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International Roundtable on Cultural and Educational Functions of Public Service Broadcasting
UNESCO, Paris, 3-5 July 1995

Working Document
Introduction

The general objective of this International Roundtable on the Educational and Cultural Functions of Public Service Broadcasting is to discuss the situation of PSB in the new technological and communication environment. UNESCO, through this Roundtable, hopes to open a broad debate on the challenges facing PSB in the broadcast industry in different parts of the world.

If ever there was an opportunity to strengthen public service broadcasting in truest fidelity to its mandate, and particularly with the advantages of technological advances worldwide, it is today. And if ever there were more obstacles and impediments to this task, it is also today. The increase in population, especially in developing countries and the inability of literacy action and educational programmes to keep pace with population growth point to the multiplier effect of broadcasting coupled with satellite and cable distribution as additional and highly potent educational instruments. Multi-media formats and the possibilities of inter-activity furnish additional arguments for the increasing role and place of broadcasting in the educational phalanx alongside libraries, conference halls and resource centres.

The rapid spread of news, information and cultural values over the air waves and via distribution cables has not only accelerated access to new information and exposure to different, in some cases, alien and even contrary values. This process has also become more or less global and inter-active; that is, it often evokes reactions and responses on the part of the audience, individually or societally. In this way, modern dress fashions, hair styles, liberal attitudes of the youth towards sex and heterogeneous relations as portrayed in music video and films, often conflict with the traditional norms of developing societies, by far the greater part of the world audience. In some cases, this process has caused grave internal, social conflicts. And yet, the potential of electronic broadcasting to contribute to reinforcing coherent social and cultural values, to smoothing the transition from traditional mores to a modern mindset, to instilling the concepts of mutual understanding and tolerance remain largely untapped.

One of the major factors in the balance of power in the media today is the fact that the national broadcaster is no longer the single source of programme fare. Major shifts in the economic and social control of programme origination have created new entertainment industries which manufacture magnetic and celluloid pleasures mainly according to the norms of the market -- what sells and gives the quickest, largest return on multi-million dollar investments, regardless of the more profound and longer lasting educational, social or cultural costs. These entertainment industries dominate the top hundred positions in financial audio-visual markets. And in this market, the national broadcaster and the public service broadcaster are only programme browsers competing with other higher paying distribution
agencies.

Even in distribution, transnational mega companies have taken over global distribution of films and television programmes through a combination of satellite and cable distribution, making the national broadcaster a poor cousin in the trade where conventional transmission by hertzian waves has been bypassed and almost completely dominated by high technology. Only where national broadcasters have joined international consortia or established their own, can public service broadcasting hope to compete in this market at a reasonable economic level and seek to fulfill the educational and cultural mandates of public service media.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in late 1989, and the shifts in many countries in almost all regions towards more democratic processes and more liberal media laws, one would think that there would indeed be a rare situation for public service broadcasting to re-establish itself firmly as the principal system of audio-visual information to the world public. However, despite the cracks in the walls of autocracy everywhere, another force - commercialism - which has long been in the looming now presents the most formidable challenge to the original mandates of public service broadcasting.

It would be unrealistic to hold that public broadcasting must shun commercialism and be forever beholden to the state or depend solely on a system of license fee collection for its existence in the future. This would effectively marginalize public radio and television and cede the world audience to commercialism offered by the transnational entertainment industries. But public radio and television cannot be true to their mandate and at the same time yield to all commercial pressures, in effect erasing the distinguishing mark of public service broadcasting. It is equally important that public broadcasting maintain its editorial independence and cultivate the credibility of its audience.

The challenges to public radio and television are colossal. But in the long run, people will want to see their national productions, transmitted in languages that they know. They will continue to want to see the reflection of their own reality. And that is the strength of public broadcasting; with the cooperation of the public, there is a good chance that public service radio and television can deliver the service.

In preparation for the Roundtable, UNESCO commissioned a number of background papers on the subject. This working document presents in a succinct form the major issues raised in those papers. The issues dealt with in the papers are by no means exhaustive but they provide a starting point for discussion and debate during which participants can share their experiences and propose concrete measures by which public radio and television can more faithfully fulfill their public service mandate, despite the economic, financial and commercial restraints prevailing in the media industry.
Paper 1: The World Situation of Public Service Broadcasting: Overview and Analysis

Background Paper Presented by

Marc Raboy, University of Montreal

The situation of public radio and television in the world has attracted considerable attention during the past 15 years, most of it focusing on the difficulties of traditional national public broadcasting institutions. In spite of this, however, the idea that broadcasting activity is first and foremost a public service continues to drive and to inspire creators, producers, programmers and policy-makers as well as the vast array of audience groups that make up "the public".

The 4th European Ministerial Conference on Mass Media Policy held in Prague in December 1994 identified the safeguarding of independent, appropriately-funded public service broadcasting institutions as essential to the functioning of the media in a democratic society. Such statements point to the obstacles faced by conventional public service broadcasting in the current global context. In the contemporary debates on the changing environment of mass communication, there is no shortage of earnest outlines of goals and objectives for media with aims other than business or propaganda. There is no shortage of good will, or good ideas, but the realization of the ideals of public service broadcasting is rendered problematic by a series of political, economic, technological, ideological and development constraints.

The paper is based on the preliminary findings of the "Public Broadcasting for the Twenty-First Century Project", which examined the situation of broadcasting in 16 national and regional contexts in different parts of the world. The principal objective was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of existing public broadcasting systems, the challenges they face, and the possibilities of establishing new broadcasting institutions based on public service ideals.

The paper first reflects on the idea of public service broadcasting, how it has evolved and what it means today. It links the idea of public broadcasting to the notion of citizenship and argues that it is necessary to guarantee its de-linking from both the political authority of the state and the economic arbitrage of the market. The key to this is not so much a particular structure or funding formula, but a set of objectives and practices, based on democratic principles and the view that broadcasting can be a means of social and cultural development.

The paper then maps the current world situation by developing a typology of the different systemic and institutional models one encounters at the present time. This typology is based on the observation that national systems are each built around a "core" characterized by a particular institutional model. Three principal types
of broadcasting system are identified: (i) public service core systems, (ii) private enterprise core systems, and (iii) state core systems.

Within the different core systems are found various institutional models, characterized by different forms of ownership and control, mandate, models of financing, types of content and relationship to the audience. The main general categories are: (i) national public service broadcasting; (ii) alternative public broadcasting; (iii) privately-owned commercial broadcasting; (iv) multiply-owned services (public-public or public-private partnerships); (v) community broadcasting; and (vi) state broadcasting.

On the basis of this typology, the paper finally proposes a tentative "ideal-type" that takes account of the need to clarify our conception of public service broadcasting in the new world context, the role that could be played by a range of broadcasting institutions with public service briefs, and strategies for dealing with various previously identified constraints.

Paper 2: Why Public Broadcasting

Background Paper Presented by

Pierre Juneau, World Radio and Television Council

Most countries in the world have taken the position, when radio was established and later when television was developed, that these media would be used for education, culture, information, entertainment and enlightenment. But countries have not always pursued these objectives with consistency, commitment or ability and the will to make the proper use of these technologies has weakened. Moreover, present technological and industrial developments pose tremendous challenges for them as to how these original purposes should be achieved.

Observing that a public service approach to television and radio, as opposed to a strictly commercial approach, would contribute to cultural diversity in the world, the paper argues that a broadcasting system which associates broadcasting entirely to marketing and industry is "an unfortunate error" which has caused grave cultural deprivation in many parts of the world. It is a cause for concern for the development of broadcasting everywhere and particularly in those countries where television may switch from being an instrument of political control and boredom to become only a medium of merchandising and commercialized entertainment.

The basic issue, therefore, is whether broadcasting will be considered mainly as an industry turning out a commercial "product" and associated totally with marketing. Or will it be first of all an institution to permit access to culture, knowledge and enlightened entertainment for all the people? The paper puts forward the proposition
that a strictly commercial approach to television - even in large and rich markets - is not reconcilable with cultural goals. It argues that the most basic element of broadcasting policy is the maintenance, development and support of strong and politically independent public institutions. While acknowledging that the history of public radio and public television over the last 50 or 60 years has revealed the many pitfalls, weaknesses and faults of such institutions, the paper observes that it is wiser to find ways to improve these institutions than to change the system.

Technological developments - Hertzian waves, co-axial cable, fiber optics, satellites, digitalization and the compression of signals - and the so-called information highway will allow the creation of a much larger number of audiovisual channels - be they pay-television, pay-per-view or interactive television. One unfortunate result will be greater and greater competition and aggressive commercialism which are likely to increase rather than decrease the amount of violence on film and television.

In the face of this trend, the paper concludes that countries will need to insist more on the positive, that is on a type of radio and television that is based on the idea of public service. It calls for both imagination and statesmanship in using the broadcasting media to provide all the people, in developed as well as in developing parts of the world, with the material for the mind, and the imagination, that are needed to make them free citizens and inspired human beings.

Paper 3: Global Satellite Broadcasting Services: Educational and Cultural Contribution

Background Paper Presented by

Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre

This paper presents a general overview and analysis of the content and orientation of satellite broadcasting services with special reference to the Asian region. It examines the potential and challenges offered by satellite broadcasting for promoting cultural and educational services (both formal instructions and non-formal education) and proposes ways of encouraging such services.

The paper notes that in most parts of the world satellite broadcasting services have developed in three main directions, namely,

1. the use of satellites for national development purposes by individual countries as in the case of the Palapa Satellite Project in Indonesia and Insat in India;
2. the setting up of global satellite services usually by multinational companies such as CNN or by public broadcasting corporations such as BBC; and
3. the provision of special services by groups of professionals such as in the use of satellite technology for educational purposes (i.e.
the Pan Pacific Educational and Communication Experiments by Satellite (PEACESAT) and for health and rural education.

The paper refers to the common observation regarding the cultural influence of satellite communication in Asia: the dominance of western programmes and their irresistible seduction of indigenous Asian audiences, away from their traditional cultural values. It observes that what is important in determining cultural influences is not what is available but what is actually viewed. It proposes that an understanding of the educational and cultural contributions of global television requires an analysis of both the supply of global television material to a country as well as its actual consumption by various groups in that country.

While the major thrust of global satellite programmes in Asia has been the provision of entertainment and global news, the paper notes that there has also been noteworthy international and national experiments in the use of the satellite medium for formal and non-formal educational and instructional purposes. At the international level, it cites the examples of the PEACESAT and the Network College of Communication in the Pacific (NCCP) which is coordinated by the Department of Communication, University of Hawaii and the East-West Centre. The basic aim of both projects is to link academic/research institutions in different countries. At the national level, the paper gives the examples of the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) in India and the Palapa Satellite Project in Indonesia, both of which have become important landmarks in the application of satellite technology to distance education in Asia.

The paper proposes the following approaches to encouraging the cultural and educational functions of satellite broadcasting:

1. continuous empirical research to know and understand not only what is available to the audience for viewing, but what percentage of this is actually viewed;
2. initiating special projects to encourage cultural and educational programmes, and harnessing groups of professionals, especially non-government organizations, for this work;
3. the formulation of an agreed code of ethics - a minimum set of guidelines - to which all purveyors of satellite broadcasting must adhere;
4. improvement by local television stations of their own programmes to make them more attractive, especially for the young audience;
5. institutionalizing some formal ways of recognizing cultural and educational contributions of satellite broadcasting such as an international award for excellence in educational broadcasting programmes;
6. encouraging a marketing scheme for cultural products from different countries so as to make the availability of programmes from a variety of sources known to broadcasters; and
7. provision of systematic formal and informal education on the nature of global satellite broadcasting and its impact.
Paper 4: Broadcasting Liberalization: Implications for Educational and Cultural Functions of Broadcasting in Sub-Saharan Africa

Background Paper Presented by

African Council for Communication Education

Many countries of sub-Saharan Africa are experiencing a "renaissance" of political independence. The wind of democratic changes sweeping through these countries has resulted in, and also benefited from, increasing cases of media pluralism and licensing of private radio and television broadcasting. A number of African countries have established studies or have set up commissions on broadcasting liberalization, and many of them, including Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Uganda, have already granted broadcasting licenses to private entrepreneurs. Despite the limitations of the new private stations in Africa, they portend great hopes for democracy, media freedom, social mobilization and a subtle challenge to the monopoly of state-controlled broadcasting.

The paper reviews the general functions of broadcasting in African countries and remarks that, from its inception in Africa, public broadcasting was conceived as a vital tool of education (both formal and informal) and as channels for disseminating cultural information. Though the technology was imported, the early broadcasters tried to adapt cultural values and forms to fit the new medium. There were local drama presentations, folk dances, story telling and coverage of indigenous festivals. Such indigenous drama and other cultural forms have continued. Not only are there now more programmes in the local languages, but more importantly, different manifestations, symbols, and artifacts of African culture are now common items on the broadcast menu.

The paper remarks that liberalization of broadcasting increases the competitive atmosphere and has many important implications for the educational and cultural functions of broadcasting in Africa including the following:

1. Whereas many public radio and television stations in the region have regular educational programmes for in-school listeners and viewers, the new private stations are directing their attention more to advertising targets. The dominant strategy is entertainment-oriented programming that focuses on music for radio, and soap operas for television. It is doubtful how long the existing public stations can continue to provide educational programmes or schools broadcasts in the face of ever-increasing competition from the emerging private stations.

2. The public stations in sub-Saharan Africa have been a
reliable medium for public affairs and civic education, although they often reflect mostly the government or official view of current affairs. But with their eyes on profits, the new private stations in sub-Saharan Africa have not yet played any significant role in this important use of radio and television for public affairs, civics and development education.

3. many of the public stations have been a ready source of international news for their audiences. Although there are no comparative data on the private stations on this issue, there is reliable episodic evidence that their attention to international affairs coverage is scanty. Because of cost considerations, and the questionable belief that their viewers and listeners do not care for international news, the private station broadcasters have tended to have only minimal international news coverage.

4. because many of the new stations are independent, and not owned or operated by governments or political parties, they have a better chance to be objective in their coverage of politics, and thereby provide the much needed political education which is necessary for the promotion and sustenance of democracy in Africa. But the new private stations have not necessarily brought greater choice or even better programming.

5. the new private stations are not champions of African culture, nor have they shown themselves to be averse to foreign cultural content. In fact, because of cost factors and the difficulty in making local productions, many private stations are more guilty of importing foreign programmes than the public stations.

The paper calls for the systematic use of radio and television broadcasting to counter cultural imperialism and strengthen Afro broadcasting by incorporating more elements of authentic African culture as well as to reinforce cultural pride in African countries by projecting a more positive image of the continent and its potentials for development.

Paper 5: The Cultural and Educational Functions of Public Service Broadcasting in Western Europe

Background Paper Presented by MEDIACULT

From its inception, broadcasting in Europe was expected to accomplish an important democratic and cultural mission. It was given the task of providing the entire population with information, education and quality entertainment. For economic reasons, the tasks implied in this mandate could only be performed by a state-regulated monopoly - i.e. public broadcasting services. This used to be the agreed opinion of
the European countries and public service broadcasting prevailed until the early 1980s.

From that period, the media landscape of Europe underwent fundamental changes as deregulation of broadcasting was launched in almost all the countries. By the early 1990s, all Western European countries, moving at different speeds and prioritizing different media policies and communication technologies, had changed their broadcasting landscapes. The national broadcasting systems were deregulated, private providers were admitted to the market, and the state facilitated and promoted the development of the technological infrastructure, and was occasionally involved in its operation.

The paper analyses the developments, the fundamental issues, perspectives and problems with respect to the cultural and educational functions of PSB in the wake of the changes. It notes that, as a result of deregulation, the broadcasting environment in West European countries is characterized by availability of more channels, more programme markets, more commercial air time; competition for programmes viewers, and advertising market shares; internationalized media groups and investments; and concentration of TV providers and media enterprises.

The paper then discusses the various actions taken by the European Union and the Council of Europe in broadcasting media when the first effects of deregulation on cultural pluralism and identity became evident. These actions include ministerial conferences on mass media policy, drafting of guidelines on broadcasting rules of the European countries and the Declaration on the Freedom of Expression and Information.

Noting that the Council of Europe has repeatedly underlined the important democratic and cultural role of PSBs, the paper refers to the resolution adopted at the Prague Ministerial Media Conference in 1994 which lists the most important tasks of PSBs as: pluralism and integration; basic service for the entire population and for minorities; promotion of tolerance, independence and objectivity with respect to information; quality programming including a significant proportion of original productions; and the provision of services which are not normally provided by commercial broadcasters.

The paper argues that if the PSBs are to effectively perform the democratic task of providing independent, free and pluralistic information and promoting cultural development, these tasks and functions must be formally enshrined in a broadcasting order which guarantees their independence and lays down the standards to be met, and above all ensures the provision of funds required to meet these standards. It concludes with reference to a number of such measures in several European countries as (i) levies on the income of advertising as in the United Kingdom and Iceland; (ii) support for the training of creators of culture as in Switzerland; (iii) use of income from levies on blank cassettes as in the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Austria, and Spain; and (v) taxing media consumption as in Austria.
Paper 6: The Cultural and Educational Functions of Public Service Broadcasting in East and Central Europe

Background Paper Presented by
Youri Khiltchevski, Association for the Promotion of Culture

The paper assesses the status of culture and education in the programs of electronic media in Eastern European countries, draws a number of conclusions and suggests some steps toward stimulating the cultural and educational functions of public service TV and radio.

The paper notes that the present state of the broadcasting media in Eastern Europe is characterized by increased competition, limited financial resources and a struggle for survival. In these conditions, cultural and educational programs with a relatively low rating fall victim first. The paper calls for a serious revision of the policy of financing of public television and radio broadcasting and an elaboration of the strategy of state companies as an institution maintaining the unity of the nation, its culture and spirit.

The paper further outlines the main features of the present state of television in Eastern European countries as: (i) a lack of understanding of its role in modern society; (ii) a lack of understanding by the state of the status, role and ways of development of the mass media, including television and radio; (iii) absence of clearly formulated laws or legislative acts related to television; and (iv) the swift development and emergence on the television and radio markets of private broadcasting and program-producing commercial organizations and their tough competition with state television and radio broadcasting companies for the audience.

To encourage the cultural and educational functions of public service radio and television in Eastern Europe, the paper suggests:

1. that UNESCO work out a special programme to encourage the cultural and educational functions of the media in Eastern Europe, including joint production of television and radio programs on cultural and educational subjects;
2. that governments of Eastern European countries institute or improve independent non-profit, non-commercial bodies which would draw up and disseminate programmes dealing with culture and programmes of an educational character;
3. that the governments make it binding on commercial companies to allocate part of their time to cultural and educational programs as a condition of licensing;
4. the introduction of tax cuts for television programme producers who specialize in creating and transmitting scientific, cultural and educational programs;
5. a more efficient advertising of cultural and educational
programs in periodicals and specialized publications; and
6. the adoption of a professional moral code for editors and producers in the broadcasting media.

Paper 7: The Cultural and Educational Functions of Public Service Broadcasting in the Arab World

Background Paper Presented by
Mahmoud Shalabieh, Yarmouk University

The paper presents a brief overview of the situation of public service broadcasting in Arab countries and suggests several ways of enhancing the educational and cultural functions of broadcasting in those countries. It identifies the common features of the broadcasting media in countries. With regard to television, the paper notes that television stations provide similar schedules including news and commentaries which focus on public affairs; religious talks; entertainment and a variety of cultural programs. The basic format of radio services is also similar in the Arab world with programmes presented in blocks which include special features for children, women, and laborers; sports; religious and cultural programmes; a variety of entertainment programmes; and regularly scheduled newscasts.

The paper remarks that most of the Arab states use both radio and television for nation-wide improvement in education, literacy, health and agricultural practices, with effective motivational and informational messages. Noting that experimental applications of broadcasting to help solve specific educational and development problems have been tried in Jordan, the paper presents a case study of distance education at the Al-Quds Open University (QOU) in Amman, Jordan.

On culture, the paper observes that the Arab states rely heavily on imported entertainment TV programs, mainly from United States and Europe and that the high proportion of foreign programs appearing on TV screens has caused great concern, particularly because of the potential impact of such programmes on children. The paper concludes by suggesting such approaches to enhancing the cultural and educational functions of public service broadcasting in the Arab region as:

1. the increased use of entertainment to transmit information;
2. the formulation of clear policies on the educational use of broadcasting and a consideration of distance education as one of the elements of a national communications policy;
3. carrying out serious audience research to provide information about the nature of audience and the effects of the mass media to program producers and media policy makers as well as national development planners;
4. a study of the possibilities of using satellite communication for education and other development purposes; and
linking the media with other arts (traditional and modern) and creating programmes that will give authentic expression to Arab culture.

Paper 8: Educational Application of Interactive Television - A Proposed UNESCO and ITU Project

Background Paper Presented by

John Rose, Division of Communication, UNESCO

Conventional education systems are increasingly unable to respond to the rising demand for learning and often have to cope with declining budgets. The world counts close to a billion illiterates and far more than hundred million children who cannot benefit from primary education. Those who do go to school very often end up with insufficient or inappropriate learning achievements. The problem is due to lack of capacity of the formal delivery infrastructure and often a poor quality teacher force.

This problem was considered at the highest level by concerned governments and international organizations during the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand, in March 1990. The World Declaration on Education for All and the Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs, which emanated from the Conference, call for the use of multiple delivery modalities and of modern communication media to open up learning opportunities to all. The important task ahead is to include the excluded, to reach those who have been deprived of their most fundamental learning rights due to factors of age, time, location, culture, and circumstance. Consultations following Jomtien have specifically underlined the potential of distance education in accomplishing this task, in the area of in-service teacher education as well as in directly reaching neo-literate and marginalized groups of learners.

The proposed pilot project will concentrate on the adaptation, use and development of the technology of interactive television in the context of the educational needs in developing countries. The project integrates educational and technological approaches and builds on cooperation between the public and private sectors. It will be seen as having been successful if it helps significantly in meeting the learning needs of the audiences concerned and provides experience in the development of educational use of interactive TV that can guide future applications.

In view of the essential role played by teachers in the Education for All context, the project will concentrate on in-service teacher training and support for primary education teachers, with the goal to improving the qualifications of under-qualified teachers to a minimum satisfactory professional level, and improving teacher performance, self-esteem and
motivation. It will specifically (i) introduce teachers in the participating countries to the methodologies, benefits and future potential of interactive TV; (ii) assess the appropriateness of interactive TV for Education for All in the participating countries and in the developing countries in general; and (iii) provide feedback on educational needs to the standardization effort on interactive TV of the International Telecommunication Union.

One or more countries will be identified to serve for the pilot project. They will be selected from partner countries of the Joint Distance Education Initiative of the nine high-population developing countries, and other countries that can be associated with the initiative on the basis of large numbers of developing under-qualified primary school teachers and substantial communication infrastructure, including solid experience in television production.

Participating governments will commit themselves to the project by making available existing technical and educational infrastructure, e.g. satellite capacity, broadcasting and studio facilities, and learning centres. UNESCO and the ITU will provide the necessary technical expertise for the implementation and evaluation of the project.

The pilot project is intended to develop a model for the use of interactive television within a given educational context. Thus, the experiences gained from the pilot project will be of interest in finding new and improved ways to tackle identified educational problems.