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**Working with scenarios of future Public Service Media
 - a tool for political decision making?**

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Abstract

Although dramatic changes and serious challenges are numerous in the media environment, the political will and/or capability in the traditional public media strongholds of North Western Europe to make corresponding reforms of the prevailing PSM systems have been absent. Why? Is it because reform ideas are caught in a stalemate between opposing political coalitions? Or are dramatic reform plans on a halt because they are faced with an apparent overall satisfaction among the majority of licence fee payers, measured by the market share of the existing PSM offer? The explanation could also be the complexity of the new media markets and the admitted lack of insight and understanding among politicians concerning the potential consequences of drastic changes.

On that background, the paper presents ‘scenario building’ as a possible tool for political decision making on future PSM systems and discusses its strong features and shortcomings, especially a number of methodological challenges and problems concerning the available knowledge base necessary to illustrate and evaluate the effects of changing PSM paradigms.

Keywords: ‘PSM remit’; ‘public value’; ‘market impact’; ‘policy evaluation

The author is member of commission, set up for a two-year period (2015-2016) by the Danish parliament, asked to present scenarios of the future Danish PSM and evaluate their consequences. The paper discusses some general methodological considerations stemming from that PSM scenario work but does not present the work of the commission, expected to be finalized at the end of this year.

1. Introduction

Since the end of its monopoly status the question of how the Public Service Media (PSM) sector should develop and be regulated has been a constantly recurring issue. Political decision makers in governments and parliaments of the traditional PSM strongholds in the North-western European states have been split along relative consistent lines in recurring and often heated debates on the necessity of reforms. The alienation from the collective culture of the industrial era combined with individualistic user patterns of new digital media is a genuine disruptive challenge to all mass media. This applies especially to the classic public service media founded on a community-oriented mission (Nissen, pp. 101-107). In most countries, changes in the regulatory set-up of PSM have however mainly been of an incremental character although some have argued for more radical reforms. The positions and disparate agendas can be described briefly as follows.

1.1. The bipolar PSM dispute

Expecting to benefit from a reduced PSM role commercial media and the printed press are complaining about market distortion arguing for a narrower PSM remit. In a somewhat peculiar alliance they are often joined by a critical cultural elite claiming that PSM should concentrate on a more distinctive programming of “genuine PSM content”, i.e. cultural programs, news, children programming etc. Also here you find the centre-right political parties working to attenuate the role of the public sector to give the market more breathing space. Moreover, many of the people in the new, interactive and individualized digital media businesses are seeing the PSMs as relict from the old collective mass-media era.

Although most of these views have been on the agenda of the PSM debate for years, they are now being presented with renewed strength as unavoidable consequences of the rapidly evolving digital, multi-media environment. The alleged urgency of reforming the whole PSM system gives their supporters the advantage of a proactive image.

The defenders of the present PSM system consists primarily of centre left-wing political parties that historically have supported a broad variety of collectively financed public services. Apart from the PSM companies themselves, they have few allies, mostly of whom are to be found among listeners and viewers' associations and academics in the media field. By contrast to the "reformists" this grouping lacks the rhetorical strength of being in the offensive. They might be right in arguing that the societal role of PSM in a digital environment is more important than ever, and that the speed of change in media habits and user behaviour is somewhat exaggerated. From a communicative point of view, however, such a defensive stance seldom gathers many active supporters at a time where everybody seems to experience the winds of change. The engaged PSM constituency have however a large group of more silent followers, i.e. most of the license fee paying citizens who – measured by the time they spend on using the PSM offer – seems to be rather satisfied with the present system.

1.2. Politicians hesitate launching radical reforms of the PSM system

It is however worth noting that – in spite of an ostensibly general acknowledgement across political differences of fundamental changes occurring in the media environment to which PSM must somehow adapt – there appears to be a kind of political paralysis. We often see political parties in the run-up campaigns for parliamentary elections making an effort to differentiate themselves in their media policy by suggesting radical reforms. However, when the very same parties after the election form the new government and takes office, it is as if they lose courage giving up their ambition for substantial change and fall back to incremental adjustments to the existing system. The turnaround made by the British Tory government in the Spring of 2016 is just one example among many other.

Although such a pattern can be found in many other policy areas of mature political systems, there might be specific characteristics of media politics that explains the pattern of incremental change and apparent lack of reform zeal. Media business is - especially in these years of digital development – a complex and contentious area of political regulation. The stakeholder environment consists of a rare combination of (big) business interests and very outspoken groups and individuals relating their interests closely to diverse national cultural policies. In spite of all the complexity, many politicians don't hesitate to express strong opinions – mostly based upon their

experience as users of media – on what should be categorized as "real public service" and which regulatory measures should be taken to obtain the desired societal objectives related to PSM. In the political decision-making context however, their positions are based more on personal, individual preferences than thorough understanding of the dynamics of supply and demand in the media markets. An area, which only (some) media-scholars and professional canal schedulers are familiar with. That applies even more so when it comes to understanding the interrelation between media-use and its societal effects. We might justify PSM by its supposed ability to supports national culture and promote social cohesion, but we really don't know if and how it works?

This lengthy deliberation on the PSM stakeholder environment, in which politicians are operating, and the apparent difficulty in establishing a sustainable basis for decision serves as a lead-in to the following reflections whether a scenario based approach to political decision making can be used as a fruitful method. It's the purpose of the paper to present the scenario approach and discuss a number of methodological issues related to working with scenarios on PSM in its political environment.

Following this introduction, section 2 will describe some general features of scenario work, especially related to decision making. On that basis section 3 will illustrate how scenarios might be used to illustrate alternative PSM variants. In section 4 a number of methodological challenges and necessary shortcuts will be discussed, especially related to assessing the impacts of the scenarios. Finally, some concluding remarks in section 5.

2. Scenario building as a tool for decision making

Scenario building as a tool in policy making was first used in the 1960'ies by the Rand corporation related to the US nuclear warfare tactics and strategies. Since then it has been used in a wide variety of (more peaceful) contexts and different areas, both public and private. It is used as an exploratory method to study the future, drawing attention to related variables and highlighting discontinuities. Scenarios can be applied as a tool for illustrating the conceivable consequences of extended trends revealing choices available and/or as method for ex ante evaluations of the effects of alternative decisions in a strategy planning process.

Because of the different usages and the interdisciplinary character of many scenario projects, scenarios are defined and described with considerable variation (see for instance: Ratcliffe, J. (2000), JCR (2007), Kosow, H. and Gassner, R. (2008), Edwarson, M. P. and Pargman, D. (2014), Kasem, A. et al. (2015), Ramirez et al. (2015)). For the purpose of the scenario work described in this paper, scenarios are seen as: *Descriptive narratives illustrating chosen segments of a plausible future. Not to be understood as predictions, but rather as simulations of the consequences of possible alternative decisions and actions under consideration.*

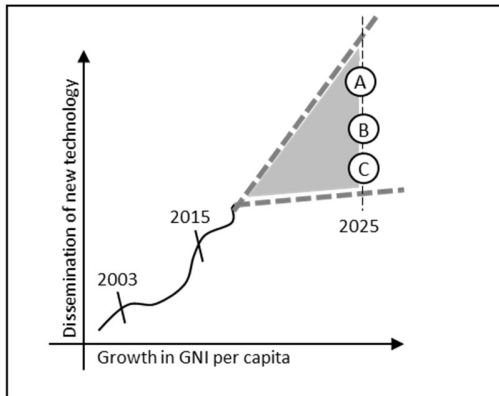
Such scenarios will usually have a normative character in the sense that their consequences are evaluated against certain overarching values and objectives of the organisation. On this background the following section will present a very rough, general sketch of typical elements and phases of a scenario building process, drawn from the literature mentioned above.

2.1. The scenario building process, some commonly used steps and elements

The starting point will typically be an identification of the field (i.e. scope and boundaries) and the main focus of the scenario project in question. The next step is to identify locate a number of core parameters, that have critical importance for the organisation and at the same time are characterized by considerable uncertainty and maybe also a significant risk and disagreement among the involved stakeholders. Such parameters or key factors can be external as for instance ‘global climate change’, ‘costs/price market trends’ and anticipated ‘government regulation’, or internal, such as the ‘profile of an investment policy’, ‘marketing initiatives’ and ‘critical elements of a merger and acquisition strategy’.

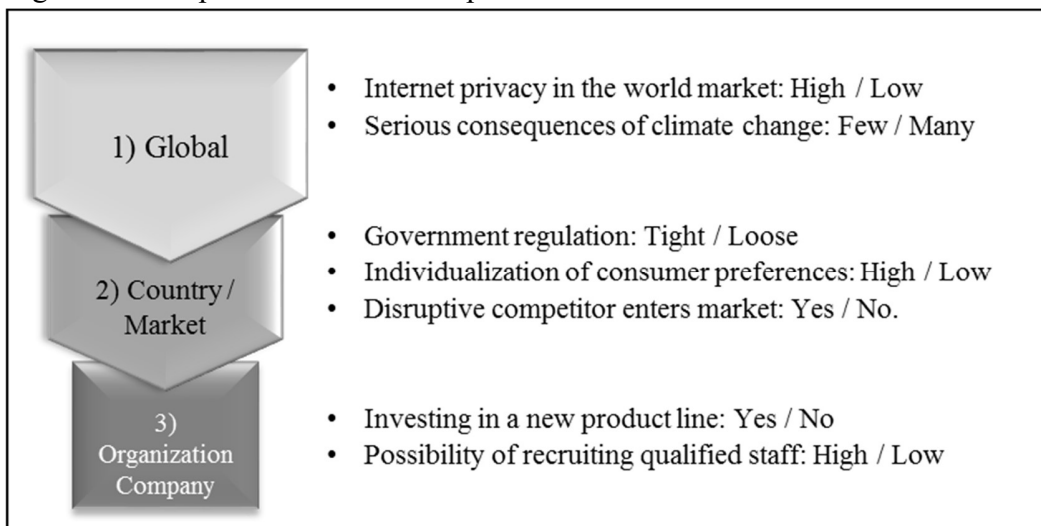
Depending on the purpose of the work and the chosen parameters, the third step is then to construct scenarios. Some of the parameters might be measurable based on quantitative data and can be used to extend trends of past developments into hypothetical projections of a possible future. In that case, an often used and simple method is to select two important, correlated data sets and use them to establish the operational space between two outlier developments. Within this space a number of scenarios can then be constructed and evaluated up against desired outcomes. Because the immediate future actually often looks much like today, such trend based scenarios by confirming our conservatism will overshadow potential discontinuities and disruption.

Figure 1. Trend based scenarios



Dealing with areas characterized by high unpredictability, scenarios must be based on much more complex constructs difficult to cover with statistical timelines and evidence based links between cause and effects. Here, as illustrated in figure 2, parameters can indicate more roughly a condition or a potential change on a scale between dichotomous extremes, for instance “High/Low”, “Few/Many”, “Tight/Loose” or “Yes/No”.

Figure 2. Examples of dicotomaized parameters related to different environments

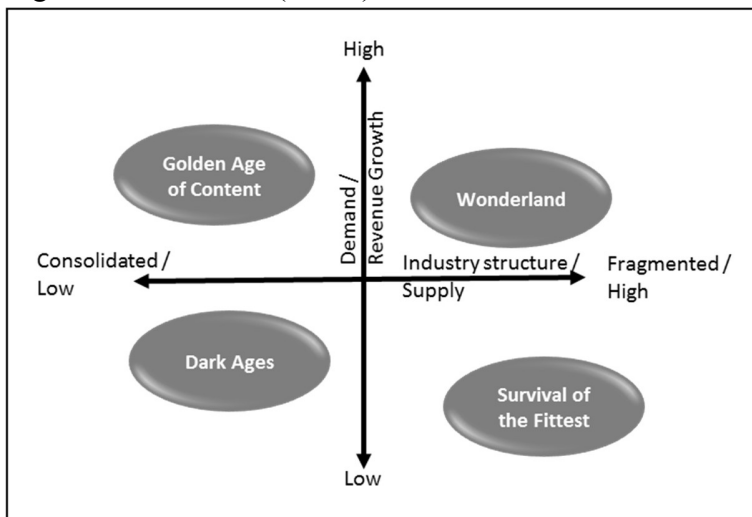


A special attention should be given to choose parameters that are regarded as driving forces of change in the macro-environment of the organization (Kosnow & Gassner, 26) (Ratcliffe, 9). What is “environment” varies, depending on institutional level as illustrated in figure 2.

A set of important parameters can in a dichotomized form be combined in a so called “scenario cross” providing four different scenarios as shown in figure 3. Because we are here on a company level 3, cf. figure 2, the four scenarios are all market driven, based on macro-environmental parameters, that individual actors have very little influence on.

A scenario cross, however does not in itself provide alternative strategies, to choose between by a management team of a company. Rather each of the scenarios highlights a set of specified environmental conditions to which any company in the business must adapt their strategy, and be prepared to alter if there are signs that the market evolves from one scenario to another.

Figure 3. Four future (media) scenarios



Source: Izdebski, L. et al. (2013) p. 5

The next step will therefore be to select critical parameters (possible actions) suited to each scenario, which taken together illustrates potential strategic choices of the company. Here one has to find a balance between on the one side to leave the beaten road of conventional wisdom and past experiences by suggesting new innovative solutions and on the other securing some realism in order to make the scenarios relevant for policy decisions.

In this context it is also important to establish plausible and consistent interrelationships between the environmental parameters and the suggested actions as well as mutually between these. That counts also when it comes to assessing the consequences and effects of the suggested strategic choices of each scenario against the key objectives of the company. As we here are dealing with

planned actions and their expected effect, such assessments can seldom be based on fully proved relations between cause and effect. This can certainly be regarded as a weakness of scenario building. On the other hand, scenarios used as narratives to illustrate plausible elements of a possible future and not as predictions of probable outcomes might benefit from being open-ended and having some degree of uncertainty. It can actually be seen as an advantage, making it easier to combine imagination, creativity and audacity with common sense and professional knowledge of the business.

The work to establish scenarios can be organized in different ways, often with a smaller working group in charge of the process, collecting data, writing papers and so forth. That can be combined with experienced scenario builders and people with professional knowledge of the business. If the purposes of scenario work (also) is to align decision makers, top management should be involved directly in the whole process, or together with external experts and stakeholders participate in workshops and seminars at certain stages.

It may be added, that to be useful in a decision making process scenarios ought to be very simple, easy to understand and to compare between each other. That also counts for the number of scenarios. A rule of thumb seems to be around 4-5; no more because that could be difficult to handle, no less since that will often result in too narrow a range of alternatives. The timespan of scenario work varies a great deal depending on purpose. When used in decision making concerning company strategy, the time-span should be beyond the immediate, tactical horizon, but probably not more than five to ten years to secure some realism and decision making relevance.

2.2. The usage of scenarios in a political environment

As the literature on scenario work in political systems apparently is sparse, there may be reason to consider whether the conditions and methods vary between business and politics.

It would probably be deemed a naive notion to regard decision-making processes in business companies as being one-dimensional and straight forward. That is to say that there should be one common goal of a company adhered to by all. Also a bit credulous to expect that although there might be considerable disagreement about the means to achieve the goal in the beginning of a decision making process, it usually ends up with a final concluding decision taken by the

management board or the CEO, which everybody accept and abide by. People with inside experiences from business companies will certainly question the realism of this description, but most of them will regard it as a commonly accepted ideal. Well run and successful companies usually come quite close to this ideal.

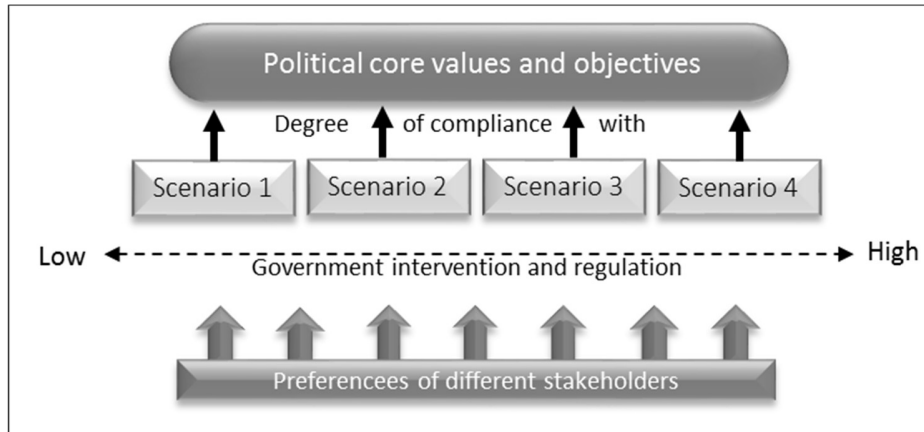
In the world of parliaments and politics parties, it is quite different. Political parties and their MPs often express common goals (e.g. protecting the environment, a high employment rate, providing better services for the citizens in health, education, social welfare and so forth). However, when it comes to selecting the means to reach these goals, they usually disagree. And they have to disagree, because divergence is the *raison d'être* of political parties. Political decision making amongst political parties is not a matter agreeing – but to reach compromises between differing attitudes and opinions. Of this reason it is probably not easy to use scenarios to involve political decision makers (ministers and MPs) from different parties directly in the scenario work as a mutual learning process.

A process, that is more in line with the practices in the political system, is to establish some kind of a committee consisting of people with complementary knowledge on the area in question. Asking the committee to identify general trends and areas of uncertainty and risks, separating environmental parameters from areas within reach of possible influence. Further to find and describe critical interdependent parameters combining them in a number of scenarios to assess the effect of alternative elements and decisions against a set of more or less shared core values and objectives. All in all, such committees or project groups can follow most of the elements of scenario building described in section 2.1. above.

Certain extra elements can however, as shown with two examples in figure 4, be added to make scenario work more relevant in a political environment. For instance, often political parties have, independently of a scenario process, chosen and publicly communicated their preferred solution (or elements of it) to the policy area of the scenario work. If applicable, such 'preferred solutions' can be incorporated in the scenarios and their effects evaluated along with other alternatives. Also it is advisable – if relevant and possible – to include among the main parameters central themes of general, widespread political discourses. In figure 4 it is illustrated by the span

high – low score on ‘government intervention and regulation’, which for decades has been a general dividing line in many areas of party politics.

Figure 4. A scenario set-up to assess the effect of alternative political action



One should however also recognize that the end result of a scenario process in a party-political environment will only exceptionally be a united decision opting for the implementation of single scenario. Instead policy makers - in accordance with the political culture of compromise – will probably try to find combinations of elements from several scenarios and try to assemble them into a joint solution they can live with.

3. Scenarios as a tool for political decision making on future PSM

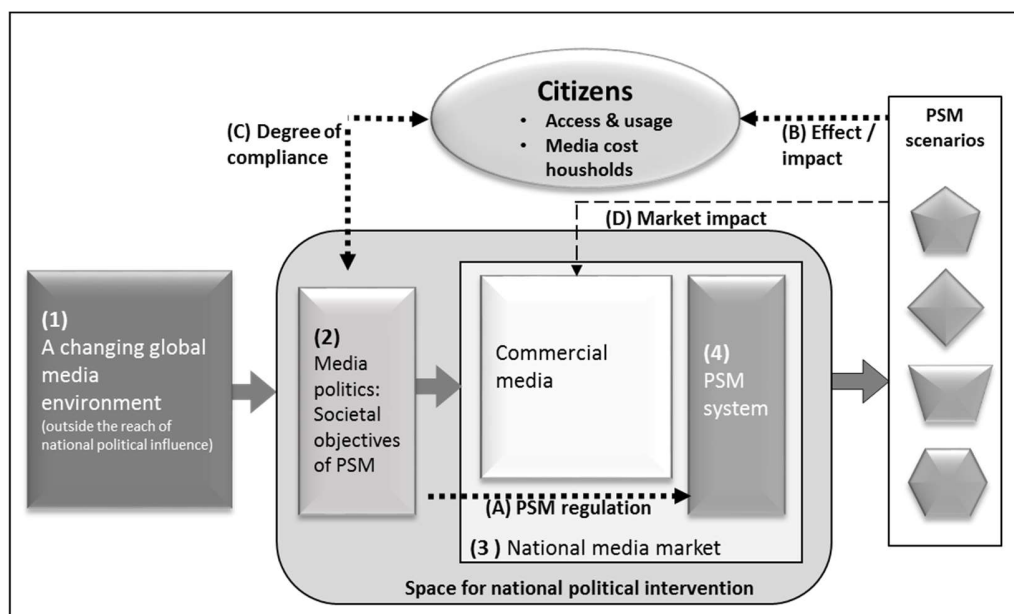
As mentioned in section 2.1., the first step in the process is to establish the main focus of the scenario work. To locate external, environmental elements and identify core parameters serving as building blocks in the scenarios. To that end, a base model providing an overview of the “media landscape” in question can serve as a useful starting point.

3.1. A base model for PSM scenario building

The model as shown in figure 5 combine four elements as a base for constructing the scenarios: (1) A changing global media environment, outside the reach of national political influence, but certainly influencing the national media market, (2) More or less commonly accepted cultural-policy societal objectives related to media, especially PSM, (3) The national media market, combining the commercial media industry and (4) the PSM system.

The model contains the two elements of the ex ante evaluations, the ‘Public value test’ (arrows B and C) and the ‘Market impact assessment’ (arrow D). As is well-known, such evaluations are not easily carried out and often debated, questioning their consistency and relevance. In this case, where we are dealing with a whole media ecology, and not only with a single PSM initiative, it’s of cause much more difficult and controversial. The methodological challenges are numerous. Some of them will be discussed in the following sections along with very cautious suggestions to overcome (some of) them.

Figure 5. A base model for evaluating PSM scenarios



First of all, element no. 2, the ‘cultural-policy based societal objectives’ of PSM is both important and difficult to handle. It expresses ‘the Public Value’, that later in the process will serve as a kind of a PSM mission statement against which the effects of the scenarios are measured. Such statements can be found in abundance in resolutions formulated by government/parliament and international bodies. With considerable variety they often highlight two PSM purposes: ‘Sustaining and defending national culture and diversity’ and ‘Supporting democracy and fostering social, political cohesion’. Such formulations are however, as we will return to below, not easy to operationalize in a way that makes them suitable to be the basis for assessment.

Secondly a delimiting definition of ‘public service media’ is needed, and that is not as easy as one might think. Definitions of PSM are found in abundance, but they are often of a more

declamatory character listening societal values and institutional obligations, see for instance (EBU) and (UNESCO). What they often lack is a discriminatory element, that can be used, as clearly as possible, to separate PSM from those media activities, that should not be considered as public services, i.e. commercial media. This separation is an imperative working with PSM scenarios, because one of the important variables characterizing different scenarios will often relate to whether specific functions of the media system are carried out by PSM institutions or the market. It is also a contentious issue, because commercial media in an attempt to marginalize PSM now and then claim they "provide public service for private money".

The third element (no. 3) of the base model is the national media market, containing also the PSM system. Besides the regulatory parameters directly related to the PSM system (see section 3.2. below), we are here dealing with: media provision and consumption, household media expenditure and the commercial media businesses. These three areas – together with the regulatory PSM parameters - should be analysed and described in depth, because they will in the later phase of evaluation serve as a base (the reference scenario) against which the effects of the scenarios are measured.

3.2. Constructing scenarios with parameters related to political PSM regulation

The key element (no. 4) of the base model is the PSM system in itself determined politically (dotted arrow (A) in figure 5) through changes in five parameters (“regulatory tools”), claimed to provide the operational space for direct public regulation of PSM:

- a) PSM institutional deployment (number and type of PSM institutions)
- b) Funding (collective/public - advertising, license fee or tax - or consumption related payment)
- c) Content (the remit of programme types and services)
- d) Production (of content and services)
- e) Distribution (covering all phases from editing/curation over technical distribution to consumption)

To be used as variables in scenario building each of these five parameters should be presented in alternate versions providing an option of a choice. That could be positions on a scale between

two extremes or as simple dichotomies. Because one of the disputed issues in the political debate on PSM, concerns whether a specific function should be performed by PSM institutions or by commercial companies in the market (cf. figure 4), it would be obvious to make this question an option for some of the five parameters. There can however, as illustrated in table 1 below, also be scenarios where parameters are operationalized differently, for instance on a graduated scale, using “more / less” and “increased /reduced”.

One of the challenges of selecting parameters to a scenario is to make them operational in a way that clearly describes which specific, regulatory actions a government and a parliament can take to change a given parameter. The five parameters mentioned above are used regularly as rather broad terms and understood by all people working with PSM in one role or the other. They must however be defined more specifically and often separated in a variety of sub-elements. Some of them have for years played a central role in public regulation, but have gradually lost their importance as a consequence of the recent years’ development, which at the same time has led to a need for new regulatory instruments. Below just two examples (among many others) to illustrate the complexity of choosing and adapting regulatory parameters – also those, used for different purposes by all of us in our daily work with PSM.

1) Content

One of the obvious alternative regulatory options concerning the content parameter is to adjust the PSM remit. For instance, by scaling down the classic PSM paradigm, i.e. the “broad”, Rethian, understanding of PSM as the full programme bouquet. It could as an option be reduced to what is often described as “genuine PSM”, more “focused” or - in a market context – “less distortive” form. Whether you are for or against such a proposal, you pretty well understand what it is about. Also all of us probably have a fairly clear understanding of what is real PSM content and what is not. News, in depth documentaries, children programming, transmission from parliamentary debates and classic music are all accepted – by the elite, that’s to say. Soaps, reality shows and other entertaining programming are not, except by a majority of the license fee paying listeners and viewers.

It’s however more difficult to come up with a number commonly accepted criteria for an implementation of such a division. Whether we use ‘quality’, the ‘societal relevance’ of the topic of a programme or its ‘narrative’ and ‘national origin’, at the end of the day it all boils

down to a question of socio-cultural values and personal taste. The problem, and the task for a scenario builder, is never the less to operationalize the separation in specific terms of a more generally accepted character suggesting what types of programmes and services to be taken out of the PSM portfolio and which accepted to stay.

Actually, this is much more than just a theoretical or methodological issue related to scenario building. If one accepts that there should be a difference between the PSM content and what is provided by the commercial market, this problem goes straight to the core of any governmental regulation of PSM content performed in accordance with the arm's length principle. If governments should refrain from interfering directly, they need means to set a direction and steer from a distance. Political intentions and decisions must be communicated and for this purpose you need definitions and reasonably clear concepts as a basis for formulating guidelines and general rules. We, the PSM congregation, have not been very helpful in that respect. Neither have we, in our stubborn efforts to establish a defensive, stationary Maginot-line around the traditional full scale criterion, undisputed as it has been in the days of monopoly and linear-only broadcast, been sufficiently aware of the penetrative strength of the disruptive changes of new media in the digital 'blitzkrieg'.

So all in all, it looks as if there is little help to get for the distressed scenario builders looking for ways to describe a relevant alternative to the full scale PSM content offer. A fall back solution might be to use a residual criterion: "PSM content as categories of programs and services that the market cannot or commercial companies will not provide". In a scenario context, this is though far from a satisfactory solution, because also this criterion, hypothetical as it is, can only with considerable uncertainty be operationalized.

2) Distribution

For all media companies it is a crucial to ensure that the content is distributed and made available for users. It used to be a rather simple function. Publicly owned tele companies took care of the transmission itself and provision through free-to-air flow channels secured an easy access for all citizens also making it uncomplicated to find and access the programs. Because of the limited transmission capacity in the traditional, analogue terrestrial networks, government regulated the number of radio- and television channels. With the emergence of new

distribution systems and technologies (cable, satellite, DTT, DAB and especially the Internet) and the privatization of many telecoms, public regulation of channel allocation, has gradually lost its relevance. Unless the demand for channels in the terrestrial network exceeds the spectrum capacity, there is no longer – in a transmission context – reasons for a government regulation of the numbers of a PSM institution's radio- and television channels. Quite another matter is that governments in some countries (ab-)use the power to regulate the number of channels in order to influence the program policy and content.

Parallel to this development new fields of potential public regulation in the distribution area have emerged. Must-carry rules and the "Country of Origin" principle in the EU Audio-Visual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) have been known for years. In addition, new concerns arise with the advent of the Internet and "disturbing" media forms like Google, YouTube and Facebook overlapping the borders between production, distribution and content (-management and -rights). Full control over the content now becomes imperative, not only from a rights perspective, but also concerning how the audience is guided (or "dragged") to programmes and services. "Curation" – to use a term from the world of museums – has become crucial for all media companies. What in the flow universe has been obtained by traditional editing and scheduling of channels, will increasingly be managed by algorithms. Such functions might not be likely areas of new public regulation. On the other hand, modified regulation of PSM roles within the broadly defined distribution area – for instance transferring the entire distribution assignment from the PSM institutions to commercial operators, or even more problematic, if it is taken over by Google and Facebook - can very well have huge (unintended) consequences for citizens' accessibility to services and the PSM obligation to reach the public (Radke, p. 25-27). In a scenario context these questions should be sorted out and specified.

The purpose of this long reflexion on just two of the five regulative parameters has been to illustrate how demanding it is to operationalize parameters – also terms used frequently by all "media people"- in a way that makes them useful as descriptions of alternative regulatory actions and suitable as a basis for subsequent impact assessments.

3.3. Combining parameters into scenarios

As mentioned in section 2.1. and 2.2. scenarios can be constructed in a variety of different forms depending on business area and purpose. The three illustrating scenarios (and the reference scenario) shown in table 1, are based on variations of the five parameters discussed in the previous section and listed in the table's first column. Each of them are clearly related to PSM themes that have been vehemently debated for years, especially the mutual division of roles between the PSM and the (commercial) market. It should be noted, that although the reference scenario, serving as the base against which the three scenarios are going to be assessed, can be seen as a still image of the present situation, it is not a description of a stable PSM-system. The present is not a status quo!

Taken together, the three scenarios follow, taken from left to right, a span between a relative low(er) and a high(er) degree (than the reference scenario) of government intervention and regulation, jf. figure 4.

Table 1. Three scenarios described by different variants of the five PSM regulatory parameters

Scenarios Parameters	Reference scenario	(1) "The market can provide"	(2)	(3) "A focused PSM"	(4)	(5) "A third generation PSM"
a) Institutional deployment	Present number of PSM institutions	None		Reduced number of PSM institutions		As in reference scenario
b) Funding	Public	Market		Reduced public		(Probably) Increased public
c) Content	PSM with public regulation	Market		Only what the market can't/will not provide		Increased proportion of national content
d) Production	PSM + market	Market		Less in-house PSM production		As in reference scenario
e) Distribution (especially curation)	PSM	Market		As in reference scenario		Expanded online activity, open access to all archives

Notes: Squares marked by grey symbolize parameters of the three scenarios which are different from the reference scenario.

A note should be added concerning the number of scenarios. For practical reasons only three scenarios are presented in the table. It is however generally considered unwise to present three scenarios, because it tempts "users" to gather around the middle scenario to reach a compromise between the two extremes.

Based upon the five parameters, each of the scenarios, should then be described as narratives communicating in a neutral form the idea behind the scenario and explaining the logic behind the interrelated parameters. It will here be a temptation to go in detail in order to honestly reproduce the complexity of media reality. That must however be balanced against the requirements of simplicity in scenario work. The scenarios should be the impetus for insight and discussion, not full-fledged blueprints for future solutions.

If there are important variants, that ought to be covered in a scenario, one possibility to secure simplicity could be to use sub-scenarios covering alternative solutions to one or a couple of parameters. It could for instance be a variant of scenario 3 concerning the distribution parameter (e), where distribution of all content and services, provided by PSM institutions, is taken care of by commercial media companies. Another example could be a variant of scenario 5 with an alternative funding based on fully or partial consumption related payment (subscription for individual channels and/or on-demand for streaming a program or a film). Alternatively, such variations could also be dealt with in a special section of the main text.

To formulate and present the scenarios in a way, considered relevant and fair among the political stakeholders, is the first important part of the work. If successful, already this can provide politicians with insight and a useful framework for joint discussion. To stop here would, however be comparable to going to a restaurant and confine oneself to study the menu card without tasting the food. It is told that some aficionados actually can enjoy a whole meal by just reading about it. Most of us would prefer to do it with fork and knife in our hands. Probably the same applies to scenarios. Everyone can have their own assumptions about the effects of each scenario, but would most likely prefer to have their validity tested. That can however not be done without serious difficulties.

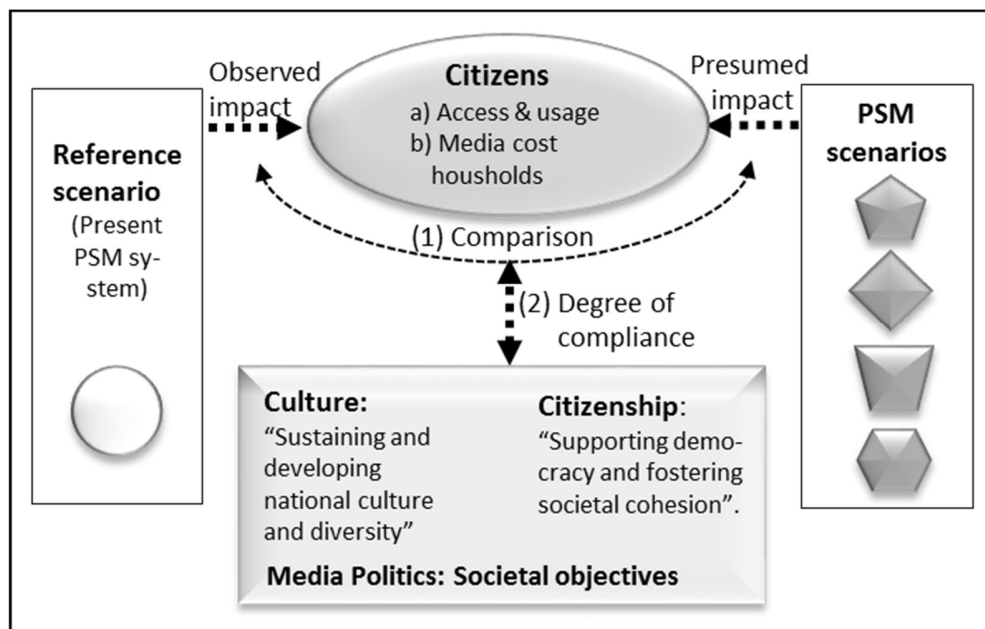
4. Assessing the impact of the scenarios

The next phase of the scenario work is to assess the impact of each of the scenarios. Figure 6 (an excerpt of figure 5) illustrates how that can be carried out in two stages. The first step is a comparison up against the reference scenario (dotted arrow 1) concerning: a) changes in media

provision, and citizens' access and consumption, and b) changes in households' media expenditure. Secondly it must be assessed to what extent these changes are consistent with (dotted arrow 2) the cultural-policy objectives, here spelled out in two main elements: culture and citizenship.

It should be added that also the impact of the scenarios on the commercial media industry would be relevant to incorporate in the scenario work, because it is one of the most contested issues in the debate on the future of PSM. These two elements of the scenario assessment correspond, as mentioned above, in many ways with the 'Public Value Tests'- and 'Market impact assessments'. However, only the first one will be commented on in the following.

Figure 6. Assessing the impact of scenarios against the reference scenario



First of all, it's of course an issue in itself, that we are dealing with hypothetical scenarios describing possible future PSM systems. That might be achievable, if we could extrapolate from the reference scenario drawing on a broad base of media research, which had established plausible, causal links between the selected parameters (independent variables) of the scenarios and citizens' use of media (dependent variables) and further on to similar causal links between media use and culture/citizenship. With very few exceptions – for instance studies on links between media systems, news consumption and citizens' knowledge of society (Curran et al. 2009 and

a number of studies following that line) – and in spite of its impressive volume over the years, media research has made limited contributions to such a knowledge base.

An alternative option – a disputable fall-back position illustrated in figure 6 - is to renounce on direct, absolute measurements of the effect of the scenarios on “culture/citizenship” and instead use the reference scenario as a base for relative comparison. By doing that, we can – more or less qualified – make assumptions about the presumed impacts on consumption patterns and the households’ cost resulting from the parameters of each of the three scenarios by comparing with the observed impacts of the reference scenario, based on existing sources (statistics bureaus and consultants, media companies and academic media research).

The second and last step, illustrated by the dotted arrow (2) in figure 6, is to evaluate or illustrate the degree of compliance between on the one hand the presumed changes of access and consumption and on the other the basic cultural-policy based objectives (‘culture’ and ‘citizenship’). This is at one and the same time both the most important and the most difficult task to solve in the whole scenario work. It goes right to the heart of public media, its whole raison d’être. And yet, after close to hundred years’ experience with PSM and in spite of it being one of the most contested issues since the abolition of PSM-monopoly we really don’t know much about whether and in what way this important societal institution has influenced national culture and citizenship. Being weak on evidence of past performance, how much more difficult will it not be to predict future causalities beyond our mere societal attitudes and cultural-political beliefs. Presenting the results of PSM scenario work to the politicians who commissioned it, this will however be the central question they will hope (or maybe fear) being answered.

Probably most academicians would refrain from going so far in their serious scholarly work. Civil servants and consultants obviously are more accustomed to working in this no man's land between consolidated knowledge and what pragmatically can be presented as possible or even probable outcomes. Following that line of thoughts, they might dare to come up with a “story line” of a scenario narrative as the following, here in a condensed, sketchy version illustrating and using the extreme 1st scenario “The Market can provide” as an example:

- *“Considering the very high share and coverage of the present PSM channels, this scenario will result in a significant reshuffle of the present provision and use of radio- and television programming.*
- *The amount of program formats characterized by a high cost per minute and/or relative low number of viewer’s will (probably) disappear or be reduced drastically.*
- *Based on data/experience covering small-country, national commercial channels this will (probably) be the case with for instance news- and current affairs programmes, investigative documentaries, programmes on culture, art, science and religion as well as nationally produced children programming.*
- *As a replacement of these formats a higher proportion of foreign-made programs and content of a more entertaining and cheaper kind can be expected.*
- *The media costs of households will generally be reduced (by let’s say € 300 per year) because of the termination of the license fee but on the other hand raise due to subscription payment. Subscription for television channels and streaming will raise because of the absence of competition from free-to-air PSM content. For the faithful channel-flow users (50+) this can exceed the savings on the license fee costs.*
- *The contribution of radio and television to sustain ‘culture’ and support ‘citizenship’ will be influenced negatively because of the changed supply- and demand pattern.*
- *And so on, and so forth....”.*

Such a preliminary assessment made only for this paper as an illustration might be possible to expand and to some extent consolidate drawing on the result of many years of media research and related data on provision and use of electronic media, also to some extent to break it down into different socio-economic and demographic segments of users and households. Experiences from countries with very different PSM-systems – for instance USA and New Zealand – might be used as illustrative cases.

5. Concluding remarks

This paper is not a report from a completed scenario project, neither a documentation of its usefulness as a tool in a media political process. The big question therefore remains whether the relative vague statements and highly debatable answers lacking clear evidence based correlations will be convincing enough to make stakeholders of a media-political audience leave their trenches of previous beliefs and policy statements pointing in very diverse directions. On the other hand, this is far from being a specific weakness of scenario work. Actually it’s a very common trait in almost all political decision making.

As has apparently been the case with the usage of scenarios on other organizational cultures, there might be a possibility that the systematic approach of scenario work casting new light a number of factors and interrelationships and the mere unfamiliarity of the method can break this general pattern of conventional political decision making. There is though little room for optimism. Even hard facts and causal links are not always convincing. A Danish politician commented on documentation presented by an adversary during a parliamentary debate in the late 19th century: “if these are facts, then I deny facts”.

If proven to be of questionable help in media politics, scenario work might be an interesting and fruitful experience for those involved from the media businesses and academia. It has at least been an eye-opener for the author of this paper, who after a quarter of a century’s work with and writing about PSM has discovered a number of new perspectives and surprising traps in areas thought to be well trodden paths. The most surprising insight has actually been to realize how little we know of so much.

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