electricity, funded out of taxation. Free access to public broadcasting could be combined with free access to the broadband connection needed to access the wealth of public resources provided by the digital commons in a new composite connectivity payment. How this might be organised will require careful discussion.

Another option for universalising access to home computing is to introduce a public rental system requiring a minimal payment or no payment at all for those on benefits.

4.11. For a Liveable Future

In his 2018 memorial lecture for Hugh Cudlipp, the legendary editor of the *Daily Mirror*, James Harding argued that we have arrived at a decisive moment of choice in the way we use media technology. In the early days of broadcasting debate centred on how best to organise the then revolutionary communicative potential of radio. Contemporary debate is focussed on the Internet. The answer he argues, now, as then, is strong public service provision.

“I know how annoying the BBC can be. But if the BBC hadn’t been created in 1922 to ensure the enormous power of radio was used to give the best of everything to everyone, today you’d create the BDC – the British Digital Corporation – to serve, just the same, the public good in the internet age. If we want to strengthen the system of freedom and choice, both in our country and around the world, we should strengthen the BBC” (Harding 2018).

Coming from a former Head of BBC News, this can easily be dismissed as special pleading but the general case for Public Service Media commands increasing support. Jeremy Corbyn, while still leader of the Labour Party, enthusiastically supported the idea of a British Digital Corporation, but mistakenly presented it as a separate “sister” organisation to the BBC, when Harding had clearly intended it as an extension and reinvention of the Corporation. Corbyn’s sketch for the BDC however incorporates key elements of the digital commons as outlined here.

[...] one of the more ambitious ideas I’ve heard is to set up a publicly owned British Digital Corporation as a sister organisation to the BBC. A BDC could develop new technology for online decision making and audience-led commissioning of programmes and even a public social media platform with real privacy and public control over the data [...] It could become the access point for public knowledge, information and content currently held in the BBC archives, the British Library and the British Museum (Corbyn 2018).

The idea of starting afresh, with a new institution for altered times, is attractive but mistaken. Any new proposal for public funding would be caught in the same crossfire of economic and political pressures that has systematically eroded public cultural provision over three decades. Democratising the BBC’s forms of governance and accountability, strengthening its insulation from political pressure and guaranteeing an appropriate level of funding, remain issues of contention requiring urgent attention but as the core public service broadcaster it offers the best available starting point for a digital commons, for five main reasons:

- *Firstly*, it is already integrated into everyday life as a familiar presence which continues to command high levels of trust.
- *Secondly*, it produces an unprecedented range of programming, local as well as national, for radio as well as television, tackling a huge range of topics, and employing a diversity of expressive forms.

- *Thirdly*, as I discovered growing up, programmes often spark an interest in knowing more. Digital connectivity allows programs to move from being events to becoming gateways, linked to a continually expanding global wealth of professional and vernacular online resources and spaces of encounter, freely accessible without the need to travel.
- *Fourthly*, the hostile caricature of the corporation as a remnant of a by-gone age ill adapted to a rapidly changing technological environment is comprehensively contradicted by its long record of innovation. Its recent ventures beyond broadcasting, the iPlayer, the Web site and podcasts, are all widely used.
- *Fifthly*, from the Domesday project to Open Door and Video Dairies the BBC has pioneered ways of using new technologies to create universally available spaces for vernacular expression, establishing a tradition that can be reinvigorated.

Neoliberal economics and authoritarian populist politics have combined to ignore and discredit these arguments in favour of promoting profit-seeking alternatives. The mounting social, economic and environmental costs imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the accelerating climate and environmental crises force us to confront the role of commercialised media in fuelling current emergencies. When we do we see that their assertive promotion of hyperconsumerism and their continuing reliance on socially and environmentally destructive chains of production are intensifying problems rather than providing solutions.

Critics of public broadcasting repeatedly point to declining youth audiences as proof of its future irrelevance. Continuing youthful support for urgent climate action, inspired by the school strikes and Fridays for Future movements, points in another direction. The present moment of global pandemic and environmental crisis offers an unprecedented chance to engage young people by curating open and participatory explorations of the challenges facing us and shaping their futures, based on an ethos of collective care for planetary resources and the lives of others. We urgently need to build the digital commons, not only to reinvigorate the ideals and practice of public service, but as an essential contribution to a liveable future.

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CHAPTER 5

The Future of Public Service Media and the Internet

Alessandro D'Arma, Christian Fuchs, Minna Horowitz
and Klaus Unterberger

5.1. Crisis and Utopia

We are at a crossroads. Society is in a crisis. The Internet is in a crisis. Public Service Media are in a crisis. In crises, the future is uncertain. We face the prospects for both great problems and great opportunities. There are potentials both for a brighter and a darker future. **This Manifesto is a manifesto for saving and advancing democracy, democratic communications and a public service Internet.** We are asking the public to join in the quest for the renewal of Public Service Media in the 21st century and the creation of a Public Service Internet.

The idea was simple and changed everything: Media for everybody. Independent. A trusted source of information. In Great

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Britain, public service broadcasting stimulated this idea at the beginning of the 20th century. More than twenty years later after the devastations caused by the Second World War, the idea reemerged in Germany where it helped in restoring democracy. Public service broadcasting helped creating the backbone of the **public sphere and quality journalism**.

In 2021, the world suffers from a global pandemic. Alarming scenarios of climate change, social crisis, fragmentation and polarisation affect humanity severely. Digital technologies' dominant forms and uses are destroying traditional media structures. The current crisis endangers the social basis of our democracies, including the established infrastructures of PSM. Neoliberalism and authoritarianism might result in a truly **dystopian scenario for PSM's future**. We need utopias as alternatives. We need to renew Public Service Media and realise the utopia of creating a Public Service Internet.

The Way Forward

The **Internet and the media landscape are broken**. The dominant Internet platforms have broken democracy. They have harmed citizens, users, everyday life and society. Digital giants such as Apple, Alphabet/Google Microsoft, Amazon, Alibaba and Facebook form monopolies whose tremendous economic, political and cultural power colonises the world. The Internet and the media are today dominated by commerce, digital surveillance, targeted and personalised advertisements, fragmented online publics, filter bubbles; the lack of human listening, engagement and meaningful debate; a highly individualistic attention economy where a few influencers dominate visibility and voice, false news, post-factual politics, authoritarianism; online hatred in the form of digital fascism, right-wing extremism, racism and conspiracy theories that spread on the Internet and social media; algorithmic politics where bots try to control political communication and so on. The Internet has become a network that separates and divides instead of bringing together humanity. The Internet has become a threat to democracy. We are convinced that we urgently need

an alternative Internet to save democracy and humanity from its own demise.

We have a dream. **We dream of a revitalisation and renewal of Public Service Media.** Public Service Media that are fit for the 21st century. We dream of a different Internet and a different media landscape. We dream of a concrete utopia that could be realised already tomorrow when enough people demand such an alternative. We dream of a Public Service Internet. An Internet that serves the public. An Internet of the public, by the public, and for the public. An Internet that advances instead of threatens democracy and the public sphere. The Public Service Internet is best realised by PSM that operate a variety of Internet platforms. The Public Service Internet consists of Public Service Media platforms. Whereas corporate Internet platforms primarily promote their owners' profits, Public Service Internet platforms promote public purposes. Public Service Internet platforms take the public service remit into the digital age. Public Service Internet platforms advance democracy, citizenship, civil society, education, learning, information, creativity, participation, political understanding and communication as well as entertainment on and through the Internet. They take the Internet to the next level and form a future-oriented Internet that enhances the public sphere.

It is time that we put this dream of a Public Service Internet and revitalised Public Service Media into reality. The realisation of a Public Service Internet and the renewal of PSM are urgent. Because it is urgent that we save democracy and the public sphere. While the contemporary Internet and the contemporary media landscape are dominated by monopolies and commerce, the **Public Service Internet and Public Service Media serve democracy.**

5.2. PSM's Challenges

Public Service Media (PSM) currently faces many challenges. The rise of global digital platforms and the COVID-19 pandemic crisis have created new ones and exacerbated some of the old ones. PSM faces societal challenges as well as internal obstacles.

PSM and Society's Big Challenges

PSM's old mission of informing, educating, and entertaining remains as relevant as ever. During the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, a huge number of individuals turned to PSM for these purposes. PSM is the best available media platform for addressing society's big challenges. There are three major challenges society faces.

1. *Platform capitalism and the promotion of unsustainable hyper-consumerism:*

The dominant online platforms are massive engines of **product promotion** fuelling a culture of **unsustainable hyperconsumption**. They act as digital monopolies that exploit digital labour and try to manipulate consumers. It is essential to maintain a strong Public Service Media presence at the centre of public culture that does not address and package people primarily as consumers but as citizens. PSM play a key role in this context

2. *The destruction of deliberation, the public sphere and democracy:*

A key task for PSM is to restore a functioning public sphere. **Deliberation, the public sphere, and democracy are today eroded, colonised, and undermined** by algorithmic- and data-driven commercial digital platforms, ultra-partisan unregulated news media outlets, false news, surveillance society, far-right, authoritarian and nationalist ideology, a highly accelerated and tabloidized attention economy where the power of voice, communication and visibility is asymmetrically distributed, the lack of time and space for debate, individualism, post-truth politics, automated algorithmic politics, and fragmented publics that have created filter bubbles.

3. *An accelerating climate crisis and periodic pandemics linked to environmental degradation:*

PSM have a responsibility and an opportunity to deliver accurate and accountable information on **environmental and social sustainability**, which can help to establish better awareness. PSM should distinguish themselves from the commercial media by being the first to develop a strategy to reduce emissions and energy consumption, aiming to increase the use of green energy sources.

While PSM are best placed for addressing society's big challenges, at the same time they also face a number of external challenges that threaten their position. Next, we are listing some of them.

The rise of far-right parties:

In recent years, far-right parties and groups have vocally accusing PSM of editorial bias and waste and have questioned the existence of both the licence fee and PSM as such. PSM and the public should vividly reject attempts to destroy the independence of PSM and their journalists.

Regulatory constraints:

In a neoliberal environment, PSM organisations are often subject to regulatory constraints to technical innovation and to the development of their online services.

Changing media habits, especially among young people:

PSM experienced an upsurge in viewing during the COVID-19 crisis, though the longer-term trend has been one of falling viewership. In particular, PSM are struggling to engage and retain younger audiences whose screen time is increasingly devoted to types of content other than traditional “mass media” genres, including e-sport, short videos on TikTok, Snapchat and Twitch, influencer- and user-generated content on YouTube and Instagram, as well as on-demand content from streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Apple TV/Music and Spotify.

Digital platforms:

PSM compete in global markets. They face a kind of “total” competition by super-dominant global tech. These digital giants can buy up any production company, premium rights, writers etc. They control existing and future gateways to the audience. Some are barely regulated. It is a key question to what extent PSM should develop their own platforms or use existing capitalist platforms. Should PSM compete or co-operate with commercial streaming, video, music and social media platforms? Take podcasts for example: should PSM use Spotify’s proprietary podcasting service to reach more listeners? And/or should PSM build their own platforms?

Commercialisation:

The dominance of commercialisation poses a clear threat for PSM organisations. There have been PSM operations to be downsized

in the name of market freedom and efficiency. Such calls have been backed by commercial broadcasters and newspaper publishers claiming that PSM organisations distort competition and “steal” viewers and paying customers with their free services.

Declining funding:

Often, the political unwillingness to endow PSM organisations with adequate funding makes it very hard for them to innovate, attract on- and off-screen talent and compete with the giant global digital platforms and transnational media corporations that have much deeper pockets. The level of resources available is a key determinant for PSM’s ability to change and innovate.

Internal Obstacles:

Internal bureaucracy and a conservative mindset:

In big organisations, there is often resistance to change. **Bureaucracy** tends to slow down any process of innovation. As big organisations, PSM themselves are often seen as fairly conservative organisations. For example, technically oriented PS personnel often needs to invest considerably in convincing senior management that the projects they pursue are worthwhile. There is a lot of focus on “legacy” products that are overall (still) popular but not attractive to young people.

Lack of workforce diversity:

The lack of sociodemographic **diversity** in PSM organisations, in terms of class, gender, age and ethnicity of its personnel, translates into a lack of diversity in on-screen representations, voice and opinion.

Skills deficit:

The **skills needed for equipping PSM to transform themselves into platforms and networks** fit for the 21st century, are scarce. The workforce holding these skills is difficult to retain because it often has far more lucrative job offers in the private sector. Often, PSMs lack of technical in-house expertise is a serious obstacle to innovation. Attracting new and dynamic talent in the face of declining funding and growing competition is a real challenge for the future.

5.3. PSM-Visions

The COVID-19 crisis has shown that PSM are a trusted source of objective and impartial information; a reliable provider of high quality and cultural content; a guardian of pluralistic and minority views; and, above all, a reference point in times of crisis. The way for PSM to survive is to strengthen its core mission and to update the means by which it brings that mission to life:

- PSM must promote **equality** in all possible ways;
- PSM must provide **opportunities for participation**;
- PSM must be the trailblazer of **new content and services** and not a conservative maintainer of established content and services;
- The survival of PSM is based on **understanding the environment we are living in and new partnerships**.

PSM must promote equality in all possible ways.

Throughout its history, PSMs have managed to turn the tide on urgent social issues such as gender representation. PSM should give opportunities to new and underrepresented genres and creators. It is equally important to guarantee equality within PSM organisations as well as in their contents and services.

PSM must fight information inequality and provide universal access offline and online.

PSM must remain a vital source of social, ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. In order to produce a service for all members of society it has to be relevant for all. This is why PSM also has to address fragmented parts of society, like less educated individuals and minorities of all kind.

PSM must represent diversity to stay relevant for society as a whole.

PSM must protect its independence.

In the midst of an overwhelming flood of news and messages in the global internet, PSM should insist on its accountability. In order to be a credible and trusted source of information, PSM's independence from governmental as well as business interests is crucial. Editorial and ethical guidelines and the protection of the

rights of journalists are needed to safeguard the accountability of PSM's role as independent news provider.

PSM must reject commercial requests that it should become a niche provider.

Just like in the past, also in the digital future, entertainment and sport events will form important elements of society and the public sphere. The way we live, what we appreciate, the way we suffer or laugh, how we compete in sport events, and the emotional side of individual and social life, should not be limited to a business model for the commercial broadcasting sector. In order to connect with all members of society and all layers of individual and civic life, PSM should use all means of communication including entertainment formats and sports events. Such programmes should be produced based on high-quality criteria and standards.

PSM must provide opportunities for participation.

There is a long history of participatory budgeting and collaborative production. PSM can adapt and further develop the most successful forms of participation and engagement so that PSM audiences to become involved in creating content and services and turn from mere consumers into active, producing consumers (“prosumers”). Instead of the obscure, opaque, dark algorithms used by YouTube, Google, Facebook, public service algorithms should in a transparent manner shape PSM's schedules, contents, and services.

PSM must be the trailblazer of new content and services and not a conservative maintainer of established content and services.

In terms of datafication, automation and AI in the newsroom, PSM should strive for singularity of purpose, interdisciplinary teams all over the news outlet, and flexible newsrooms structures, and the representation of user needs. All these have to be accompanied by a long-term strategy.

PSM must increase its production so that there is more room for educational, informational and children's programmes, content

and genres. PSM must dare to produce and be allowed to produce and provide more thorough, time consuming, critical content. It should not have to compete for clickbait and attention for sensationalism.

PSM should offer alternative nodes for news, interaction and entertainment. It should actively define new values to resist current models of datafication on commercial platforms. PSM could define new values together with civil society groups and not-for-profit communities that have already created relevant principles and practices.

The survival of PSM is based on understanding the environment we are living in and new partnerships.

There is a need for a common public arena for common identity-building and connection-building. This PSM environment must be based on a new understanding of how democracy works and the changes of democracy in the context of digitalisation and the climate, health and political crises.

PSM requires stable and adequate funding; investment in news, information and high-quality content; and the public support of its strong democratic, cultural and social roles in society. The future PSM environment requires new forms of collaboration and common platforms. Future PSM have to build on the successes of PSM in a new context.

5.4. Digital PSM: Towards a Public Service Internet

While the contemporary Internet is dominated by monopolies and commerce, the **Public Service Internet is dominated by democracy**. While the contemporary Internet is dominated by surveillance, the Public Service Internet is privacy-friendly and transparent. While the contemporary Internet misinforms and separates the public, the Public Service Internet engages, informs and unites the public. While the contemporary Internet puts economic profit first and over humans, the Public Service Internet puts humans first.

Data privacy is a core aspect of the Public Service Internet. The Public Service Internet provides role model practices of data processing. Public Service Internet software and content is a common good that can be reused for noncommercial purposes. On Public Service Internet platforms, users can manage their data, download and reuse their self-curated data for reuse on other platforms.

The digital giants store every click and every online move we make on vast server farms to monitor and monetise usage behaviour. Public Service Internet platforms in contrast **minimise and decentralise data storage** and have no need to monetise and monitor Internet use. Public Service Internet platforms experiment with new forms of content licencing that advance the cultural and digital commons for not-for-profit and non-commercial purposes.

Realising the Public Service Internet requires **new ideas, new technologies, new policies and new economic models**. PSM have in the history of 20th century communications been great innovators. The social and technological innovations that will shape the future of the Internet should not be left to corporate giants. PSM have the potentials it takes for becoming the key force that advances democratic communications in the digital age. Public Service Internet platforms develop new platforms, services, formats and content. We need new policies that enable the creation of Public Service Internet platforms. Legislators have too much focused on enabling the power of the digital giants and have not enough done for enabling Public Service Media to become Internet platform providers. This situation has to change if digital democracy and the digital public sphere shall have a future. Although the power of the digital giants needs to be curtailed, Public Service Media and their Public Service Internet platforms need support and enablement. Public Service Internet platforms should not operate for profit and should be kept free from advertising. They need funding models that are different from the ones the digital giants use. The licence fee that sustains PSM is not a mechanism of the past but one for the digital future. The digital

licence fee will extend and transform PSM's licence fee in the digital age.

Public Service Internet platforms **treat users and workers fairly**. They are independent from corporate and political power. They are spaces where critical, independent journalists make high-quality news and where creative professionals make high-quality programmes that educate, inform and entertain in ways that reflect the affordances of the digital age. They engage citizens in new forms that build on the experiences, structures and content of the public service broadcast model. They combine this model with and go beyond it by making full use of and transforming the participatory and creative potentials of user-generated digital content and user participation. PSM's remit will thereby be transformed into a new digital public service remit.

On the Public Service Internet, **Artificial Intelligence (AI) is used for public purposes**. On the Public Service Internet, AI enhances the convenience of the Internet's, does not replace but support and augment journalists, while respecting data privacy and minimising the data stored about users.

The Public Service Internet's algorithms are **public service algorithms**. Such algorithms are open source and transparent. They are programmed in ways that advance the digital public service remit. Public service algorithms are algorithms by the public, for the public, and of the public. Public service algorithms help organising the platforms, formats and contents of the Public Service Internet by making recommendations and suggestions based on transparent procedures and without advertising, commerce and surveillance.

The Internet is global. The public sphere is global. Also the Public Service Internet and its platforms should be **global**. Such platforms can be accessed by anyone at any time and from anywhere. Public Service Internet platforms minimise the data stored about users and at the same time maximise the availability and permanence of Public Service Internet contents that contribute to humanity's cultural heritage. For challenging the power of the digital giants, Public Service Internet platforms are ideally operated as

international networks of multiple PSM organisations. For operating PSM organisations, PSM organisations co-operate with others, including public organisations (universities, museums, libraries and so on), civil society, civic and community media, artists, digital commons projects, platform co-operatives and so on. As a result, PSM organisations together with public interest organisations form public open spaces that are mediated by Internet communication and that together form the Public Service Internet.

The contemporary Internet is the Internet of the corporate digital giants. An **alternative Internet** is possible. A Public Service Internet is possible. A Public Service Internet is needed. We dream of, envision, and want to live in a world where the Internet serves the public and advances democracy. Humans, let's together transform the Internet.

5.5. Imagining PSM Utopias in 2040

Big Tech and commercial data giants successfully gained dominance on the global communications market. In some countries, PSM are kept hostage by authoritarian regimes. In other countries, PSM suffers from a lack of resources or is marginalised by serving only small audiences and producing content that commercial media outlets do not want to provide. Some PSM still produce high-quality content, but operate in niche sectors with an elitist mindset and without any relevance for societies.

But such a **dystopian scenario** is by far not the only perspective for PSM. Different scenarios can be realised. An alternative Internet and renewed Public Service Media are feasible and possible in the near future.

Imagine that in 2040 we live in a fair, just, democratic society where individuals have learned from the societal, environmental, social and health crises of the past, and where the full democratic potentials of digital communication are realised so that all benefit.

To cope with the future, **PSM** will need a powerful answer **beyond the defence of the status quo**. It will need a vision that is powerful enough to attract and fascinate people, create innovation and new horizons.

PSM's public purpose, public value and the common good need to be adapted, renewed and transformed.

Imagine 2040: PSM has undergone a series of radical reforms. How will it look like?

In 2040, a new, radical governance structure has made **PSM independent from any external influences** like government and business interests. The legitimacy of PSM is no longer contested. There is transparency. There are public hearings. There is an external evaluation process. There is quality control. Individuals feel represented by PSM and its programming. They feel that PSM's reporting is as neutral as possible, not influenced by any external pressures and featuring public opinion.

In 2040, PSM is **impartial**. Society is less polarised. PSM is not labelled as being biased or elitist. It reaches out to all parts of society, including fragmented and less educated audiences, info-avoiders and minorities.

In 2040, PSM operates on the **national, regional and global level**. It invests into quality journalism, including investigative journalism and innovative formats for different groups in society. Young people see public service journalism as an attractive and viable environment of information, communication, collaboration and participation.

In 2040, entertainment is an **essential part of the culture of everyday life** that the PSM environment enables. PSMs are wealth creators for the creative sector that provide visibility to many artists such as musicians and filmmakers.

In 2040, PSM's quality is **distinctive from commercial media and data companies**. It reaches the majority of the population. It serves humans' daily personal and societal needs. It addresses their role as citizens and not just their role as consumers.

In 2040, PSM will have remembered its future. It has adapted and transformed its **public service** mission to inform, educate and entertain. It advances cultural citizenship and the needs of the digital society. It renews its contract with the society.

In 2040, PSM's **workforce is highly diverse** in terms of social class, ethnicity, gender, ethnicity, age and geographic origin. PSM's hiring mechanisms are inclusive and transparent.

In 2040, PSM is present, accessible and discoverable on all relevant platforms. In 2040, PSM is fully present in the digital sphere and provides the right content at the right points of time tailored to a plurality of devices and user habits. PSM stays connected to and closely listens to all of its audiences and stakeholders. It answers to society's important challenges and issues. It effectively communicates its own contribution to society, its public value.

In 2040, PSM is a platform where **professionals and users** produce, engage and communicate based on the public service remit.

In 2040, PSM has increased its investment in **technology infrastructures** and the **digital skills** of its employees.

In 2040, PSM has developed a **collaborative programme** with schools, focusing on media literacy and digital literacy through online courses and educational kits developed by PSM.

In 2040, PSM has transformed from one-to-many-broadcasting institutions into a **network infrastructure** that is guided by principles of public network value. It is a networked infrastructure that advances the digital commons and digital citizenship. It strengthens universal access, communication, participation, co-operation, inclusion and unity in diversity.

In 2040, PSM uses **alternative success metrics** that are focused on PSM's impact on democracy and the public sphere.

In 2040, **journalism** will be a core aspect of PSM. Investigation, unique storytelling and entertainment will be important human aspects of PSM.

In 2040, PSM are **sustainably funded** and based on a **reformed licence fee** that is accepted by citizens. The licence fee is progressive, that is, based on income. In addition to the mandatory licence fee, people can make donations based on a crowdfunding scheme combined with participatory budgeting that allows the users to allocate a small portion of their fee to specific programmes and services.

In 2040, PSM still faces problems and challenges. Society is not perfect. But in 2040, society is **more sustainable, resilient, fair and just**. What if the current crises created a tipping point

where risk turns into change, consumerism turns into citizenship, despair turns into opportunity, and dystopia turns into utopia?

IMAGINE 2040. Imagine positive transformations of society. Imagine a transformed media system. Imagine the PSM system of the future. We need visions of the future that guide our actions in the present.

We invite all audience members, users, readers, experts and non-experts, inside and outside of PSM, in fact all citizens who care for the future of democracy in our countries to **participate in the quest for strengthening Public Service Media and creating a Public Service Internet.**

This book presents the collectively authored **Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Manifesto** and accompanying materials.

The Internet and the media landscape are broken. The dominant commercial Internet platforms endanger democracy. They have created a communications landscape overwhelmed by surveillance, advertising, fake news, hate speech, conspiracy theories, and algorithmic politics. Commercial Internet platforms have harmed citizens, users, everyday life, and society. Democracy and digital democracy require Public Service Media. A democracy-enhancing Internet requires Public Service Media becoming Public Service Internet platforms – an Internet of the public, by the public, and for the public; an Internet that advances instead of threatens democracy and the public sphere. The Public Service Internet is based on Internet platforms operated by a variety of Public Service Media, taking the public service remit into the digital age. The Public Service Internet provides opportunities for public debate, participation, and the advancement of social cohesion.

Accompanying the Manifesto are materials that informed its creation: Christian Fuchs' report of the results of the Public Service Media/Internet Survey, the written version of Graham Murdock's online talk on public service media today, and a summary of an ecomitee.com discussion of the Manifesto's foundations.

The Manifesto can be signed by visiting
<http://bit.ly/signPSManifesto>



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