

“I PRODUCE FOR MYSELF”: PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA, CROSS-MEDIA AND PRODUCERS IN TODAY’S MEDIA ECO-SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

Public service broadcasters are adapting to today’s media eco-system and to the increasing fragmentation of audiences by shifting from a classical broadcasting approach to cross-media productions that exploit the synergy of different media and that, theoretically, invite different forms of audience inclusion.

Such a shift is, however, far from unproblematic, as it often challenges old paradigms, one of which is the traditional, rather unidirectional relation that producers have with audiences.

In this article, I build on Umberto Eco’s concepts of meaning and interpretation to explore how cross-media is conceptualised in relation to audiences and how producers position themselves in their relationship with audiences. Working with three case studies from the public service media of Finland and Estonia, three sets of semi-structured interviews with key figures of the three production teams (twenty interviews in total), I attempt to demonstrate how the relation of cross-media producers with their audiences still faces the same challenges as in the past, often related to hegemonic positioning that producers tend to take towards audiences.

KEYWORDS

Cross-media – public service media – audience – television

1. Introduction

Today’s media eco-system – which includes a multitude of audio-visual providers, both traditional and online – is pushing television networks to exploit the possibilities offered by the synergy of television with the Internet and, in certain cases, other media (Clark & Horowitz, 2013; Hallvard, Poell & van Dijck, 2016). This approach is what Gillian Doyle (2010) refers to as a “360-degree strategy” (p. 2), or the practice of shaping content according to its potential to deliver public value through the use of multiple media, among which television is only one element. Public value theory, theorising “what the public most ‘values’ and also what adds value to the public sphere” (Benington & Moore, 2011, p. 14) is, in the context of European Public Service Broadcasters (PSB), linked to the tradition that understands the public service media as a social agent enabling social inclusion, citizens’ representation and cohesion (Bennett, 2006; Hujanen, Weibull & Harrie, 2014). Such a role, however, works only when the agent’s activities are able to reach audiences; this is also why the “broadcasting” model is replaced by public service “media” (Bardoel & Lowe, 2007).

Transforming public service broadcasting (PSB) to public service media (PSM)

paves the way for cross-media strategies, through which the public service media fulfil their objectives and mission. It is with these new cross-media strategies that PSM adhere to their role as socially beneficial agents (Jauert & Lowe, 2005), thus shaping a mutually beneficial relation between themselves and their audiences (Jõesaar, 2015).

For our purposes, ‘cross-media’ is considered as an umbrella term encompassing all activities that carry a message across media aimed at catching audiences’ attention, facilitating awareness and enhancing engagement (Ibrus & Scolari, 2012). Typical cross-media involve social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, but news portals, websites and live events can – and very often do – also constitute cross-media. Furthermore, the term “cross-media”, similarly to “transmedia”, is not limited to distribution practices, such as the adaptation of content to different media, but denotes also creation of unique content for specific platforms that, when put together, create a coherent whole. This whole, consisting of a sum of different texts that were designed to intertwine and support each other in the attempt to engage audiences to migrate from one text to another and to actively participate in it (Evans, 2011; Gambarato & Nani, 2016), can be experienced in its entirety or only in self-sustaining parts.

The shift from PSB to PSM that are of cross-media nature brings, however, unprecedented challenges to the dialogue and mutual understanding between producers of media content and audiences. In this article, I thus look at how PSM producers make sense of the PSM audiences; more specifically, by studying three case studies of PSM production teams in Finland and Estonia, the article attempts to answer the question of what positioning television producers take in relation to inclusive practices typical of cross-media. The paper is divided into three main parts. The following section is theoretical. It first builds on Umberto Eco’s concepts of *meaning* and *interpretation* to explore how cross-media is conceptualised in relation to audiences; then, it theoretically discusses how producers might position themselves in their relationship with audiences. The second part is empirical: it summarises findings from two PSM productions from Estonia and one from Finland. In this part, I also propose a cross-media production model that illustrates three possible cross-media production practices. The third part draws some conclusions on the positioning of television producers in relation to public service media and their audiences.

2. Audiences and Producers in Cross-media

Today, with PSM and the implementation of cross-media practices, producers have to create content of which television programmes are only a part. Since PSM often consist of television and radio content, Internet content (e.g. video-on-demand, news websites), mobile applications and, in certain cases, of on-site events such as meet-ups, concerts and performances, the conceptualisation of audiences becomes rather challenging. When audience diversity becomes a norm rather than an exception, the likelihood of incomprehension, rejection and failure is supposedly higher. For whom, for instance, should creative teams produce their content – for the typical, often „leaned back“, to use Helen Katz’s term (2010), older PSB television watcher,

or for a younger, typically more dynamic mobile app user? As we will see later while discussing the empirical data, some producers would answer “both,” but this creates certain dichotomies.

I opted for exploring these repercussions through Umberto Eco’s ([1968] 2005) concepts of *aberrant reading* and *model reader* (1979a) that, while long-lived, still remain relevant for at least two main reasons.

First, considering that Eco’s idea of reading and interpretation of a text illustrates how the connotation might result in a polysemy when applied to the “semiotics of converged media” (Scolari, 2009), in the PSB era it becomes even more relevant because the polysemy of interpretations is now potentially amplified by the number and diversity of texts. Here I argue that a polysemy of interpretations might result in a number of unpredictable modes of audience engagement.

Second, following some early criticisms and Eco’s consequent reflections, the concepts were revisited in *The Role of the Reader* (Eco, 1979b), and later enhanced in *I limiti dell’interpretazione* (Eco, 1990) and in *Dire quasi la stessa cosa. Esperienze di traduzione* (Eco, 2007), and in their current form connect production and reception studies in a fruitful way. By using Eco’s notions of reading and interpretation, I do not look at either producers or audiences in isolation, but I see them as mutually interwoven parts of the same system affecting each other.

More specifically, the existence of plural connotative meanings nourishes what Eco labels as *decodifica aberrante* (*aberrant decoding*). *Aberrant decoding*, which was later termed *aberrant interpretation* (Eco, 1979b), has been the subject of vivid academic discussions for many years. John Fiske (1994) interprets aberrant decoding as “what happens when a message that has been encoded according to one code is decoded by means of another” (p. 1). Cristinel Munteanu (2012), defining the aberrant decoding as “a misunderstanding of the meaning of a text due to the unknowing (or to the insufficient/partial knowledge) of a code or of a context” (p. 233), highlights the importance of the context in which the interpretation takes place.

Regarding the context, Umberto Eco and Paolo Fabbri (1978, p. 560-565) remark that aberrant decoding occurs in three possible situations or for three possible reasons. The first is an incomprehension or refusal of the message due to the absence of a code. In other words, the message turns into noise on the way. In the second case, the message is not comprehended due to the use of different codes by the sender and a receiver (this is similar to what Fiske (1994) and Munteanu (2012) describe). In the third one, which is absent in the arguments of the two abovementioned authors, the receiver understands the message, but its meaning is twisted for ideological reasons, thereby delegitimising the sender. Focusing on the context, aberrant decoding is not a result of a lack of knowledge of the context in which the encoding took place, but rather a conscious refusal of such meaning. This is relevant because aberrant decoding is not just a manifestation of the receiver’s, or henceforth audience’s, ignorance (i.e. lack of knowledge), but may even represent an intentional alternative interpretation of the sender’s intended meaning.

A producer of a text has to imagine receivers of his/her message (i.e. the audiences) within the scenario of possible aberrant decoding. Eco (1979) discusses the *lettore modello* (*model reader*) as the conceptualised reader capable of interpreting the

text as encoded in its original form. Following a constructivist approach (Allor, 1998; Ang, 1989; Hartley, 1987; Lull, 1988; Radway, 1988), the idea of the *model reader* brings us to Litt's (2012) appropriation of the concept of the *imagined audience*, another central element in this work. The imagined audience is the group for which the content is produced. Litt describes the imagined audience as "the mental conceptualisation of the people with whom we are communicating, our audience" (Litt, 2012, p. 331).

This idea is complementary to the relationship between the producer of a text and its receiver as described by Eco. In this text, I use the term 'producer' to refer to diverse professionals who constitute parts of cross-media production teams (and who were interviewed), including executive producers, journalists, directors or any other roles that take part in the creative production processes. I also use Eco's original term *emitter* as a synonym of 'producer', i.e. the person who both produces and sends/transmits a message¹.

To avoid terminological misunderstandings, I would like to identify a few considerations regarding the possible behaviours of audiences. Stephen E. Dinehart (2012), for instance, suggests that we should refer to audiences as "VUP" — i.e. as viewers, users and producers; however, the use of this term poses a number of problems, such as the inability to differentiate between the three, that make it a poor alternative. Sonia Livingstone (2013) locates audiences within time and space circumstances. She remarks that, although today's people are unavoidably immersed in media (see also Schröder, 2015, p. 21), the role that people take on at a given time and space is not fixed. Today, the term "audience" may have multiple different meanings and connote different behaviours, ranging from active engagement to passive consumption. Annette Hill (2017) articulates the different stages and levels of engagement with the term "spectrum of engagement" (p. 2); such stages and levels of engagement can vary depending on numerous factors, such as socio-cultural values, and they are ultimately dependent upon how producers conceptualise their audiences and their engagement.

As has been said, producers always have to imagine their audiences and think of how they want to emit and convey meaning as well as how, in turn, this meaning may be decoded in an aberrant way. John Corner (2017) argues that producers have

¹ In this context, I feel compelled to further clarify Eco's original use of the word "sender". Although the term is widely used in Anglo-Saxon media and communication traditions (e.g. Fiske, 1994; Hall, 1980; Hartley, 2002), Eco uses the term *emittente* (*emitter*) that has a different meaning than its common English translation, the *sender*. While a *sender* is a person who sends or transmits a message, an *emitter* is a person who both sends out and simultaneously produces a message. This is a crucial distinction, because in Eco's original formulation, the sender is also the producer. Similarly, I feel compelled to remark on how I am using the word 'producer' (i.e. the person who creates a text). In English, 'producer' is often associated with, and hence in this context misinterpreted as, the specific job of a media producer; however, in this work the word has a wider meaning. I use 'producer' as a synonym of *emitter* because such an interpretation better fits with the understanding of producer–audience dynamics, as proposed in this work. Empirically, the use of the term in such a way may result in imprecise implications or interpretations; however, considering that in this article I do not examine the dynamics of production within the production team, but rather the positioning of the team as a whole, the term 'producer' well represents the *emitter* as a professional figure.

to anticipate the use of and possible audiences' engagement with different texts, across different media and different demographics. He calls this 'the second-guessing' – that is, the understanding of the "engagement to come" (p. 3) – that in its most successful form corresponds to the behaviour of the *model reader* as previously discussed. Indeed, the conceptualisation process does not happen in a societal vacuum (Peterson, 2003) but rather within a given culture and society, where producers are influenced not only by production practices but also by their own tastes, imaginations and experiences. And, because producers are also receivers, a part of the audience, they cannot reliably discern considerations related to the audience and their own encoding practices. Chris W. Anderson (2011) echoes the same argument: the visions professionals have of their audiences are often based on the visions they have of themselves and their peers.

However, if personal tastes represent a dominant variable in constructing imagined audiences, or, even worse, an excuse to creating self-centred productions, it might lead to incomprehension, if not outright refusal, of the message. Herbert J. Gans (1979), for instance, referring to journalists, argues: 'they had little knowledge about their actual audience, they paid little attention to it; instead, they filmed and wrote for their superiors and for themselves, assuming [...] that what interested them would interest the audience' (p. 230). Even though almost forty years have passed since Gans's study, and despite unquestionable cultural and societal transformations, media professionals' approach towards audiences has not significantly changed.

If audiences or the *model reader* are conceptualised as reflections of the self, they are prone to be imprecise. As McQuail (1965) suggests, such misconceptualisation often occurs as a result of hegemonic² positioning of producers towards audiences. McQuail argues that in the attitudes of producers towards audiences, tendencies like 'paternalism', 'specialisation' and 'ritualism' can be observed. 'Paternalism' here refers to the attitude of media professionals of asserting to 'the mass media a missionary role of educating and informing, and of raising public levels of taste and appreciation' (p. 79). 'Specialisation' refers to the 'differentiation of media activities along functionally specific lines, with the aim of directing particular types of output towards the interests and needs of known audience groupings' (p. 80). Finally, 'ritualism' concerns 'the tendency to cling to well-tried formulas with known audience appeal' (p. 81), thereby privileging some practices over others because they have been previously tested and verified.

'Paternalism', 'specialisation' and 'ritualism' introduce Ari Heinonen's (2011) argument according to which media producers, while encouraging audience engagement, tend to hold their production teams as the 'sanctuary of professionalism' (p. 53). This corresponds to the fact that in the light of the threat of losing their role in society that PSM organisations are facing, they have looked for alternative models, but have done this while keeping old and well-established practices. Hilde Van den Bulck, Karen Donders and Gregory Ferrell Lowe (2018) in fact remark that PSM or-

² In this paper, I do not go deep into Antonio Gramsci's (1929-1935, 2012) idea of *cultural hegemony*; however, I do use the concept of hegemony for articulating my specific media production perspective: to indicate the dominant positioning that one group in power, in this case producers, takes towards another less empowered group, in this case audiences.

ganisations are still struggling ‘to recreate a viable place in the flux of convergence dynamics that mitigate against their centrality’ (p. 18).

James Bennett and Niki Strange (2014) add that

‘The baggage of broadcast production cultures often far outweighs that of their digital media counterparts, with multiplatform productions dominated by the legacies of “linear thinking”’ (p. 112).

For Bennett and Strange, linear thinking refers to the pre-Internet broadcasting culture that saw television as the main type of media running public service broadcasting. They illustrate how the idea of ‘TV first, everything else after’ (p. 145) undermined the potential of digital innovation, which becomes particularly relevant considering that public broadcasters are often expected to be at the forefront of innovation in the area of convergent media and online distribution (Moe, 2008; Bechmann, 2012).

Sandra Evans (2016), borrowing from disruption theory (Christensen, 2013), suggests that media professionals have a tendency to ‘autodisrupt’ their organisations in an attempt to innovate it before it is too late. She remarks that innovation often translates into ‘experimental managerial innovation, such as structural and administrative changes made in the attempt to support innovation’ (Evans, 2016, p. 15). Furthermore, Evans (2016) suggests that the search for change often becomes what she terms ‘storytelling innovation’ (p. 13), the practice of telling stories in new ways: including, for instance, the attempt to implement cross-media storytelling practices.

Such a movement towards new self-imposed organisational practices is, however, influenced by the cultural context in which these changes occur. For example, Timothy Havens (2014) elaborates upon Todd Gitlin’s (1983) idea of ‘industry lore’, defined as ‘the interpretation among industry insiders of material, social or historical realities that the industry media faces’ (Havens, 2014, p. 50); he suggests that producers, with their cultural baggage, might steer productions towards established and familiar practices.

All things considered, we can assume that if the conceptualisation of the audience is based upon the producers’ own tastes and if the audiences are a mirror image of the producers’ selves, the inclusive nature of cross-media, and thus of inclusive practices that see the audience members as co-participants rather than consumers, only partially finds fruitful ground in the shift to public service media.

In the empirical part of this study, I thus investigate whether the above-described tendencies, such as paternalism and ritualism, can be observed in the producers’ positioning towards audiences today. More concretely, the empirical work addresses the following research questions: How do PSM producers position themselves in their relationship with audiences? What do their notions of the *model reader* come from?

3. Research Design and Methods

The purpose of this work is to study how cross-media is conceptualised in relation to imagined audiences and how producers position themselves in their relationships with their audiences.

With this objective in mind and based on preliminary discussions with the members of the management of the public service media of Finland (YLE) and Estonia (ERR), I selected three different production teams. For this study, it was important that the management of both YLE and ERR themselves referred to the suggested productions as to cross-media programmes, so I asked them to suggest programmes that they considered to be cross-mediatic and I then independently made the decision regarding sample selection. I constructed the sample in such a way so that it illustrates different cross-media strategies. Given the lack of a systematic model for classification, I distinguish the cross-media types based on three different kinds of relationships between the texts that constitute the cross-media. The proposed models frame the different relationships as ‘many to one’, ‘many to many’ and ‘hybrid’ (Figure 1). The empirical part of the paper shows how these models bridge current theoretical approaches as producers shape their cross-media offerings with different aims.

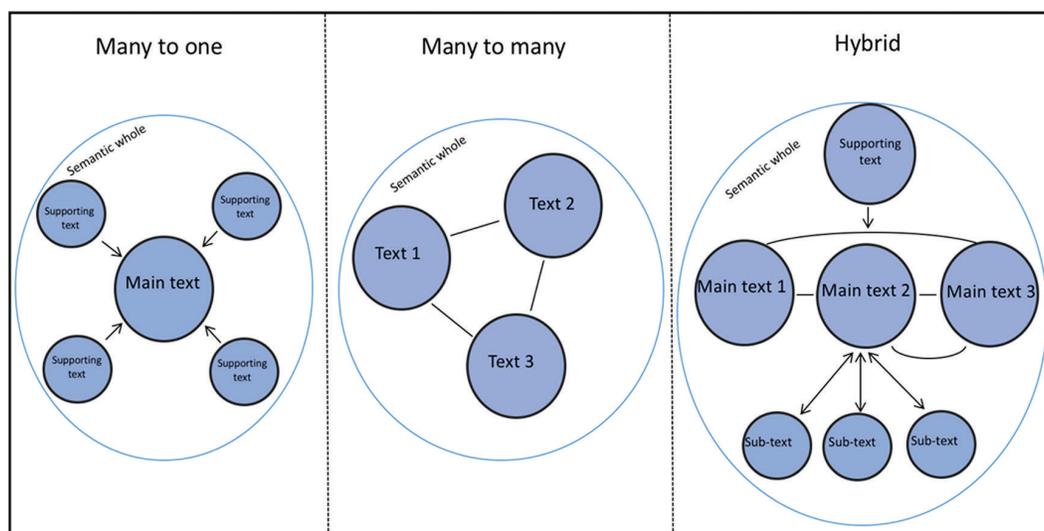


Figure 1. Cross-media strategies.

The ‘many-to-one’ strategy represents producers’ attempt to maximise the attention and engagement of audiences by emitting a central text. If the cross-media production arises from television, this ‘main text’ is most often a television product such as a television series or programme. Here, a number of supporting texts converge independently to endorse the main text and to promote a unidirectional migration of the audience from the supporting texts to the main text. The cross-mediatic nature of such an approach differs from classical marketing strategies, with which

this approach might be confused, because it indicates the creation of texts capable of stand-alone consumption while simultaneously pointing towards the main text.

With the ‘many-to-many’ model, each text, in a similar manner to transmedia storytelling (Jenkins, 2006), unfolds independently and meaningfully with the purpose of contributing to the creation of the whole without, however, necessarily creating a unifying narrative. Within this model, producers create a whole within which audiences are encouraged to migrate from one text to another yet do not offer them a unifying narrative supported, for instance, by the inclusion of migratory cues (Long, 2007) directly guiding them from one text to another. Audiences are therefore expected to find the next text via either independent search, driven by their interest and curiosity, or through suggestions reaching the audience via cross-marketing and cross-advertising.

The ‘hybrid’ strategy employs, for instance, the many-to-many strategy at the macro-level in relation to the whole programme and the many-to-one strategy at the micro level in relation to a single text (e.g. a short topical insert in a television magazine). Here, not only do the two previous models converge, but some texts might be also expanded into sub-texts that allow the audience to better engage with the single text or use alternative texts to help build a coherent whole.

In the light of these three models, I selected *Eesti Laul* (Estonian Song), the main Estonian singing competition produced by ERR, as a case of the many-to-one model; *Nullpunkt*, a youth fictional production co-produced by ERR and Allfilm, an independent Estonian production company, as a many-to-many case; and *Puoli Seitsemän*, an evening magazine–type television programme produced by Finnish YLE, as a hybrid strategy example.

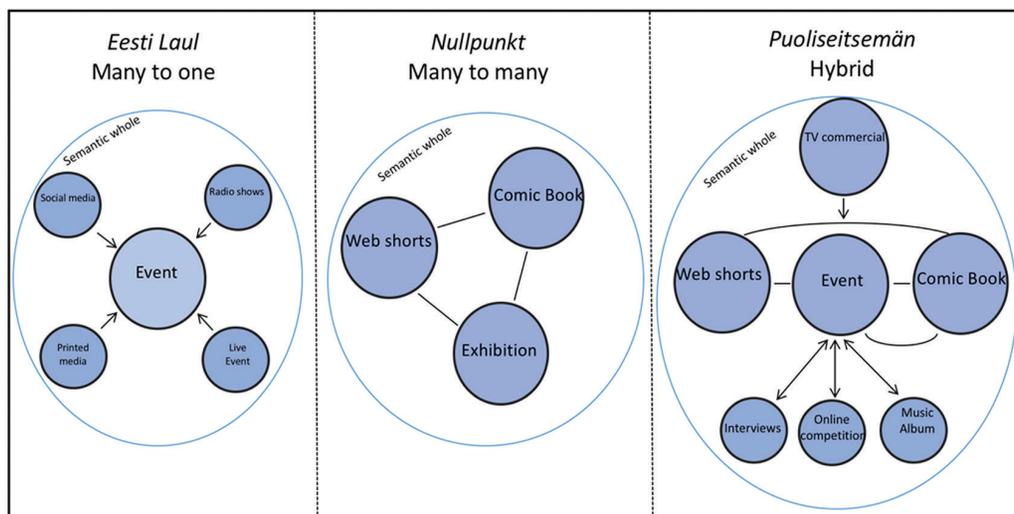


Figure 2. Rationale for production selection.

Eesti Laul is an annual event aimed at selecting a national representative for the Eurovision Song Contest. The cross-media production comprises three television

episodes (two semi-finals and one final); one live event at the Saku Suurhall Arena, the largest indoor arena in Estonia; and a number of radio broadcasting formats³, presence on Facebook and Instagram, as well as partnership with *Postimees*, a national daily newspaper in Estonia. *Nullpunkt* is a production consisting of a pre-existing book, a feature film and a six-episode television series, as well as a fan book, an online game and a mobile augmented-reality app together with a presence on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. *Puoli Seitsemän* is a factual magazine-type daily television show and includes radio inserts; a number of live events; webisodes; and a presence on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

The choice to select works from two different countries reflects the current situation of the cross-media productions of PSM in the region and well fits the explorative nature of this study. Cross-media produced by public service is still a relatively new phenomenon. Furthermore, considering that this study is not intended to be comparative, each case study shows the production practices and producers' positioning at a very specific moment in time and space.

I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews that took place from December 2014 to December 2015. The selection of interviewees reflected my intention to talk to those employees who had a direct say in the making of the programme, so I opted for figures such as producers, editors, journalists, creative directors and others who could be considered *emitters* within Eco's framework. The interviews unfolded along three main topics: the producers' understanding of the program's nature, their conceptualisation of audiences, and their positioning towards practices favouring the active engagement of audiences. Each interview had an approximate duration of sixty minutes.

The interviews were first transcribed and then analysed using qualitative data analysis software (NVivo). The data analysis was thematic (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003) and conducted by implementing a two round coding system made up of an initial 'open coding' (Strauss, 1987) followed by a revised second round coding. More specifically, since the coding was aimed at identifying the essential themes and patterns that formed the data, I used Virginia Braun and Victoria Clark's (2006) model, where my open coding equalled their 'phase 2' (p. 87); hence, the data were first coded according to an initial list of ideas that emerged from a preliminary familiarisation with the data set. The coded data were then analysed and refined ('phases 3 and 4' (p. 87)) and then analysed again both within each code and across the whole data set.

4. The Nature of Media Production and Producers' Positioning

What constitutes producers' perceptions of their work is of primary importance in the study of their positioning towards audiences. This is because, as briefly noted, if producers see their production as a 'classical' television programme, they focus on a primary text—the television programme—which might indicate that they relate to

³ Including live radio broadcasting of the semi-finals and of the final (in Estonian and Russian) and a number of radio programmes across Radio 2 and Radio 4 both prior and after the final.

their audience as to a semi-passive mass, consuming a text from a 'lean back medium' (Katz, 2010). The mass would be in such an instance semi-passive because even though today's television in no way excludes forms of active engagement, such as voting and online commenting, the very nature of television favours passive consumption rather than active engagement.

If, on the contrary, producers see their productions as something beyond television, as something unfolding across media, they envision and foster the presence of paratexts (Gray, 2010). This, in turn, might indicate the producers' inclination to relate to their audience as to an "active" one (Fiske, 1989; Andrejevic, 2008), working on the assumption that one person may watch a show on television; comment on the same show's post on one of numerous social media platforms, thereby engaging in the production of user-generated content and becoming a 'prosumer' (Toffler, 1980); and attend a live event related to the show.

Considering this, all three cases examined in this research study stemmed from television, either transforming established realities, as in the case of *Puoli Seitsemän* and *Eesti Laul*, or as new experiences created by professionals who had previously worked primarily in the film and television industry, as is the case with *Nullpunkt*. This, as I have previously discussed, may suggest that there is an inherited cultural and social conditioning of how producers conceive of their works and of their audiences.

Regarding the use of social media, which potentially could be an arena of interaction and audience participation, Marleen Te Walvaart, Hilde Van den Bulck and Alexander Dhoest (2016) remark that media professionals' use of social media is primarily aimed at circulating existing content rather than truly engaging audiences. This results in decreasing audience engagement to the semi-passive mode typical of television watching. The authors stress that for the producers, "a more interactive approach is considered difficult as the daily routines focus on producing a television programme" (p. 14).

The interviews with *Puoli Seitsemän* staff confirm the perceived difficulty. Some of the interviewees see their work as that of a television programme that remains a television programme despite its online presence. When asked to define their work, a journalist argued, 'it is a television show [...]. It is not multiplatform', while another remarked, 'I do a TV show almost 90 per cent of the time, and then there are different kinds of things, like social media and a little bit of co-operation with radio channels'. One interviewee⁴ added some self-reflection by stressing

'I still see it mostly as a TV programme. I know I should be thinking of it as a multimedia platform, but my work, what I do, is so limited, basically [...]. I don't do much else besides the TV show'.

Some other interviewees saw how their show is transforming:

⁴ In the empirical part, I mostly do not specify the professional role that the interviewee has in the production team, as I do not examine the dynamics of production within the production team, but rather the positioning of the team as a whole.

'I have been working here for two years, and when I came it was more a TV programme, but during those two years, it has become more and more of a programme that is also on the Internet and where we do lots of things all the time'.

There were also more overarching explanations, such as:

'It is a brand, and it consists of the TV programme—four times a week, a live show, which is a hybrid of a talk show and factual magazine with an emphasis on field journalism, plus an Internet existence, which nowadays is partly independent from the content broadcast live on TV'.

Eesti Laul reflects similar patterns but with a noticeable difference. Here producers differentiate between their understanding of the production and the audience's interpretation of *Eesti Laul*. According to them, *Eesti Laul* is for producers primarily a project or television show, while for audiences it is mainly a singing competition. One of the interviewees expressed this concept, explaining:

'It used to be only, only a TV show [...], but then it became more than a TV show [...]. However, I think they [the Estonian public] would say that it is first and foremost a competition. I am not even sure if they would mention that it is a TV show'.

These remarks seem to suggest that media professionals privilege TV, or as Benet and Strange (2014) have suggested, 'linear thinking', and have a sort of resistance when dealing with other forms of media that, by nature, push the audience towards more engaged behaviour rather than semi-passive television consumption.

Ultimately, this could lead either to the acceptance of the upcoming reality, as I will discuss later, or to what Karin Van Es' (2016, p. 121) predicts: that in the future, despite promises of interaction and audience inclusion, the media will try to maintain the status quo old practices. This also reflects Nikki Usher's (2014) argument that journalists do not engage in genuine conversation with the audience despite their initial interest in the participatory possibilities brought by technological innovations.

Nullpunkt follows a different trajectory because its producers have seen it from the very beginning as a project made up of a book, a film and a television series and thus beyond the dominant scope of television. Here, contrary to the first two cases, where the production is seen as something in transformation that is inevitably influenced by its original format, *Nullpunkt* is seen as unfolding across platforms yet gravitating around the film and television texts.

In the case of *Puoli Seitsemän*, some responses from the interviewees seemed to indicate a 'top-down' imposition of executives' decisions, which were perhaps 'pushed' onto the production teams. Comments like 'YLE is very keen on having a multiplatform approach, so now we are also getting ready to do some web-specific videos' and, in reference to audience targeting, 'I know that the bosses would like to have young women. A couple of years back, it was the young men they were after'

might be symptomatic of a change introduced from the top rather than the result of a cultural shift of the producers themselves. This is to say that the push toward organisational changes and innovative storytelling practices, as Evans (2016) articulated, seem to be the result of the strategic thinking of the senior management rather than an aspiration of production teams.

What is perceived as power positioning of executives towards their employees might reflect the organisation's culture, thus potentially illuminating a paternalistic and hegemonic positioning of the producers towards their audience. I suggest that a different understanding of the television or a cross-media production could reflect the producers' understanding of their relationship with their audience.

Regardless of the basic differences between the studied productions, all three had one element in common: the media professionals produced for themselves. As previously discussed, by the 1960s scholars had already found that media professionals were basing their production choices on personal taste (McQuail, 1965) and this study confirms the finding. Even within the cross-media productions, the positioning of the producers often remained egocentric (Turow & Draper, 2014).

One *Eesti Laul* interviewee argued:

'I make the programme for myself. I'm not making the programme for people older than me. I'm trying to make it for myself and those younger than me because pop music is for people younger than the usual ERR employee'.

Puoli Seitsemän producers' comments were similar. One interviewee remarked that they made the programme for people like themselves, and another stressed, 'I try to write in a way that I would like to see it myself, so I don't think about older or younger people'. Yet another went further, explaining:

'When I choose what kind of topics we talk about there, on the TV show, I think about what is interesting [...], interesting in general, interesting to me, interesting to my colleagues'.

In the case of *Puoli Seitsemän*, this self-centred position, where the *model reader* is shaped in relation to the self, is not accidental. Instead, as Pekka Toikka, *Puoli Seitsemän*'s head producer, confirmed, it is a planned strategy. He noted:

That [choosing a topic that interests the creator] is what they are asked for, because they themselves do the creative job. They are not given an idea—make an insert of the biggest truck in Finland—it has to be them themselves who find the idea. And this makes them a bit blind in a sense. But from my point of view, we need to have a good variety of people who are making it for themselves, so that I can get a good combination of different personalities.

What *Puoli Seitsemän*, and also the other two productions, seem to indicate is that even fifty years after McQuail's (1965) observations, a paternalistic positioning

of producers still exists. This does not contradict the notion of modelling the audience based on the producers' personal tastes: the producers still perceive audiences as an entity separated from their own selves. In other words, while producers stand for their own model readers and thus produce media content primarily based on their own tastes, they, paternalistically, look down on the actual audiences as on groups of individuals who should be educated.

In the light of this situation, do media professionals, despite their self-centred positioning, envision a sort of inclusive relationship with their audiences? Or are they more inclined towards a top-down approach as described by Mark Andrejevic (2008)?

I suggest that, in certain cases, such a top-down approach may be imposed on media professionals by the management in the attempt to address the threat of audience fragmentation. It is revealing that, according to the YLE Administrative Council, 'YLE has an obligation to use different technologies and must promote the development and use of online services' (YLE, 2016). However, this is not unique to YLE. In fact, James Bennett (2006) argues that:

'The potentialities of television's "new" capacities have forced the BBC into a position of attempting to embrace and promote such capacities to demonstrate its continuing relevancy' (p. 268).

Such changes may be confronted with opposition from the creative teams, potentially being seen as 'a consequence of a new managerial culture taking over' (Nissen, 2013, p. 72) and possibly leading to a sort of defensive positioning in which 'the new media mock the old while tellingly failing to deliver on the promised transformative shift in power relations' (Andrejevic, 2008, p. 44).

As I have argued, cross-media can occur even without interactive or inclusive elements. Nevertheless, considering what I have discussed so far, their omission might be indicative of a misunderstanding of the potential of cross-media as a tool for engagement. Producers' intentions might be, in principle, to welcome audiences' active engagement, yet, in reality, their productions and even their comments might tell a different story. The case of *Eesti Laul* is emblematic. The majority of the interviewees welcomed the idea of a 'participatory' experience, but for them participation was only welcome when framed within strict rules and predefined boundaries. For example, audience members have the right to vote for their favourite act, but this right is exercised within the boundaries of a selection of 20 acts that have been previously defined by a jury of experts. This is done, according to the interviewees, in the name of quality and is, once again, a sign of a paternalistic approach in which producers make decisions for the audience. Moreover, it is an indication of ritualism: repeating known production practices that are preferred to innovation and experimentation related to cross-media practices, or as Havens (2014) has suggested, an indication of the influence that the producers' cultural baggage exerts over production practices.

The *Puoli Seitsemän* case is relevant from a similar viewpoint. Here, when employees were asked if they would broadcast or use in some form content made by

their audience, contradictions emerged. Some employees appealed to YLE's quality trademark and expressed fear that 'nonprofessional' content could harm the reputation of public broadcasting services in Finland. Hence, they stressed that audience involvement should be confined to participating in events rather than co-creating content. In contrast, other interviewees took a more pragmatic position; one in particular argued:

'I am not sure about the quality of the content when it comes from the viewers, it could be anything, and I think that at YLE [...] maybe we should broaden our attitudes, so that everything does not have to be so clean and neat.'

Others, like *Puoli Seitsemän*'s main producer, stressed that the content produced by the audience should be welcome and sought out. The different positions held among members of the same creative team is a symptom of a lack of an overall strategy regarding the relationship with audiences.

Furthermore, the top-down decision making and the paternalistic approach previously described might reflect themselves in some latent problems in the producer–audience relationship. First, conceptualising the *model reader* based on the self ('I produce for myself') leads to a number of possible *model readers*, depending by whom the particular text was conceived and produced. In fact, interviewees across the three case studies all described their audiences in different and at times conflicting ways. This was well illustrated by the *Nullpunkt* case, where the film and television series director stated, 'Our primary target audience is between 13 and 23 years old; then, the "surprise target audience" is females between 30 and 50 years old', while the main producer argued, 'Our primary audience is between 14 and 18 years old and our secondary audience between 19 and 26'.

In cross-media, the consequent risk is that the polysemy of different conceptualisations might be so vast that it ends up jeopardising the shaping of coherent texts based on shared codes. This can easily lead to a situation of aberrant reading, as seen in Alessandro Nani's and Pille Prulmann-Vengerfeldt's text (2017), where the audience does not decode the message(s) as envisioned. This is similar to the pushback reaction described by Annette Hill (2016) in her discussion of the complex push-and-pull dynamics between producers and audiences. She stresses that while producers might pull the audience into multi-layered productions unfolding from television to the Internet, mobile apps and events, the audience 'can push back, for example, through alternative fan practices, disengaging with content, or illegal viewing' (p. 5).

Second, the conceptualisation of the audience as modelled on the self represents the antithesis of the inclusive practices that, as we have seen, are a significant aspect of cross-media (Ibrus & Scolari, 2012). Thus, such an approach can easily lead to the audience's rejection of the imposed message and to aberrant decoding.

5. Conclusions

The complex relationship between television producers and the audience has been theorised and empirically studied for many years. However, today's transformed media eco-system requires studies capable of applying established theoretical concepts to new grounds. Media convergence has opened up new areas of inquiry and, as Scolarì (2009) suggests, has actualised theories that some years ago might have been considered exhausted. This is the case of the Umberto Eco's ([1968] 2005) ideas of a producer as an *emitter*, *model reader* and *aberrant decoding* that allowed me to conceptualise the elements that producers are aware of prior to their conceptualisation of the audiences and of productions. Television producers are being pushed into new roles and, as emerged in this study, are struggling with them. Three case studies from Finland and Estonia helped me to illustrate the positioning PSM producers towards audiences, that, similarly to other studies (Domingo, 2008; Hermida and Thurman; 2008; Usher, 2014), tell a tale of the past.

The data played out against McQuail's (1965) work helped me to demonstrate how media professionals often follow trajectories of paternalism, specialisation and ritualism that can lead to hegemonic positioning of professionals towards audiences. This has not changed with the blossoming of converged media. Instead, the empirical evidence presented in this paper has shown similar trajectories. First, public service media producers still see cross-media programmes as television programmes, while the management attempts to add it a convergent media layer.

Second, it has highlighted how producers often conceptualise the audience and craft their programs based on their self-images, thus making room for aberrant decoding. The empirical results suggest that media creators, despite explicit endorsement of active engagement of audiences, still see the actual audience as a group of passive consumers who need to be entertained rather than involved in production processes. As a result, they fail to embrace the very nature of cross-media in the name of the conflict of alleged quality and active engagement. The potential of co-creation with audiences, typical of cross-media, is confined to a theoretical possibility, privileging the status quo and established practices over the potential of the new modalities.

In the light of what has been discussed in this work, I suggest that public service media organisations are in need of a profound cultural transformation. As Peter Goodwin (2018) argues, public service media organisations should first 'invest substantial resources in areas quite outside their traditional broadcasting remit' and then 'they would have to adopt a far more democratic and participatory attitude to those involved in new public service networked initiatives' (p. 39).

PSM should regard the Internet and social media as an integral part of their practices in order to comply with their remit. Stig Hjarvard (2018) suggests:

'PSM should not think of social media in isolation but rather as part of a wider, converging media infrastructure in which PSM *and other media* jointly influence information flows and debates that unfold in and between various media.' (p. 70).

Finally, Hermann Rotermund (2018) remarks:

‘As long as “online” is assessed as an additional, supplemental distribution channel for already produced linear content, it is unlikely that the online strategy of many PSM organisations will succeed.’ (p. 79).

Not only academic but also industry understanding of cross-media phenomena could therefore benefit from further investigation of the production processes of cross-media products, the changing role of media professionals, and audience behaviour. In particular, we should further study how willing audiences are to act as the *model readers* of such productions; in other words, we should investigate the effectiveness of cross-media across genres and cultures. Finally, the models proposed in this article should be further tested as a systematic classification of cross-media products.

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