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# Catering for Minority Interests in Public Service Media Environments: Finland and the UK

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**CATERING FOR MINORITY INTERESTS IN PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA  
ENVIRONMENTS: FINLAND AND THE UK**

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores recent patterns of minority interest television programming in Finland and the UK and their implications for future public service broadcasting (PSB) environments. The provision of resources to cater for minority interests of various kinds has traditionally been a core feature of Finnish and UK broadcasting, despite PSB being distinctly different in terms of its organisation and delivery in each territory. The core argument of the paper is that the expansion of broadcasting systems since the mid-1980s, delivered for the most part through a process of neo-liberal marketisation, has altered the nature, extent and delivery pattern of broadcasting for minority audiences. The paper provides empirical evidence of how broadcasters in both cases have gravitated towards competing for audience share through concentrating their resources on populist, cost effective, forms of programming with important consequences for minority interest provision. The paper's empirical data shows that the instances of this trend have occurred most strongly in the commercial sector. In the light of the current, and likely future, funding environment, the evidence of the paper points to the importance of maintaining public funding for minority programming in increasingly marketised broadcasting systems.

# CATERING FOR MINORITY INTERESTS IN PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA ENVIRONMENTS: FINLAND AND THE UK.

## INTRODUCTION

The past 20 years have seen a radical change in European television markets, whose major outcome has been increasing marketisation<sup>1</sup> and the gradual decline of the public service orthodoxy. While national governments in Europe are increasingly introducing a more commercial paradigm in their broadcasting policies, their arguments are often based on economic or consumerist - rather socio-cultural - considerations. Two opposite scenarios dominate the debate: the diversification argument, whose view is that marketisation diversifies programme supply; and the diversity paradox, which argues that marketisation increases horizontal convergence in television content, thus increasing diversity in sources, but decreasing the diversity in programming (Aslama 2006). However, the nature and extent of the effects of the process on individual programmes remains unclear. Directly addressing theme six of the conference and, in particular, the question '*Who deserves to receive public funding, why and on what basis?*', this paper explores recent patterns of minority interest television programming in the UK and Finland. Minority programmes are those which are regularly viewed by minority audiences, or whose audiences are considered commercially insignificant by commercial broadcasters. The paper focuses on two minority programme categories: children's programmes and religious programmes, both of which have been identified as vulnerable by recent reviews on the future provision of PSB (see e.g. Ofcom 2008).

Finland and the UK provide interesting cases to consider the position of minority interest programming in an era of increasing marketisation. Although dissimilar in political, demographic and economic terms, both countries employ a well-developed and tightly regulated PSB system, whose core feature has traditionally been the provision of resources to cater for minority interests of various kinds. Both countries were also early in adopting commercial broadcasting, but placed it under strict regulation. The paper illustrates how marketisation in these countries has had unexpectedly parallel effects on these programme types despite the fact that they represent different media systems (Finland a Democratic Corporatist Model and the UK a Liberal Model (Hallin and Mancini 2004)).

The core argument of the paper is that the expansion of broadcasting systems since the mid-1980s, delivered for the most part through a process of neo-liberal marketisation has altered the nature, extent and delivery pattern of broadcasting for minority audiences in Finland and the UK. The paper's cross-national comparison illustrates how broadcasters in both cases have gravitated towards competing for audience share through concentrating their resources on populist, cost effective, forms of programming with important consequences for minority interest provision. The paper shows how in Finland, compared to the UK, the key structural changes of the 1990s have been particularly detrimental to securing the protection of plural

minority interest programming. In this period, much of the existing broadcasting regulatory framework remained in place in the UK serving to de-limit the effects of marketisation, to some extent. In Finland, however, the traditional public service orthodoxy was swiftly and radically altered through deregulation in the direction of commercialisation. The consequence of this change, the paper argues, has been a series of threats to minority interest programming in Finnish broadcasting. Specifically, newly liberalised Finnish commercial broadcasters operate under minimal and loosely defined public service obligations in respect of minority programming. Whilst historically important to both types of programming, the paper illustrates how public funding and public provision is now increasingly vital to their viability in a neo-liberal, marketised broadcasting environment.

### THE FINNISH BROADCASTING SYSTEM – FROM ‘UNEASY SYMBIOSIS’ TO LIBERALISED COMPETITION

Often referred to as ‘the longstanding experiment’ (e.g. Hellman 1999; Jääsaari 2007), the Finnish television broadcasting arrangement up to 1993 was a unique and innovative model, a pragmatic symbiosis of a public and private operator sharing limited resources for mutual interests. Dissimilar to the Nordic PSB monopolies, it can be considered as a hybrid between the then-dominant European norm of public service ‘purism’ and the British model of regulated duopoly. It consisted of two separate companies, the licence fee funded public broadcaster Yleisradio Oy (founded in 1926 and nationalised in 1934), and the commercial Mainos-TV (MTV, founded in 1957), owned by a consortium of advertisers, advertising agencies and film production companies, whose essential role was to provide additional funding for Yleisradio’s public service operations. The arrangement was a practical solution to the problems arising from covering the high costs associated with setting up and operating the new service in a geographically vast but sparsely populated country. By separating commercial and PSB into separate organisational entities, Yleisradio was able to avert conceding its Reithian ethos and duties to values and practices it deemed corruptive.

Unlike in the British BBC-ITV duopoly, in which the commercial broadcaster was considered as an equal competitor in providing quality programming within the ideological framework of PSB, the Finnish arrangement considered commercial broadcasting as a ‘necessary evil’, tolerated for financial reasons, but whose influence was to be strictly limited.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, MTV was not granted its own broadcasting licence, but operated as Yleisradio’s auxiliary under its broadcasting licence, hiring broadcasting time from Yleisradio and broadcasting programmes in separate, mainly peak-time programming blocks on Yleisradio’s two channels.<sup>3</sup> In exchange, Yleisradio received a proportion of MTV’s advertising profits, whose level was set annually by agreement between the companies. In terms of broadcasting regulation, this institutional arrangement led to a rather unique situation. As MTV was not granted its own broadcasting licence, it operated without a proactive independent regulator. MTV’s dependence on Yleisradio’s broadcasting licence, however, meant that the latter was able to exercise regulatory power over MTV. Yleisradio,

in turn had been under parliamentary control since 1948. The Parliament appointed the company's highest executive body, the Administrative Council, whose members were mainly MPs. The outcome here tended to mirror the political composition of the parliament (Hellman 1999). The Administrative Council, together with Programme Councils, exercised regulatory control over both Yleisradio's and MTV's programmes. This coordination extended even to the schedules of the two broadcasters, which were coordinated by a joint committee and subjected to approval by a Programme Council (Hanski 2001; Hellman 1999).

Although MTV's role as a commercial broadcaster and Yleisradio's subsidiser manoeuvred its programming towards light entertainment, throughout its existence, as Yleisradio's lessee, it aimed to operate like a 'full service broadcaster' (Hellman 1999), with a broad programme portfolio including in-house produced drama, documentaries, arts, educational and minority interest programmes. This was in part an outcome of Yleisradio's regulatory control of MTV, but it also demonstrated MTV's desire to justify and reinforce its role as a broad-ranging, well-established broadcaster, which was necessary for its long-term aspiration for full independence. The PSB arrangement in Finland, like in other European countries, was traditionally considered a state protectorate for technical, cultural and economic reasons. However, the 1980s saw the advent of political, economic and technological reforms, which posed a challenge to the public service orthodoxy and affected other European public service systems alike.

Previously protected national broadcasting sectors were opened for business, and the values and rhetoric of market were brought in to assess their functioning, thus replacing the concepts of 'citizen' and 'society' with those of 'consumer' and 'market'. The legacy of this process of marketisation, pan-European by nature, was a radical shift in broadcasting paradigm from socio-cultural to economic (Hellman 2010). Consequently, Yleisradio's hegemony in Finnish broadcasting began to disintegrate, while its monopoly on radio broadcasting was brought to an end in 1985 with the launch of independent local radio. The foothold of commercial broadcasting was strengthened in 1986 when Yleisradio and MTV's joint venture, the entertainment-orientated third network Kolmoskanava, was launched – a move intended to resist the threat posed by foreign cable and satellite channels. As the political climate became more favourable for the liberalisation of broadcasting, negotiations began to grant MTV its own channel, broadcasting licence and full independence from Yleisradio's control. This was realised in the 1993 Channel Reform, which shifted the third network (renamed MTV3) to MTV's full control. This can be considered a landmark in the re-regulation and liberalisation of broadcasting in Finland.

As no detailed obligations for programming were set for MTV3,<sup>4</sup> the channel was formally left outside the Finnish PSB framework.<sup>5</sup> Thus, it became necessary to strengthen Yleisradio's position and redefine its public service duties. In conjunction with granting MTV3's broadcasting licence, the parliament cemented Yleisradio's status as the sole public service broadcaster by guaranteeing its status in a parliamentary act. The 1993 Act on Yleisradio Oy granted it a statutory right to broadcast without a broadcasting licence, but also laid down certain public service obligations (Sumiala-Seppänen 1999).<sup>6</sup> To compensate lost

income from MTV's broadcasting time, a public service levy was set on all commercial terrestrial broadcasters, accounting for about a quarter of Yleisradio's annual income. The Channel Reform's structural changes to the Finnish television system also eliminated the grounds for maintaining MTV's monopoly on the television advertising market. A licence for a fourth terrestrial network was granted to the broadcasting consortium Ruutunelonen in 1996.

Thus, marketisation in the Finnish television system has resulted in paradigmatic changes which have placed the values of PSB secondary to those of the market. While broadcasting policy still promotes structural (market-entry) regulation and cultural protectionism, the process has introduced the following key changes in the Finnish broadcasting paradigm: a shift in the balance between private and public interest in favour of the former; a shift of emphasis in communications policy from political and cultural values to the norms, rules and expectations of the market, and; a change in the role of the state from market regulator to promoter of effective competition (Jääsaari 2007). The digitalisation process (completed in 2007), while initially aimed at increasing and diversifying programming, has only served to advance these processes by increasing the choice between channels but failing to increase programme diversity within or between them (Hellman 2010). This is also reflected in the fact that new digital broadcasting licences do not include specified programming obligations, which have also been removed gradually from the licences of the existing channels as well.

Meanwhile, Yleisradio's status has become increasingly jeopardised. It now has to compete against commercial channels through audience ratings in order to sustain the argument for maintaining the licence fee, whilst at the same time having to fulfil its public service obligations. All this takes place in an increasingly difficult economic climate. In the course of digitalisation, Yleisradio has lost the income it received from commercial broadcasters in public service levies. The future funding of Yleisradio remains an unresolved policy issue, as the Finnish government decided to postpone replacement of the licence fee with the media fee, a common flat-rate tax to be collected from all households and companies. This, together with the increased costs associated with digitalisation and the advent of its new digital specialist channels have forced Yleisradio to undergo difficult budget cuts and to streamline operations, all of which have affected the company's programming.

The Finnish broadcasting system was restructured in the 1990s along neoliberal principles, which left Yleisradio as the sole provider of PSB. Its strong status is vital for the effective functioning of the system. As commercial broadcasters facing increasing competition have gradually given up minority interest programming, the latter now relies crucially on Yleisradio's output. The future functioning of the PSB system is dependent on a single player, Yleisradio, which, in turn, is expecting an increasingly turbulent future. If an effective financing method cannot be found and Yleisradio's financing is to be significantly reduced, certain minority programming types will face a genuine risk of extinction.

## KEY FEATURES OF BROADCASTING IN THE UK

The UK has one of the longest established systems of PSB in Europe, stretching back to the 1920s. A vital staple of this system has been the requirement placed upon providers of radio and television services to cater for minority listening and viewing interests. In the initial decades of UK broadcasting, the BBC was the sole monopoly service provider of TV services, sustained to deliver its carefully prescribed Reithian PSB remit by substantial licence fee revenue levied on all TV and radio households (McDonnell 1991; Curran and Seaton 2004). As has been well documented, the UK system was the kind of sociological solution to the technical problem of spectrum scarcity (Wheeler 1997) which aimed to maximise social benefits – whilst mitigating the potential negative externalities - of broadcasting systems.

A key feature of the UK broadcasting system has been regular reviews of its functioning and performance. This has often resulted in policy innovations - most recently the 2003 Communications Act which created the convergence regulator the Office of Communications (Ofcom) - marking out the UK out as a leader in communications policy experimentalism. Another much earlier important illustrative landmark was the decision taken by the UK government, through the Television Act of 1954, to introduce commercial television funded through advertising, advocated, largely, by a lobby of the liberal market conservative Right, audiovisual equipment manufacturers and advertisers (Criswell 1997; Johnson and Turnock 2005). This led to the growth of the ITV consortium, on a nationwide basis, as an alternative broadcaster to the BBC and marked the development of the UK as a dual broadcasting system. Here, alternative service providers were in competition, one of which was a commercially-operating and commercially-funded body. However, the introduction of competition and commercialisation into the UK system was far from a straightforward move in the direction of marketisation of broadcasting. Most obviously, the degree of competition was merely duopoly in extent. Very importantly, the creation of ITV on a commercial basis was used as a way of providing a challenge to, and alternative from, the ‘incumbent’ provider, the BBC, more than any desire to create market-based competition per se. In fact, the BBC and ITV were not competitors of the kind associated with free market liberal competition in that they did not compete directly for revenue resources. The BBC’s licence fee revenue remained intact (though not unchallenged) and ITV, until the 1980s, held a virtual monopoly on UK commercial TV advertising revenue.

Thus, commercialisation in UK broadcasting delivered competition for audience share, which was to a considerable degree measured as a yardstick of quality. Such modest commercialisation was thus a tool to invigorate the system, promote innovativeness and address audience preferences – in other words, to promote PSB (Scannell 1990), the parameters according to which television services provision continued to be articulated. ITV, criticised by the Pilkington Committee in the early 1960s after its first few years of broadcasting for concentrating too much on popular entertainment, was, with the passage of the 1963 Television Act, brought into the UK PSB system and made subject to a series of

public service obligations enforced by the Independent Television Authority (ITA). The creation of a second BBC channel in 1964 (BBC2) allowed the BBC, by contrast, to focus content aired on BBC1 more in the direction of popular entertainment (Humphreys 1996), until then ITV's forte. Through the 1970s, therefore, the two component broadcasters of the UK's dual broadcasting system tended to become more similar with a blended schedule largely addressing the Reithian staples of education, entertainment and information. This functioned within a stable, revenue-assured, though technical capacity constrained, network infrastructural environment.

Since the 1980s, however, the landscape of UK broadcasting has been subject to a well-documented transformation in technological, commercial, and regulatory terms which called into question, and thus held potentially significant implications for, key elements of PSB provision in the UK (see Wheeler 1997, Goodwin 1998, Humphreys 1996, Negrine 1985, Smith 2007, Steemers 1998), not least the provision of minority interest programming. Facilitated by important regulatory decisions related to - and technological developments in - broadcast networks (principally the licensing of satellite networks for TV broadcasting and the spread of digitalisation), the spectrum scarcity of the foregoing decades was transformed into capacity abundance. Equally important, however, was the broad, though controversial, growth of a political preference for organising social and economic life along the lines of the principles and practices of the market: marketisation, in other words. Actions to this effect found ideological sustenance, at the time, within new articulations of economic liberalism (see Cerny 2007). Neo-liberalism, championed first and most prominently by the Thatcher administration (1979-90) continued under its successor Conservative government (1990-97) and throughout the New Labour administration (1997-2010) (in the latter case, see Freedman 2003; Doyle and Vick 2005).

A broad political-economic project which has had, to date, far from fully understood consequences for UK society, neo-liberal marketisation exercised particularly significant effects on UK electronic network communications, not least in TV broadcasting. An unprecedented expansion in UK commercial broadcasting held greatest significance for ITV, which saw strong competition for content advertising revenue streams emerge from satellite and cable broadcasters, as well as, with the digitisation of terrestrial broadcasting, a host of new terrestrial broadcast competitors. In this situation, competition for revenue might be predicted to produce more radical behaviour modification in established commercial broadcasters than in the old duopoly system outlined above, since the commercial stakes centred, unlike in previous decades, on operational survival through direct revenue competition. However, the promotion of a *culture* of marketisation, held, perhaps less obviously, implications for the licence funded PSB, the BBC. First, any movement in favour of marketisation in broadcasting presents a challenge to organisations whose funding does not accrue from the market mechanism. This tends to centre on concerns over competitive privilege (manifest in the parameters of competition policy) as well as scepticism around the economic value to be gained from (partial) public funding of key sectors of the economy. Thus, from the 1990s to date and more than at any time in its history, the funding mechanism

of the BBC has come under scrutiny. However, viewed differently, the growth of marketisation in UK broadcasting could present the BBC, under certain circumstances, with opportunity. A well developed and internationally famous brand in commercial terms lay at its disposal in the context of a paradigm of neo-liberal marketisation sympathetic to the promotion of international free trade. Through the 1990s and beyond, commercial activity became an increasingly important consideration for the BBC (Tracey 1998). At any length, and more defensively, by the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the main UK PSB provider had established itself as a powerful institution in UK socio-political life, able to resist strongly – if not entirely – political efforts to change its financial status. An interesting scenario for the BBC has thus been the possibility to modify its strategic behaviour in a more (internationally) commercialised direction whilst striving to maintain its core funding status as much as possible.

Beyond the BBC, despite the emergence to prominence of neo-liberal marketisation in broadcasting, it is important to recognise the significant capacity of the UK system as a whole to resist and filter attendant political and economic pressure for change. In fact, in the light of several important reviews since early 1990s, the UK appears to have maintained, rhetorically at least, a strong commitment to PSB, not least the continued delivery of appropriate levels and quality of minority interest programming. Nonetheless, an important empirical issue is the extent to which the *actual delivery* of core elements of this kind of programming may have altered in the face of the broader changes and associated pressures outlined above. Particular interest here centres on the volume of designated kinds of minority programming, its origin of production (that is, whether it is domestically produced or imported) and, lastly, changes in any key sub-genre classifications of programming in terms of volume and scheduling pattern. Through analysing these elements of the provision of children's and religious programming on the long standing free-to-air Finnish and UK terrestrial channels in this time of change, it is to these issues that the remainder of the paper now turns.

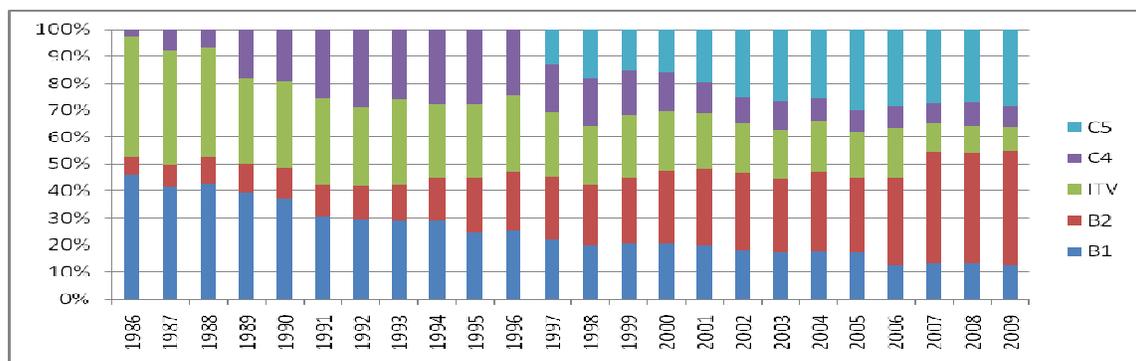
## NEO-LIBERAL MARKETISATION AND ITS EFFECTS ON MINORITY PROGRAMMING – EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Using programme details collected from television listings, patterns in the provision of children's and religious programmes<sup>7</sup> broadcast on the main terrestrial channels<sup>8</sup> in the UK and Finland were analysed between 1986 and 2009. Two one-week sampling periods, in May and November, were selected for each year. Both minority programme categories have traditionally enjoyed a specific status within the PSB systems, and attempts have been made to secure their provision by various regulatory measures accordingly. However, the outlook for these two categories looks very different. Firstly, although the initial production costs for children's programmes can be steep, a relatively high proportion of them are imported, which lowers overall costs. Children's television is an international market and programmes are often co-produced with third parties, thus lowering costs further. Children's programmes can be also repeated many times. On the contrary, most religious programmes, especially devotional programmes, are directly connected to regional or national religious traditions.

They are predominantly produced and broadcast within a national context, and cannot be repeated, so their production costs remain high. Secondly, children’s programmes are a preferred and distinct target audience for advertisers. Although certain restrictions have been imposed on advertising for children (such as the 2007 UK ban on junk food advertising), this is a multi-million pound market. Religious programmes are generally associated with elderly, less affluent viewers, and consequently are not attractive to advertisers which tend to target young urban viewers. Thirdly, as children make a ‘natural’ audience, the demand for children’s programmes has not changed significantly over the years. By contrast, secularisation within Western European Christian societies has affected the demand for religious programmes. This is also reflected in the high number of specialist children’s channels in contrast to the few religious channels available on cable and satellite platforms in both countries.

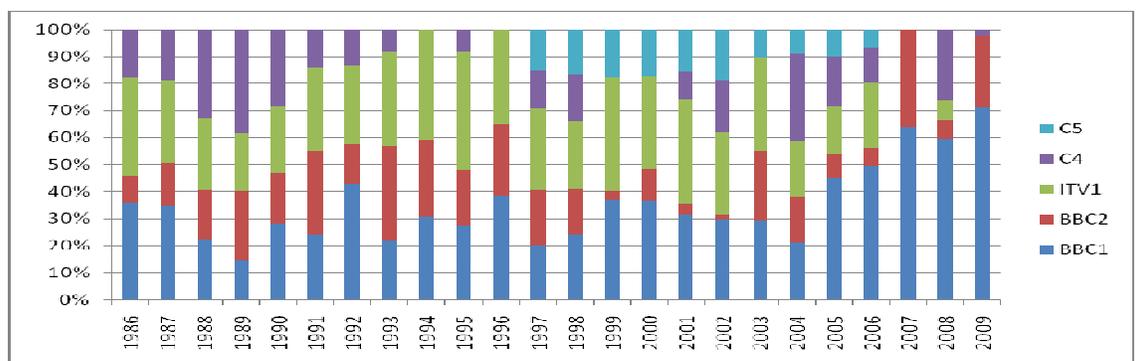
Consequently, it might be assumed that different effects would be discernible in these two programme categories. Children’s might be assumed to have retained a somewhat stronger and more pluralistic provision in both countries than religious programmes on this basis. The provision of the latter might be predicted to have straightforwardly deteriorated.

Chart 1: Share of the total of children’s programmes in the UK 1986-2009



(Source: Authors’ research)

Chart 2: Share of the total of religious programmes in the UK 1986-2009

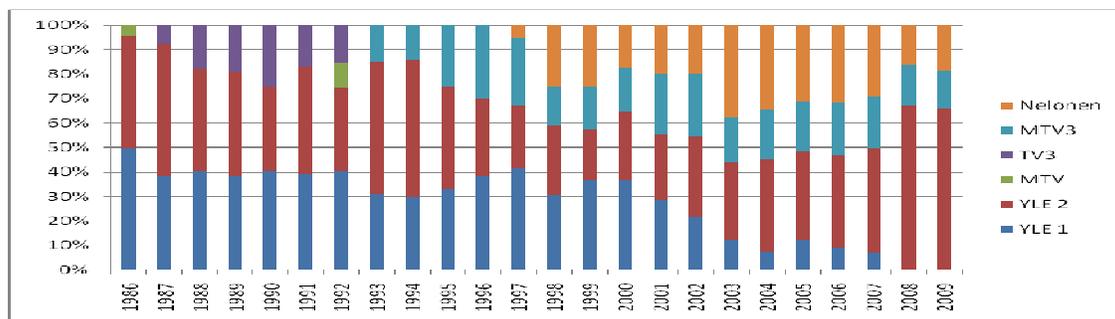


(Source: Authors’ research)

The results indicate, however, that a parallel migration of minority programmes from commercially to publicly (licence fee) funded channels has taken place in both countries. Although the total quantity of children’s programmes has increased by 2.5-3 times between 1986 and 2009 – largely owing to the rise in broadcasting hours and new terrestrial channels – growth has taken place mainly on publicly funded channels. Commercially funded channels’ share of children’s programmes has declined since the turn of the Millennium. In the UK, where commercially funded channels have traditionally had detailed public service obligations regarding minority programming, while the overall proportion of children’s programmes on the main five terrestrial channels has risen from 8.5% in 1986 to 10.4% in 2009, 55% of them are now provided by the BBC’s two main channels. As to religious programmes, where the BBC’s output share was 45% in 1986, the Corporation’s output now accounts for 97% of the total. Consequently, religious programmes’ proportion of all programmes within the same period has markedly decreased from 1.5% to just 0.2%.

The significant drop in both children’s and religious programmes on commercially funded channels since the early 2000s indicate that the regulatory reform of the 2003 UK Communications Act, which abolished specific quotas for both genres, has had a particularly detrimental effect on commercial channels’ minority interest output. Since then, ITV’s children’s output has halved and religious programming has disappeared altogether. The channel’s religious output saw an instant decline by a third between 2003 and 2004, and in 2005 ITV had axed its regular Sunday service, a part of the channel’s schedules for decades. This also marked the end of the channel’s regular religious output, with Five following suit the following year. ITV’s children’s programmes have not fared much better. In 2007, ITV decided to discontinue children’s programming on weekday afternoons (following the launch of the CITV channel in March 2006), which immediately cut the channel’s children’s output by half. In June 2010, ITV announced that it would discontinue all children’s programming on ITV1 ‘in the near future’.

Chart 3: Share of the total of children’s programmes in Finland 1986-2009



(Source: Authors’ research)

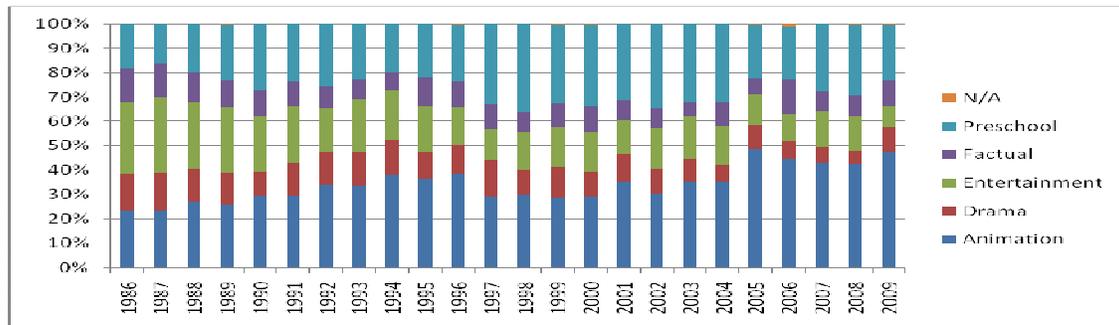
Chart 4: Share of the total of religious programmes in Finland 1986-2009



(Source: Authors' research)

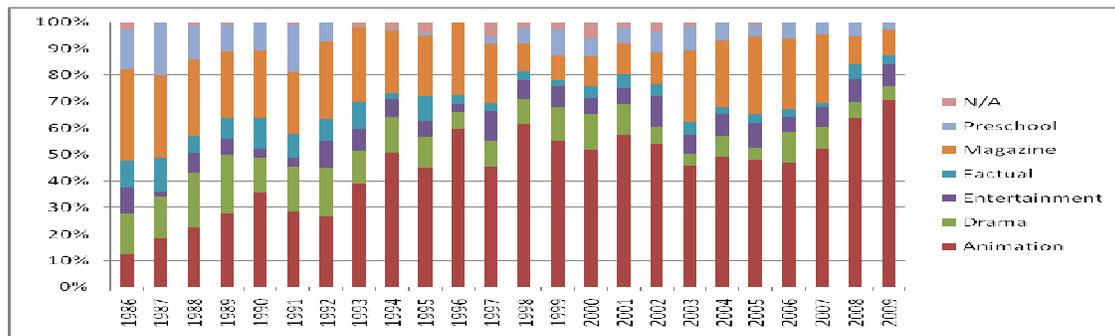
This pattern is even more pronounced in Finland, which, after the 1993 Channel Reform, adapted a liberalised approach to broadcasting regulation. Specifically, no regulatory measures were created to secure pluralistic minority interest output on commercially funded channels. Although both commercial terrestrial channels initially adopted children's programmes as a part of their schedules, the proportion began to decrease in the early 2000s, and, consequently, Yleisradio's output now accounts for two thirds of children's programming. Likewise, while MTV3 had modest quantities of religious output throughout the 1990s, the launch of Nelonen and the increasing competition for advertising income caused the company to discontinue its religious output in the early 2000s, notwithstanding the fact that religious programmes have never been its domain. Consequently, the proportion of children's programmes across the system has decreased from 11% in 1986 to 6.5% in 2009, while religious programmes have seen even bigger drop from 2.2% to 0.4%.

Chart 5: Children's programmes in the UK by genre 1986-2009



(Source: Authors' research)

Chart 6: Children's programmes in Finland by genre 1986-2009



(Source: Authors' research)

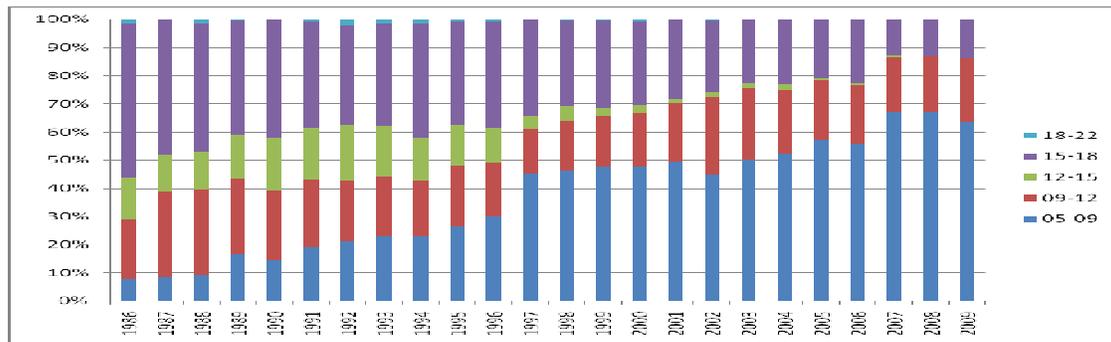
This polarisation, however, is not limited to the programme quantity, but also extends to the genre and format of the programmes. There is now a growing disparity in programming between publicly funded and commercial channels. The structure of children's programmes on British commercially funded channels in 1986 resembled that of the BBC's channels and included relatively equal proportions of animation, drama, factual, entertainment and preschool programmes. In the early 2000s, however, the proportion of animation began to rise, from 25% in 2000 to 69% in 2009. In the same period, the BBC's proportion of animation decreased from 34% to 30%. In contrast, children's drama on commercial channels has decreased from 17% in 1986 to just 1% in 2009, whereas the BBC increased its share from 13% to 18%.

Developments in Finland seems to have taken an even more radical turn, and affected the public broadcaster as well as commercial players. Children's programming in 1986 – almost completely delivered by Yleisradio – signalled a strong commitment to traditional public service values, with relatively high proportions of magazine (35%), drama (15%), preschool (15%) and factual (10%) programmes, whereas the proportion of animation was just 13%. The launch of Kolmoskanava in 1987 and MTV3 in 1993 increased this figure first to 17% and then further to 38%. In 2009, the proportion of animation across the system had risen to 64%, while the proportions of drama, preschool and factual programmes had declined to 5%, 4% and 3% respectively. The decline in these genres was largely a by-product of the massive growth in animation, whose proportion by 2009 accounted for 93% of the commercially funded channels' and 59% of Yleisradio's children's programming.<sup>9</sup> Although total broadcasting hours have risen threefold, the hours of drama and factual programmes have remained at their 1986 levels and the hours of preschool programmes have actually declined. It is noteworthy that factual and preschool programmes have practically disappeared from commercial channels. This can be interpreted as another sign of the commercial channels' shift towards a marketised paradigm. Unlike drama, factual and preschool programmes, animation has a wider appeal to audiences of different ages, in some cases including adult viewers. Animation is also an inexpensive genre: it can be imported as it is not usually directly related to a specific culture, and can be dubbed or subtitled without difficulty. This largely explains the pervasive presence of animation on Finnish commercial channels.

As animation constitutes the largest imported subcategory of children’s programmes, its proportion correlates with the proportion of non-domestic programmes. Consequently, both countries have also seen an overall rise in imported programmes, although this seems to have affected only children’s programmes owing to the nature of religious programmes as national and cultural products. With their programming relying heavily on animation, commercially funded channels have a higher proportion of non-domestic programmes than publicly funded channels. British commercial channels’ proportion of non-domestic children’s programmes seems to have risen from 16% in 1986 to 41% in 2009, while the BBC’s proportion rose from 15% to 19%.

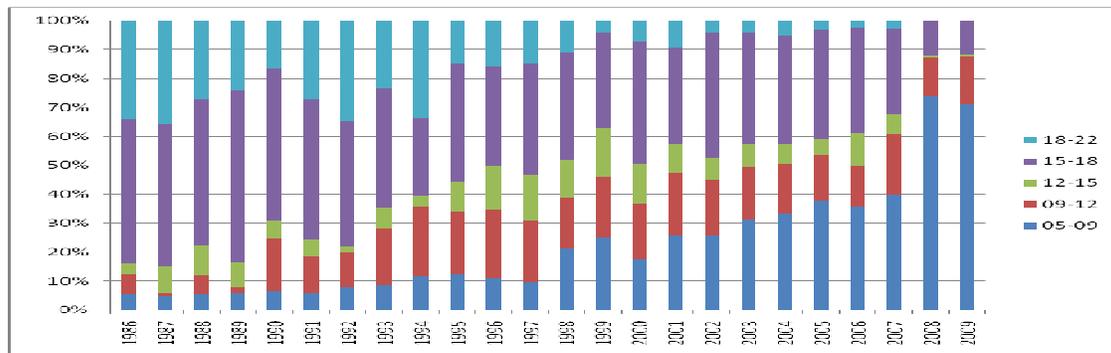
In Finland, commercially funded channels’ proportion of non-domestic children’s programmes has always been high, as the channels never set up separate children’s departments, which have traditionally produced most domestic children’s programmes. Averaging 98% in the 1990s, the proportion briefly fell to 67% in 2005<sup>10</sup>, but began to rise again towards the end of the decade, topping at 97% in 2009. Yleisradio’s proportion has followed this trend too, from 25% in 1986 to 60% in 2009.

Chart 7: Scheduling of children’s programmes in the UK 1986-2009



(Source: Authors’ research)

Chart 8: Scheduling of children’s programmes in Finland 1986-2009



(Source: Authors’ research)

The most significant changes, however, relate to the scheduling of minority programmes. The results indicate that both children's and religious programmes are being pushed outside daytime and early fringe slots to more marginal parts of the schedule late at night and early in the morning. This points to growing inequality between minority interest and popular forms of programming in terms of scheduling. While, in 1986, the majority of children's programmes on both commercial and publicly funded channels were broadcast on weekday afternoons ('the children's hour'), in 2009 seven out of eight children's programmes had migrated to the early morning. Consequently, the median time of children's programming has shifted from 16:00 in the UK and 17:30 in Finland in 1986 to 08:15 in the UK and 08:00 in Finland. Again, there is a growing disparity between commercially and publicly funded channels. Commercially funded channels concentrate their children's provision between the hours of 06:00 and 09:00, and some channels have shifted their children's provision exclusively to weekend mornings. In both countries, the children's programmes on daytime and afternoon have been replaced with the more commercially lucrative genres of drama (soaps) and game shows. This parallels the United States, where the Big Three commercial networks<sup>11</sup> abandoned children's programming on weekdays more than a generation ago (Eastman and Ferguson 2009). As all channels now provide children's programming in relatively narrow and overlapping broadcasting slots, variety is limited to the choice between channels and programme options, but not in choice between broadcasting times. Only publicly funded channels have continued their weekday afternoon children's programming.

A similar shift has taken place in the UK in the scheduling of religious programmes, from their traditional Sunday morning and early evening slots towards the early morning and late night (often dubbed 'the graveyard slots'). While the percentage of religious programmes broadcast between the hours of 00:00 and 06:00 averaged just 1% in the UK in the 1980s and early-to-mid 1990s, it began to grow in the early 2000s, and in 2009 accounted for 32% of such programmes. Meanwhile, the Sunday morning slot (between the hours of 06:00 and 12:00) has declined from 46% in 1986 to 21% in 2009. Moreover, fewer religious programmes are scheduled at peak time. While religious programmes were for decades broadcast on the Sunday evening 'God Slot' on both BBC 1 and ITV, the 1990 Broadcasting Act ended the IBA's proactive intervention in ITV's scheduling. The latter cancelled its prime-time strand of religious programmes in 1993. Currently, the BBC is the only broadcaster to schedule regular religious programmes at peak time, although its internal research demonstrates that religious programmes have been affected by irregular and out of peak time scheduling (BBC Governance Unit 2005).

Much less radical changes have taken place in Finland, suggesting that the Finnish religious programme production arrangement itself acts as a regulator in maintaining religious output on Yleisradio's channels. This arrangement consists of a joint co-operational body made up of representatives of Yleisradio and the churches which coordinate devotional programme production. Devotional programmes are produced for Yleisradio by the Communications Centre of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Nevertheless, there have been changes in the scheduling practices of the religious programmes in Finland too, although they have not

resulted in equally straightforward marginalisation. While the primary devotional broadcasts are still scheduled to match the service times of the Evangelical-Lutheran church, the remaining religious programmes lost their regular slots in the early 2000s, and have since been scheduled to fill gaps between other programmes. While Yleisradio even broadcast a religious magazine on Friday peak time as late as in 1999, religious programmes have since been pushed out of peak time hours to irregular slots in the afternoon and late evening, which has affected the viewing figures of these programmes as well.

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE FINNISH AND UK CASES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA POLICY

Though the empirical findings of the paper are at this stage tentative, the cases of Finland and the UK provide evidence of the impact on minority broadcasting of structural and operational changes arising from the adoption of elements of the neo-liberal marketisation agenda in broadcasting. In both Finland and the UK, there is a strong history of public service broadcasting, though it has been structured and delivered rather differently in each case, thus providing a useful basis on which to explore the effects of broadly similar changes in the sector since the late 1980s. A striking comparative feature is the different historical attitude to commercial broadcasting activity in the two territories. As noted above, the UK was more comfortable with commercialisation, having introduced it, in 1955, as a tightly regulated policy tool to promote quality in the broadcasting system. In Finland, by contrast, commercial broadcasting was viewed as something that needed to be tightly controlled by, and be subordinate to, the public service broadcaster. Commercial broadcasting in Finland thus occupied much more of a marginal - and sceptically viewed - position than in the UK and even was required to contribute directly to the revenue stream of the PSB. Unlike the UK, the Finnish broadcasting system has been subject to much more state influence through direct parliamentary governance of the public service broadcaster. It might thus be reasonable to expect that the effects of neo-liberal marketisation would be less strong here in the face of similar internationally recognisable trends which have impacted on each system. Like elsewhere in Europe, there has been unprecedented growth in network capacity in both cases. This has facilitated a broadening of market-based broadcasting and, in Finland's case, the independence of the commercial broadcaster from the control of the PSB. In both cases, market competition has put pressure on assured long-standing commercial revenue streams enjoyed by the incumbent commercial broadcasters, as well as pressure for behavioural change on the PSBs in question.

Despite these differences, the data in the previous section indicate a number of important similar trends for the provision of children's and religious programming in the UK and Finland. A key feature is the significant changes in the extent and pattern of provision of minority interest programming delivered through terrestrial commercial channels, which has declined very significantly overall. As commercial broadcasters in the UK have traditionally provided a significant part of minority programming, the decline has had serious effects on

the provision and diversity of these programmes. For example, as worship programmes were formerly ITV's domain, its decision to cancel its weekly religious output has left the UK without a regular Sunday worship broadcast. Sub-genre data also give a clear indication of how, in both territories, the pressures of marketisation are stimulating behaviour modification in the direction of cost minimisation. Striking here is the evidence that, in the UK, 69% of children's programmes on the main commercial terrestrial channels is comprised of animation, combined with an equally significant drop in the percentage of 'drama' sub-genre children's programmes. In Finland, too, as much as 93% of the commercially funded channels' children's output under scrutiny was accounted for by animation. Whilst undoubtedly a valuable sub-genre in its own right, a policy question must surely be raised about the proportion of this kind of programming now in commercial schedules; specifically, what kinds of effects are these changes exerting, if any, on the audiences in question? A key issue concerns whether this change is motivated more by the desire to increase profitability or even the absolute imperative of trying to avoid going out of business, than to pursue innovativeness and enhance quality. The data emphasise the importance of having robust targeted media policies to promote minority interest programming if it is to be maintained. In the UK, the 2003 Communications Act's abolition of minority programme quotas - and in the Finnish case liberalisation following the 1993 Channel Reform - clearly have had marked consequences for minority interest programming on the main commercial terrestrial channels.

In contrast to the steep decline in the volume of children's and religious programmes shown on the commercial terrestrial channels investigated, the data highlight the continuing importance of publicly funded channels in provision of minority programming in an era of marketised broadcasting. A striking statistic among the UK data is that nearly all of the religious programming on the main terrestrial TV channels is now provided by the BBC, whilst, in Finland, Yleisradio broadcasts two thirds of children's programmes and all religious programmes. The empirical evidence gathered also supports the argument that public service obligations set in broadcasting policy also act as an effective measure in maintaining reasonable levels of minority programming. For instance, devotional programmes, although their quantity has remained at low levels over the years, have enjoyed a somewhat secured status in Yleisradio's schedules because their provision has been set as one of Yleisradio's statutory duties. Moreover, these duties were amended in 2005 to include the provision of children's programmes. Consequently, Yleisradio's children's programme provision increased by one third between 2007 and 2008.

However, the sub-genre data also clearly show the effects of marketisation even on public service broadcasters, with some interesting policy implications. While the last 10 years have seen an increase in drama and a slight reduction in animation on the main BBC channels, Yleisradio's output of animation has risen dramatically since the mid-1980s from approximately 13% to 59% in 2009. This indicates a significant shift in the public service paradigm from a previously clear Reithian educational ethos towards a more populist and entertainment-oriented approach.<sup>12</sup> From a pragmatic point of view, this is a direct consequence of the paradox affecting Yleisradio in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is obliged to broadcast

more hours of programming for an increasing number of platforms but with ever-decreasing resources. This process forces Yleisradio, like other PSBs, to shift resources from in-house and domestic productions to less expensive acquisitions and imports.

The cases of change in patterns of minority programming in Finland and the UK highlighted in this paper confirm the highly significant effect that the injection of marketisation has had on the scheduling of such programming. While the PSB-dominated paradigm of the 1980s in both locations is demonstrated in the equality in scheduling between minority interest and popular programmes (largely an outcome of pro-active regulatory measures, lack of commercial competition and the prevalence of a public service paradigm in commercial channels' programming policy) there is clear evidence of a shift of minority programming away from the most lucrative parts of the schedule in terms of audience figures and advertising revenue capture. This commercial imperative though unsurprising, has, nonetheless, significant social consequences the detailed treatment of which stretches beyond the confines of this paper. In respect of religious programming, the practices of marginal scheduling especially on commercial channels have resulted in a 'vicious circle', in which unsociable and constantly changing scheduling times lead to declining audience figures, which provide further justification for marginalisation. Analysis of the viewing figures for religious programmes in both countries reveals that erratic and more marginal scheduling practices have affected viewing figures more than secularisation of UK and Finnish societies.<sup>13</sup> These trends in religious programming raise the difficult policy question of promoting religious awareness in a multi-ethnic society in which the often fractious inter-play between politics and religion often comes to the fore.

In regulatory terms, the marginalisation of minority programmes in the UK raises important questions of the effectiveness of the post-2003 regulatory infrastructure. On the one hand, the latter is more able to address the realities of the multi-channel PSB environment by evolving from channel-specific to system-wide PSB assessment. On the other, concerns exist over its capacity to defend the interests of viewers by not taking a more proactive approach in coordinating the scheduling of programmes. Although the Finnish devotional programme production arrangement i.e. the cooperation with Yleisradio and the Evangelical Lutheran Church has allowed the two institutions to combine their specialisms for mutual interest and succeeded in maintaining a ground level of domestic religious programmes on screens, it too does have its disadvantages. Not only does it fail to address the needs of the ever-increasing religious minorities in Finnish society, but it has also allowed the genre to fall into a relative stagnation. Consequently, religious programme provision in Finland consists mainly of a few, long-running devotional strands of programmes. Very little innovation and evolution has taken place within the genre, which has failed to find ways to address new audiences, e.g. children and young people. It can be said without exaggeration that Finnish devotional programmes are an extension of worship on television, rather than a platform for moral and ethical debates aimed at meeting the needs of its contemporary society more precisely.

In conclusion, the evidence in this paper points towards highly significant change in minority interest programming in the era of neo-liberal marketisation in two very different European Union states, both of which have placed clear value on PSB for many decades. Though further empirical research is needed to analyse issues of minority programming in respect of new digital channels, the findings of this paper point towards the need to develop specific policies for the protection and promotion of minority broadcasting interests in an ever more expansive and complex viewing environment. Specifically, these policies need to focus on maintaining diversity within minority programme genres to avoiding overt homogenisation within a genre. Such a risk is already demonstrated by the ever-rising proportion of animation in both countries, and the ‘stagnation’ of religious programmes in Finland. Additionally, the provision of PSBs needs to be developed to cover gaps in minority programme provision resulting from commercial broadcasters’ declining output. This requires a more proactive approach from PSBs, including closer cooperation with regulatory authorities and research on minority programming across the spectrum. Above all, public service media policies will require proper financial resources, the levying of which creates a policy problem in the current and likely future recessionary public spending environment. The current uncertainty with the future funding of PSB is particularly detrimental to the stability of minority programmes and can distract PSBs from fulfilling their public service obligations. The pursuit of innovative funding solutions, however, is likely to yield a series of longer term social and political benefits that should over-ride any predilections for politically expedient funding cuts with short-term political-economic goals in mind.

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<sup>1</sup> We here take marketisation to mean the introduction into broadcasting systems of the normative values, organisational features and practices of the market.

<sup>2</sup> For example, MTV was prohibited from broadcasting certain programme genres, e.g. news and current affairs (until 1981), sports and party political broadcasts; these were considered as privileges of the public broadcaster.

<sup>3</sup> From the 1960s to 1993, MTV's output on Yleisradio's channels made up about 20-30% of the total programming time (Hanski 2001; Hellman 1999).

<sup>4</sup> MTV3's original broadcasting licence set some rather vague obligations to the channel, e.g. a requirement for providing 'high quality' programmes of factual information and entertainment; a requirement for the inclusion of a 'sufficient' part of programming of domestic origin; and a requirement for providing programming in both Finnish and Swedish languages.

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<sup>5</sup> However, Hellman (1999) argues that the programme regulations stipulated on MTV3 in its 1993 broadcasting licence defined the company as a public-service type broadcaster rather than a commercial one.

<sup>6</sup> According to the Act, Yleisradio's duties are 'to support democracy by providing diverse information, points of view and discussions on societal issues, also for minorities and special groups', 'to support, create and develop domestic culture and to make it available to all', 'to promote the enlightening nature of programming, support citizens' educational needs and provide devotional programmes' and 'to provide programming for Finnish speaking as well as Swedish speaking citizens on equal grounds, and provide services in the Sami language too, and, where applicable, in other minority languages' (Salokangas 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Due to the limited information provided by television listings, only individual programmes were selected to this research. Programmes sent as a part of another programme (e.g. magazine programmes, breakfast television) were excluded from this research. Therefore, the research does not include TV-AM and GMTV's output or other children's segments in breakfast programmes either in the UK or Finland.

<sup>8</sup> Main terrestrial channels in the UK are BBC One, BBC Two, ITV1, Channel 4 and Channel 5/Five (1997-). In Finland, they are YLE TV1, YLE TV2, MTV (-1993), Kolmoskanava (1986-1993), MTV3 (1993-) and Nelonen (1997-). Although MTV's output prior to 1993 was on Yleisradio's two channels, it is considered as a separate entity in this study.

<sup>9</sup> Animation sections showed as parts of children's magazine programmes is not included in these figures; thus, the true figures for animation are likely to be even higher.

<sup>10</sup> This can be largely accounted to Nelonen's daily youth magazine programme, which was also repeated on a daily basis. Nelonen axed the programme in 2007.

<sup>11</sup> ABC, CBS and NBC.

<sup>12</sup> An Yleisradio producer of various children's programmes in the 1970s and 1980s testified in an interview that producers in the 1980s certainly held educational values superior to entertainment (i.e. cartoons); if animation was to be used, it was preferably to be acquired from domestic production companies. Certain antipathy existed towards imported 'commercial' cartoons, which were deemed to be incompatible with the pedagogic missions public service children's programmes were required to deliver.

<sup>13</sup> The audience figures of religious programmes on the BBC's and Yleisradio's channels reveal that considering the general fragmentation of the television audiences in the 2000s, there has not been a major decline in the viewing of religious programmes. For example, Finnish religious programmes can attract audiences as high as half a million (10% of the country's population), with regular figures around 150-200.000. In the UK, audiences for the BBC's weekly *Songs of Praise* averaged 3.3m in 2003/4 (BBC Governance Unit 2005).