

Preface

Public Service Media's Contribution to Society is the tenth RIPE volume published by Nordicom. This collection is sourced from the discussions and presentations that took place at what was supposed to be the RIPE@2020 conference in Geneva, but which, due to a global pandemic, transformed into the RIPE@2021 virtual conference. The outbreak of Covid-19 made it impossible to host a physical conference on the premises of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) in Geneva that would have also provided an opportunity to celebrate RIPE's 20-year legacy and the seventieth anniversary of EBU. Nevertheless, the organisers at the University of Fribourg carried on their work and hosted the best possible conference given the circumstances. Making papers and video presentations available on-demand before the conference and meeting live only for discussion and interaction proved to be a format worthy of RIPE, as it allowed for high-quality exchange while at the same time preventing video-conferencing fatigue. Moreover, the virtual format allowed scholars and public service media (PSM) practitioners from around the globe to participate in fruitful discussions.

The conference's and book's theme – contribution to society – is a very topical one. PSM organisations across Europe and beyond are increasingly under pressure. Due to digitalisation, media use continues to rapidly change, with streaming services and online platforms gaining importance and making it harder for legacy media to hold their ground. Moreover, with users and advertisers shifting to search engines and social networks, the business model of newspaper publishers is at risk. This crisis of newspapers has fuelled attacks on PSM, as their online activities are perceived as a market distortion that makes it even harder for commercial media to succeed. In addition, many policy-makers are highly critical of PSM due to a belief in the efficiency of market solutions or – especially in the case of right-wing populist parties – for

political reasons. As a result, both PSM's role in a digital environment and its funding are under scrutiny, placing PSM organisations in a seemingly constant defensive position. Following attempts to demonstrate the "public value" of PSM, the discussion is now turning towards the concept of PSM's "contribution to society". The RIPE@2021 conference and this volume provide an opportunity for media and communication scholars to critically discuss the analytical value and usefulness of this concept.

As editors of this volume, we have many persons and organisations to thank for their support. The local organising committee for the RIPE@2021 conference consisted of Etienne Bürdel, Stefano Pedrazzi, Manuel Puppis (all from the University of Fribourg), and Roberto Suárez Candel (formerly at EBU). The programme committee consisted of Maria Michalis (Westminster University, London), Marko Milosavljević (University of Ljubljana), Julia Pohle (WZB Berlin Social Science Center), Manuel Puppis, Roberto Suárez Candel, and Hilde Van den Bulck (Drexel University, Philadelphia). Both committees were essential for the focus and quality of the conference. Obviously, all presenters, session chairs, respondents, and reviewers made important contributions to the success of the conference and the book. A special shout-out goes to the conference's keynote speakers, Abraham Bernstein (University of Zurich) and Gilles Marchand (Director-General SRG SSR). We are also grateful to EBU, and especially to Florence Hartmann, for sponsoring the conference's best paper awards, and to the former and current management team of the International Association of Public Media Researchers (IAPMR). We thank the authors of the chapters collected in this volume for their important contributions. Moreover, we would like to express our gratitude to Hilde Van den Bulck, who kindly agreed to write a concluding chapter – a commitment that involved an in-depth engagement with all the other chapters contained in this book. Last, but not least, we thank Nordicom for their support during the preparation of this volume. The community of PSM researchers is also grateful for the professional support that Nordicom has provided since the first RIPE volume was published twenty years ago in 2003. Nordicom and RIPE have mutually benefitted from a relationship that has produced the most comprehensive series of scholarly publications about PSM in times of digitalisation. We especially would like to mention the Open Access that Nordicom generously provided for the entire series, which has enabled researchers around the world to engage with the knowledge and insights produced by the many scholars who have contributed over the last two decades.

We hope that you, dear readers, enjoy this volume and that the chapters inspire you to think about PSM's contribution to society in new and fruitful ways. While this is the last anthology with Nordicom resulting directly from a RIPE conference, the work of PSM researchers, RIPE conferences, and

publication activities will continue. Most importantly, as PSM researchers, our aims remain unchanged: good research coupled with exchange between scholars and practitioners to better understand the role of PSM in society, both today and tomorrow.

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