

Mark Raboy (ed.) Public broadcasting for the 21st Century

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The essays collected in this book provide a general portrait of the situation of public broadcasting in different parts of the world. Despite the rapid movement toward globalization, broadcasting is still legally constituted within the confines of national borders.

The book tries 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 (p. xiii).

In the introduction Marc Raboy makes clear that the evolution of broadcasting has been marked by three sets of parallel developments: first the explosion in channel capacity and disappearance of audiovisual borders made possible by new technology; second the disintegration of the state broadcasting model with the collapse of the socialist bloc and the move toward democratization in various parts of the world; and third the upsurge in market broadcasting and the introduction of mixed broadcasting systems in countries with former public monopolies. (p.3).

In the U.K. the Broadcasting Research Unit (BRU) made an attempt in the 1980's to answer the question of what public service is. The BRU defined principles such as universal accessibility (geographic), universal appeal (general tastes and interests), particular attention to minorities, contribution to the sense of national identity and community, and direct funding and universality of payment. (p.6) Because it is difficult to apply such a set of principles, there is a pressing need to discuss fundamental values regarding broadcasting and its role in society.

The issued of broadcasting becomes more and more political because „broadcasting takes place in the public sphere and we come to it both as consumers

and as citizens“ writes Anthony Smith (1991) (p.7). Citizenship is political. This implies that the space of public broadcasting must be decoupled from the authoritarian power of the state and, at the same time cannot be commodified. This balance between the public and the private is one of the fundamental issues in the essays in the book.

The first part consists of eight essays looking at the shifting paradigms in the heartlands of public broadcasting. By describing the histories of the long established models of public broadcasting in countries such as the U.K., Germany, Australia, Japan and the U.S., it is made clear that in all these countries the role of the public institutions are now being redefined.

The second part looks at emerging models for development and democracy in countries such as Poland, Ukraine, India, Namibia and Latin America. The rapid changes in most of these countries are reflected in the history of (public) broadcasting. The essays conclude that the future of the often recently organised public broadcasting depends on the stability of the economy and the political and social structure of societies. With its sixteen essays the book lives up to its claim to be the first truly global report on the question of public service broadcasting. The introduction puts the public service broadcasting in the context of globalization. The sixteen national and regional studies focus on a representative range of main issues such as the accessibility, universal appeal, the funding and competition with private broadcasters. An analysis of the views of the authors, comparing the long-established models with the emerging ones, would be a welcome addition to the book.

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