

Public Service Broadcasting: Is the Golden Era Still to Come? (guestblog)

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With the BBC apparently under siege it's easy to think that public service broadcasting as a concept is also threatened. But there is no reason why we can't choose to have more, not less, argues one eminent expert.

POLIS intern Beth Lowell reports.

Is the Golden Era of public service broadcasting still to come? According to Professor Caroline Pauwels the answer to this question is yes, but only if we work for it.

In a speech at the LSE, Pauwels, head of the Institute for Broadband Technologies/Studies on Media, Information and Telecommunications at the Free University of Brussels (VUB), denounced discussions of an earlier golden age of public broadcasting as glorified idealizations.

She argued independent public service broadcasting has never been guaranteed and past, present, and future versions must be continuously evaluated and scrutinized. Public service broadcasting she argued, must be treated and watched as a "usual suspect" with the same potential to run astray as other private media.

Perhaps we do look back on early eras of public service broadcasting with rose colored glasses. There seems to be little point in waxing nostalgic about a form of the medium that may never have existed in practice.

Shouldn't we be looking forward rather than gazing back? More importantly, what does public service broadcasting need to do to move away from the stagnant past and remain viable in the digital present?

Pauwels answers this last question by proposing six Cs: Conversation, Citizen, Credibility, Creativity, and Conservation.

She sees the keys to public service broadcasting's success in a conversation model that embraces new media, maintains a focus on the citizens, enhances the credibility of media systems, embraces creativity and innovation, and strives to conserve cultural heritage and national narratives through local content.

But the question remains, as respondent, LSE's Damian Tambini so directly put it in his "are you being radical enough?". Is this plan adaptive enough? Or are we still struggling to hold onto an outdated system format?

The answer to Dr Tambini's question appears unclear. Public service broadcasting is a transitioning medium facing a constantly changing media landscape. There is no bastion of stability off of which to base a future model for the medium.

The media environment now demands innovation and flexibility. It seems Pauwels' six Cs under the umbrella of a seventh C: commitment.

In the face of changes and challenges public service broadcasting must remain focused on its core commitment to providing quality content to the public by any means possible, including, as Pauwels suggests, utilizing a cross section of public, private, and new media mediums.

The best course of action for public service broadcasting appears to be the adoption of an open perspective towards emerging innovation and a forward facing action plan that aims to bring about a future golden era of public service broadcasting that exists in reality rather than glorified memories.

This report by POLIS intern Beth Lowell

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