Josef Trappel

**Taking the public service remit forward across the digital boundary**

Public service broadcasting organizations (PSB) sit uncomfortably between two chairs. They sit halfway on a chair which is figuratively located in the post World War II era when the *raison d’être* of public media was generated, and justified by various scarcities. They also sit half-way on a chair that is defined by highly competitive cutting-edge digital media markets characterized by abundance. These markets stretch far beyond radio and television. Public players on these markets are *public service media* (PSM).

In this paper, the dividing line between these chairs is called the *digital boundary*. The misfit is obvious: Although repeatedly adjusted, the inherited public service remit of the 1920s up to the 1960s cannot cope with the market realities of today’s digitally integrated media landscape. National legislation is constantly challenged to respond by appropriate amendments.

In her book on public service media in Europe, Karen Donders (2012) describes the various historic stages of the development of public service broadcasting and arrives at today’s challenges by admitting that conclusive answers to the question are lacking “how to transpose diverging ideas on PSB in policy practice while taking into account the peculiar technological, economic and political circumstances of the 21st century.” (2012: 21)

In this paper, Donders’ question is taken as a starting point and raises the rather fundamental question what the core values of traditional and contemporary public service media organizations are and how they can be maintained under digital rules of the broadcasting game. Core values are elaborated from scholarly and industry literature as well as from the recent and ongoing debate on the public value of public broadcasting. In a second step, the main characteristics of the digital transformation of broadcasting are discussed, again based on scholarly and industry literature. Thereby, areas of conflict between digital developments and core rationales and values are identified and described. Subsequently, a number of countries is selected to evaluate whether these critical areas of potential conflict are addressed by broadcasting policy and what solutions are provided. Finally, policy recommendations on up-to-date PSM remits are deducted.