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## **The Notion of ‘Mission’ in Radio Broadcasting in Poland**

### **Introduction**

The 1992 Broadcasting Act laid the foundations for a new media landscape in Poland after the fall of communism. The act, amended several times, remains in force. An important notion introduced in the Act is the ‘mission’ of public broadcasters. Article 21 does not clearly define what this ‘public service mission’ is; instead, it imposes on national broadcaster several tasks that should be accomplished. The Act also lists nine general recommendations concerning the fields in which such a mission should be carried out. Though they apply directly to the public sector, some important aspects of the said ‘mission’ lie within the remit of community radio and, to some degree, private sector broadcasters.

The paper analyses the notion of the ‘public service mission’ of Polish radio not only through legal terms, but also through reflection upon the actual content of contemporary radio in Poland in the context of public discourse. The appearance of non-state-owned broadcasters in the 1990s was followed by the emergence among them of programming strategies, targeting a precisely-profiled, well-situated, enterprising audience and focusing mainly on entertainment. This led to the exclusion of some listeners (e.g. farmers, pensioners, children) from the sphere of the commercial broadcasters’ interest. Concurrently, public radio programming was bound by the existence of the ‘public service mission’ it had to fulfil; to some extent this applied to community broadcasters as well. The question of this ‘mission’ (or lack of it), of its meaning, reasonableness and scope has been much debated over the past two decades. The paper attempts to outline these issues.

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### The three-way division of the Polish radio market

Before moving to discuss the ‘mission’ of Polish radio, it is worth outlining the radio market and its legal underpinnings. The presence of three groups of radio broadcasters (public, commercial, community) is present in more than 100 countries around the world.<sup>1</sup> In Poland, the 29 December 1992 Broadcasting Act established the division into public and commercial media, and it was only in 2001 that the new category of ‘community broadcaster’ was formally regulated. The tasks allocated to this category of broadcaster practically overlap with the mission of public media: promoting education, publicising charitable activities, respecting Christian values, acting in accordance with ethical principles, and preserving the Polish national identity in programming. The amended Act also barred community broadcasters from airing advertising or sponsored programmes;<sup>2</sup> thus, the broadcasters are burdened with a number of tasks with no indication of how these tasks should be funded. Religious broadcasters are an exception here, since they may be funded by their diocese; of nine religious broadcasters, however, only one – Radio Maryja – has become a nationwide radio station, reaching even listeners outside Poland. Other broadcasters have attempted to implement strategies along the lines of ‘having their voices heard’, ‘providing alternative representations, discourses and formats that vary from those originating from mainstream media’. Such strategies may be found among others in radio stations run by universities (there are 10 licensed student radio stations in Poland, all located in big cities), by religious institutions (44 licences belong to dioceses, orders and parishes of the Catholic Church), local government or by NGOs; these include six stations for children, students, ethnic minorities, Christians and two for local communities in Poland.<sup>3</sup>

Radio in Poland is subject to the processes of globalisation and concentration of ownership (motivated by cost reduction as well as maximising the reach of advertising), which promotes takeovers of competing radio stations. Local radio stations are taken over by larger entities, creating so-called radio networks, which are often part of large media conglomerates. The traditional division of media into the press, radio, television and internet breaks down as radio stations refer listeners to online forums, newspapers create their own internet portals, and radio and television programming can increasingly be accessed online. Media converge,

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<sup>1</sup> K. Jakubowicz, *Media publiczne. Początek końca czy nowy początek*, WAIp, Warszawa 2007, p. 80–116.

<sup>2</sup> Parlament Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (2001), Ustawa z dnia 1 lutego 2001 r. o zmianie ustawy o radiofonii i telewizji, <http://prawo.lego.pl/prawo/ustawa-z-dnia-1-lutego-2001-r-o-zmianie-ustawy-o-radiofonii-i-telewizji> [accessed: 11.10.2011].

<sup>3</sup> U. Doliwa, *Od duetu do tercetu. O rozwoju trzeciego sektora radiowego w Europie*, [in:] *Systemy medialne w XXI wieku. Wspólne czy różne drogi rozwoju?*, eds. A. Jaskiernia, J. Adamowski, Warszawa 2012, pp. 307–322.

offering services which thus far had a discrete existence, or services specific to multimedia utilising digital technologies and the internet. Because this convergence is precipitated by economic factors, media conglomerates seek to create as effective an advertising medium as they can. To do so, they utilise formatting, which is to say they aim their programming at specific target groups (consumers of advertising and of programme content); at the same time, they ensure the diversity of the channels of distribution. Concentration of ownership may result in a homogenisation of content, although it need not result in their commercialisation. It is nonetheless evident that factors characteristic for private media have had an impact on public broadcasters as well. The pressure to improve audience figures has reached public broadcasters, who increasingly seek to include programmes which are cheap to make and easy to consume. This tendency has adversely affected the public service function and the 'mission' of public media, which have to compete against commercial broadcasters (and community ones, although this is less of an issue), at the same time struggling with financial problems.

### Broadcasting policies

In a broader perspective, the media policies of post-communist countries, or the attempts of those countries to shape the conditions, aims and rules of the functioning of the mass communications system,<sup>4</sup> were shaped as a result of a conflict between several divergent approaches to the changes in the media system:

- an idealist approach, which can be traced back to the notions of re-constructing the media system held by oppositional and dissident movements under the Communist regime
- a mimetic approach, which seeks to emulate existing legal and institutional frameworks (functioning in Western Europe or the United States)
- an atavistic approach, which surfaced after the fall of the Communist regime, as even newly-formed democratic governments believed the weight of the tasks facing them required the control of the media as a means of communicating with the general public.<sup>5</sup>

The programming priorities of different broadcasters reflect these approaches. Commercial broadcasters, following the mimetic approach seek to narrow down formats and concentrate capital; this maximises profits and reduces operating costs. The commercial broadcasting model in Western Europe emulates that of the USA, with American consultants helping to establish the new system. It has adopted many features of the mature American commercial system, including

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<sup>4</sup> B. Mierzejewska, *Polityka medialna*, [in:] *Media, komunikacja, biznes elektroniczny*, ed. B. Jung, Difin S.A, Warszawa 2001, p. 227.

<sup>5</sup> K. Jakubowicz, *Media publiczne...*, p. 106.

format radio, disc jockeys, short news, jingles of stations, radio game shows. With increasing diversification, some classical music stations were established, as well as stations catering to significant migrant groups. In Poland, the first commercial radio stations were directly modelled on French broadcasters: Radio Fun in the case of the Kraków-based RMF, and the general French model with Radio Zet, whose founder Andrzej Wojciechowski had just returned from a long stay in Paris.

Polish community broadcasters had a wide array of models to follow. “The idea of non-commercial, non-public stations was first realized in the US (*Pacifica Network*) in the late 1940s, but in Europe during the 1970s and 1980s civic actors established a wide variety of stations, some tolerated by the State, others heavily persecuted. In this founding generation, three types of non-commercial radio could be found in Europe. In the South (France, Italy) the stations called themselves *radios libres*; they were seen as a place for alternative information and counterculture. In the West, the stations followed more the pattern of local community radio and were quickly legalized (Netherlands, Belgium), in the Scandinavian countries the State established a dense network of a high number of local stations based on civic control and serving urban neighbourhoods (e.g. the Swedish *Närradio* = nearby radio).<sup>6</sup> Polish community broadcasters tended to adopt the idea of non-mainstream activity, free from all political influence, as it is difficult to define the essence of community radio: “There seems to be a general consensus that a community station is a radio station run primarily by volunteers on a not-for-profit basis.”<sup>7</sup>

The notion of public media which shows elements of the atavistic approach rests on the assumption that the media, which serve to communicate with the general public, will become an independent representative of all the subjects of the state power system, social organisations, trades unions, cultural and educational institutions, and so on. In this vision, the public service ‘mission’ approximates the ‘monastic’ (*klasztorny*) model of public media,<sup>8</sup> which holds that if commercial media do not satisfy all the needs of the audience, there is a justification for public media, insofar as these are complementary to commercial broadcasters. The ‘monastic’ model of public television and radio defines these as niche media, broadcasting only contents and genres absent in commercial media. Here, what lies within the remit of public media are productions aimed at educating audiences and providing them with broadly understood culture. Supporters of “pure

<sup>6</sup> H.J. Kleinstauber, U. Sonnenberg, *Beyond Public Service and Private Profit. International Experiences with Non-commercial Local Radio*, “European Journal of Communication” 1990, 5 (1), pp. 87–106.

<sup>7</sup> J. Gordon, *A comparison of a sample of new British community radio stations with a parallel sample of established Australian community radio stations*, “3CMedia: Journal of Community, Citizen’s and Third Sector Media and Communication” 2006, 2, pp. 1–16.

<sup>8</sup> K. Jakubowicz, *Media publiczne...*, p. 49.

mission", like Lord Puttnam,<sup>9</sup> who would have public broadcasters provide something for every listener while at the same time strive to reach all with their programming, appear somewhat utopian in their attitude. The idea of public service is insufficiently rooted and insufficiently credible in the public consciousness, while the public sector, subject as it is to political pressure, has too little freedom or authority to efficiently operate public media. William A. Richter emphasises that radio was the first national medium in the history of the USA. "Radio gave Americans something that they had never had before: the ability to experience one special moment as a country."<sup>10</sup> This element was certainly present in Europe as well, where, for very much the same reason, governments took control of the new medium to secure political stability and loyalty. State-controlled stations were transformed into a public service model, often with considerable political control remaining and a relatively weak position vis-à-vis commercial competition.

### What is a mission?

In general terms, a mission is a public part of the strategy of an institution. It expresses the role an institution wishes to play in its surroundings. It contains a "set of highly regarded values on which it seeks to build its future."<sup>11</sup> By formulating a mission, "an organisation expresses the way in which it wants to be perceived."<sup>12</sup> A mission is a statement of the reason or reasons for the existence of the organisation, the ultimate purpose the organisation serves in society, and the boundaries within which it operates.

The self-defined mission of Ofcom (Office of Communications), the British regulator of electronic and broadcast media, is to fulfil such tasks as providing information, broadening knowledge, popularising various fields of culture, arts and sciences, enhancing cultural identities, representing different cultures and presenting diverse viewpoints. Programmes produced as part of this mission should be high-quality, original, innovative, accessible; they should force their audiences to think.<sup>13</sup>

The Polish Broadcasting Act has no precise definition of a mission, but it does specify the ways in which it should be implemented. These include "providing

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<sup>9</sup> Lord Puttnam, *The Role of Public Service Broadcasting in the Changing Television Landscape*. Speech "Public Service Broadcasting-Changing Scenes", Helsinki 2003, <http://www.proyleiso.org/frameset.htm>, [in:] K. Jakubowicz, *Media publiczne...*, p. 75.

<sup>10</sup> W.A. Richter, *Radio. A Complete Guide to the Industry*, New York: Lang 2006, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> J. Beliczyński, *Misja i wizja regionalnego radia publicznego*, „Studia Medioznawcze” 2006, nr 3 (26), p. 33.

<sup>12</sup> J. Penc, *Leksykon biznesu*, Wydawnictwo Placet, Warszawa 1994, p. 121.

<sup>13</sup> K. Jakubowicz, *Jaka przyszłość mediów publicznych?*, „Biuletyn Informacyjny” 2004, nr 7/8/9, Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji.

[...] the entire society and its individual groups with diversified programme services and other services in the area of information, journalism, culture, entertainment, education and sports which shall be pluralistic, impartial, well balanced, independent and innovative, marked by high quality and integrity of broadcast”<sup>14</sup>. The Act further states that the programmes and other services provided by public radio and television should encourage an unconstrained development of citizens’ views and the formation of public opinion; enable citizens and their organisations to take part in public life by expressing diversified views and approaches as well as exercising the right to social supervision and criticism; assist the development of culture, science and education, with special emphasis on the Polish intellectual and artistic achievements; respect the Christian system of values, being guided by the universal principles of ethics; serve to strengthen family ties and advance the propagation of pro-health attitude; serve to promote and popularize sport; and contribute to combating social pathologies.<sup>15</sup> To achieve these objectives, radio must have a wide array of genres at its disposal, combining classic genres of information and opinion journalism with music, entertainment, literature, science and advertising. Such multi-genre programmes as on-site news report, reportages, radio plays, concerts are often costly to produce. From the perspective of content, a mission can thus be viewed as consisting in propagating genres conducive to the creation of a civic society, furthering its media education and enhancing its culture of being.

A mission can also be defined from a journalistic perspective as responsible actions on the part of journalists and other persons involved in social communication. “This understanding of a mission is based on responsible journalism, which is a professional and ethical performance in a position of public trust.”<sup>16</sup> The scope of the notion of mission is therefore extensive, although it is not precisely delineated. It has a marketing aspect (a mission is a strategy for presenting an institution to society and informing it about the institution’s goals), an ideological aspect (in the ideas the institution chooses to implement), a philosophical one (in the hierarchies of values it subscribes to), and finally a generic one (in that it requires the presence of certain genres on air).

### **Who is to implement the mission?**

The Broadcasting Act lays much of the burden of fulfilling the public service mission on the shoulders of public media. Other broadcasters are obligated to fulfil the said mission within the terms of their broadcasting licence; this, however, is

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted after Broadcasting act of 29 December, chapter 4 art. 31–32, Dz. U. 1993 Nr 7 item 34 chapter 4, art. 21.

<sup>15</sup> Tamże.

<sup>16</sup> M. Drożdż, *Misyjność radia lokalnego*, [in:] *Radio i społeczeństwo*, eds. G. Stachyra, E. Pawlka-Hejno, Wydawnictwo UMCS, Lublin 2011, pp. 95–111.

practically restricted to a certain percentage of spoken word programming (information and journalism), content in Polish and local programmes.

In the case of local broadcasters, fulfilling this mission is easier, since local issues are at the heart of their strategy. Local broadcasters, present in many countries in Europe and around the world, are a phenomenon which can be traced back to the 1920s (when Polish Radio stations were created in a number of Polish cities) and which flourished in the 1990s, when market deregulation enabled the creation of small stations. However, market changes and the appropriation of the advertising market by large conglomerates decimated small stations; at the same time, intense globalising processes, notably formatting and standardising programming, show a potential to erode what distinctiveness remains between communities, regions and even whole countries, to diminish cultural identity, heritage and development, and ultimately to threaten the economic and political autonomy of minorities, large and small. One of the strengths of local media content is that it can express socio-political and cultural distinctiveness.

Polish Radio has four nationwide channels, one for Poles abroad, and 17 local stations. Polish Radio Programme I broadcasts mostly news – political, economic, social, domestic and foreign (news bulletins and other information programmes, including economic and farming news services); cultural and sports news bulletins (“Polska i świat”, “Poranne rozmaitości”). It also has free electoral broadcasts; programmes featuring government representatives or politicians who present and explain policy items (“Rozmowy w Jedyńce”, “Sygnały Dnia”); programmes presenting the positions of political parties, trades unions and business organisations on key public affairs (“Debata”); reportages; cultural content (“Spotkanie z mistrzem”); children’s programmes; and classical music concerts.

Polish Radio Programme II broadcasts among others the Polish Radio Theatre based on Polish literary works. It promotes classical music (the radio station sponsors the National Symphonic Orchestra of the Polish Radio and the Polish Radio Choir) and fosters musical education, familiarising listeners with new trends and new interpretations of existing pieces. Programme II broadcasts symphonic concerts from Berlin, London, New York and Vienna, featuring eminent musicians, conductors, and soloists; it produces classical concerts for children, guides on medical, legal or linguistic issues, and reportages on current affairs, some of them award-winning (Prix Italia or Premio Ondas). Programme II also broadcasts the holy mass and religious ceremonies of other denominations.

Polish Radio Programme III is an arena for radio personalities presenting original programmes. In the 1970s, the channel stood out for its musical programming, playing music of diverse genres and geographies, including jazz, rock, folk, reggae, blues, swing, country, gospel, French and Italian music; Programme III was therefore perceived as a “window on the world”, especially the Western world, out of reach to the average Pole stuck behind the Iron Curtain. Original programmes were presenters introduced, often in a very personal way, their

favourite genres, performers and songs, interspersing them with biographical background or trivia, grew to be a trademark of the radio station and forged a strong bond between it and the listeners. Programme III also broadcast serialised audiobooks, read by eminent actors and enriched with a soundtrack, and recitations of poetry; productions of Polish Radio Theatre, reportages and children's programmes could also be heard on air. The early 1980s saw the broadcasts of Polish Radio Programme III suspended due to martial law. When the radio station resumed broadcasting, it focused on a younger audience and remained relatively free from propaganda; live shows and a high proportion of Polish and international music well-liked by younger listeners led to Programme III's popularity among young audiences; even today, many between 35 and 50 years of age remain faithful to the radio station, referring to themselves as "Three's generation."<sup>17</sup> The programme III hit chart (*Lista Przebojów Programu Trzeciego*), broadcast for the first time in 1982, immediately after the station resumed activity, deserves much credit for forging this strong bond between the radio station and its listeners. The only programme of this kind in Polish radio, the chart provided a sense of community, a musical education, and a democratic access to the airwaves, as listeners were able to comment live on air on social and political issues. These are elements of public service broadcasting even today, and so the public service mission of Radio III was evident even before the 1992 legislation. Radio III is now competing against commercial broadcasters, and its audience share is 7.5%.<sup>18</sup>

Polish Radio Programme IV fulfils the public service mission mainly in education. A public broadcaster, it has adopted quite an interesting approach, aiming its "Radio with a vision" project at young people aged 16–25 and professionally active people aged 24–39. Internal research conducted by Polish Radio showed that although its audience share is substantial, young people tend to abandon radio in favour of other media. The radio station therefore decided to open a TV channel based on radio in order to reach a new, younger audience. This innovative, converged product was viewed as a necessity, putting Programme IV at the cutting edge of radio in Poland.<sup>19</sup> In the case of Programme IV, the strategy of convergence was implemented by switching the radio product to other platforms – the internet and television – without losing its radio character. This was particularly interesting in the televisual aspect; the Free to Air signal was transmitted via the satellite HotBird and two of the main digital platforms in Poland as well as major cable networks.<sup>20</sup> The only investments made concerned the refurbishment and redevel-

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<sup>17</sup> M. Wielopolska-Szymura, *Program Trzeci Polskiego Radia – poszukiwanie nowej formuły programowej*, [in:] *Radio i...*, pp. 127–137.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.radiotrack.pl/index.php/wyniki/ranking.html>, figures for November 2013–January 2014 [accessed: 10.03.2014].

<sup>19</sup> [www.wirtualnemedial.pl](http://www.wirtualnemedial.pl) [accessed: 25.01.2011].

<sup>20</sup> [www.press.pl/newsy/pokaz.php?id=24997&strona=&idd](http://www.press.pl/newsy/pokaz.php?id=24997&strona=&idd) [accessed 20.01.2011].



opment of two studios from which the programme was broadcast. The radio way of conducting the programme was carefully preserved. The journalists were told that the new project did not mean changes to their job; "the Four" intended to use the language of radio broadcasts, DJs were expected to behave as if they were simply on air on the radio, and it has stayed that way.<sup>21</sup>

However, private broadcasters are also expected to perform tasks relating to the public service mission. As suggested in a report by the National Broadcasting Council, these broadcasters "also implement programmatic tasks contributing to preserving pluralism, enriching cultural and political debate and broadening the range of programmes available to audiences" (KRRiTV 2012). Therefore, the terms of broadcasting licences forcing commercial broadcasters to respect the rules of participation in the media market are popularly understood as a "mission". Commercial broadcasters themselves treat the charitable foundations they established and the charitable drives they participate in as part of their mission: the Radio ZET Foundation, established in 1999, has the status of a public benefit organisation and helps children with heart diseases, mostly heart defects, paying for the treatment and rehabilitation of young patients.

Independent community broadcasters also claim to be performing a public service mission. These broadcasters include Radio Wnet, established in 2009, whose founders intended it to be an attempt to build "a truly public & truly social medium", free from political interference, but deeply interested in public matters. The mission of the radio was to "increase the level of freedom in the Polish media."<sup>22</sup>

It is community radio, with its democratic management structure and political independence, which can foster a sense of togetherness and provide a space for public debate.<sup>23</sup> One example of such a radio station is the Catholic Radio Maryja. While mainstream media allege it to be antisemitic and hostile towards national minorities, as well as evincing a ritualistic and superficial piety, these stereotypes are contradicted by objective qualitative research,<sup>24</sup> which finds a democratic pluralism and a wealth of religious experience in the radio station's broadcasts. The research also shows that the listeners strongly identify with the radio station. A sense of belonging to Radio Maryja's Family ties in with a need to contribute to evangelisation. The listeners have a clear, unambiguous sense of identity, which

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<sup>21</sup> G. Stachyra, *The communicational aspects of radio convergence process – remarks upon "the radio on vision" and web-radio*, [in:] *Convergence: Media in Future*, eds. A. Baczyński, M. Drożdż, IDIKS UPJPII, Kraków 2012, p. 179–197.

<sup>22</sup> G. Stachyra, *The Radio Afterlife. Three Spheres of Communication and Community*, [in:] *Radio evolution. Communication and Society Research Centre*, eds. M. Oliveira, P. Portela, L.A. Santos, University of Minho Braga 2012, p. 407.

<sup>23</sup> P. Lewis, *Finding and funding Voices: the London experience*, "Information, Society and Justice" 2008, Vol. 2, Issue 1, pp. 5–20.

<sup>24</sup> *Czego nas uczy Radio Maryja? Socjologia treści i recepcji rozgłośni*, red. nauk. I. Krzemiński, WAiP, Warszawa 2009.

is unusual in contemporary Poland, where one would be hard pressed to find new social identities. The research also defines Radio Maryja's mission, which partly consists in spreading the Gospel, strengthening the Catholic faith, reaching out to social groups marginalised by mainstream media (the poor, the unemployed, the sick, farmers, children, the elderly) and building a space for public debate among Polish Catholics. A major success of the radio station was its campaign defending Telewizja Trwam, a TV channel which is part of the same media group. The National Broadcasting Council was initially unwilling to allow the TV channel space on the new digital platform, but Radio Maryja's campaign led to 2.5 million individuals signing a motion opposing the stance of the Council. As a result, Telewizja Trwam was allowed on the platform. Radio Maryja is the fifth largest radio station in Poland with a stable 2–3% audience share. Contact with its listeners enables the radio station to function as a forum, a space in which to exchange ideas, but first and foremost is its message to listeners that their opinion is valid and they have a right to express it in public. An on-air dialogue also provides an opportunity for a broadcaster to communicate its own ideology, towards which the audience relates by the use of codes that are constructed within particular social structure.<sup>25</sup>

A comparison with the largest commercial broadcasters is enough to show that 'spoken word' programmes, or debate, journalism, news, advice, prayer, literary and children's programmes, dominate in Radio Maryja, a community broadcaster:

Tab. 1. Programmes offered by licensed TV and radio broadcasters in 2012

Broadcaster	Spoken word	Music	Self-promotion	Advertising, paid-for announcements
Radio Maryja	over 77%	22%	1%	0%
Radio Zet	23%	69%	2%	6%
RMF FM	27%	65%	2%	8%

Source: Monitoring Department at KRRiTV, 2012.

### **The mission of broadcasters in a changing political, social and economic context**

The changing context in which broadcasters function is causing a transformation in the way the obligations of public broadcasters are defined. Depending on local challenges and contexts, one can discern three general areas of pub-

<sup>25</sup> E. Pleszkun-Olejniczakowa, *Kulturowy przekaz radia*, [w:] *Radio i...*, p. 239.

lic service obligations; these have specific effects on the programmes offered by a broadcaster:<sup>26</sup>

Tab. 2. Public service media obligations – their backgrounds and consequences

Challenge/background	Public service obligation	Consequences for the public service media remit and services
Mainstream, mass market offering not meeting individual needs	– Serving the individual citizen	Providing content for small groups with specified needs; citizens as individual consumers
Internationalisation and globalisation	– Sustaining, defending national culture and cultural diversity – Fostering democratic processes	Distinctive content and services for large audiences
Disintermediation, fragmentation, individualisation	– enhancing social, political and cultural cohesion – serving as the civic “market place” of modern society	Public service media being used regularly by all citizens (high “reach”)

Source: Nissen 2006: 157.

The last of these areas is closely related to the essence of public service media. It is not enough to define them as remaining in the ownership of the public sector, as this would include state-owned media in the category. Similarly, it is not enough to define them as offering ambitious or socially beneficial programming, as this can be and is done by commercial media. The essence of public service media consists in the public service they perform to democracy, to and on behalf of a civic society. In terms of models, we can speak of public service media only when media organisations are sufficiently (directly or indirectly) controlled by society and strive to reflect society in their programming as well as to represent society in the relations with those in power.<sup>27</sup> Here, performing a public service mission must position the receiver (the viewer or the listener) as a citizen, not a consumer, as is the case with commercial broadcasters. Respect for the receiver, and the image of the listener and the viewer as someone who seeks knowledge and understanding and is interested in the world that surrounds them should induce broadcasters to produce content which is intellectually or artistically demanding

<sup>26</sup> Ch. Nissen, *Public Service Media in the Information Society*, report prepared for S-PSB, 2006, Strasbourg: Council of Europe, [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human\\_Rights/media/1\\_Intergovernmental\\_Co-operation/MC-S-PSB/H-Info%282006%29003\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/media/1_Intergovernmental_Co-operation/MC-S-PSB/H-Info%282006%29003_en.pdf), [in:] K. Jakubowicz, *Media publiczne...*, p. 157.

<sup>27</sup> K. Jakubowicz, *Media publiczne...*, p. 25.

and, first and foremost, motivates the receiver to make an effort to shape civic-minded attitudes and cultural models.<sup>28</sup>

It appears that community broadcasters in Poland are spontaneously moving to perform this function ascribed to public service media. This is a European tendency; although community media appeared in Europe in 1970s and 1980s, obtaining a special status as an independent voice of the society, their full presence in European politics is relatively recent. Initially, the sector was emphasised as significant in developing cultural and local identities. The European Parliament has adopted a resolution in support of community media in Europe. The resolution stresses that community media are an effective means of strengthening cultural and linguistic diversity, social cohesion and local identity, which explains the diversity of the sector (Resolution of 25. Sept. 2008). It soon became evident that community media are largely impervious to political influence and can thus successfully foster the idea of civic society. The financing of the community media – crowd-funding or citizen financing – signals political independence to their audience, as mediated content always reflects the interests of those who fund it.

Pursuant to existing legislation, in order to follow the model of social responsibility (public interest) as part of the public service mission, public radio in Poland must “encourage an unconstrained development of citizens’ views and formation of the public opinion; enable citizens and their organisations to take part in public life by expressing diversified views and approaches.”<sup>29</sup> In Poland, it tends to be obvious that a public broadcaster giving air time to representatives of the ruling party and marginalising those of the opposition is concerned about the former’s survival and not about the quality of public debate. Every single change in government in Poland has resulted in a reshuffle in the National Broadcasting Council. The Constitution of the Republic of Poland states that “the members of the National Council of Radio Broadcasting and Television shall be appointed by the Sejm, the Senate and the President of the Republic”. Still, although “[a] member of the National Council of Radio Broadcasting and Television shall not belong to a political party, a trade union or perform public activities incompatible with the dignity of his function”, leading political parties always push for a friendly representative to be appointed to the Council.

The Programme Department of the National Broadcasting Council, pursuing its legal duty, which is control over the activity of radio and television broadcasters (Broadcasting Act, art. 6 item 2 point 3), monitored the broadcasts of regional public radio stations during the local electoral campaign in 2010. The objective was to assess how radio stations implement their public service obligation, specifically providing civic education in election-themed programmes of three different

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<sup>28</sup> Tamże, p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted after Broadcasting act of 29 December, chapter 4 art. 31–32, Dz. U. 1993 Nr 7 item 34; chapter 4, art. 21.

types: news and information (mostly news bulletins); comment and opinion; and how-to instructions.

Out of 17 local Polish Radio stations, as few as two (!) gave voice to listeners, either talking to them on air or reading out emails. All the listeners, without exception, expressed strong criticism of the increasing role of political parties in local elections, which they believed was contrary to the idea of local government and the need for grassroots initiatives and programmes for local communities; they also criticised the role of the media, which they viewed as fuelling political conflicts.<sup>30</sup>

It is therefore not surprising that, in popular perception, the media remain a mouthpiece for politicians rather than a forum for listeners who could join in the debate. The media, TV stations and newspapers do not merely observe politics from the sidelines – their political involvement makes them co-creators of politics. In a 2008 public opinion survey by TNS OBOP, as many as 72% of those responding answered the question “Do you agree that some media in Poland conduct their own politics to their own benefit?” in the affirmative.<sup>31</sup>

Criticism of the media which fail to fulfil their public service mission comes not only from audiences but also from competing broadcasters. By mid-2012, four commercial broadcasters (Eurozet, RMF FM, Time and Agora) had written three letters to the National Broadcasting Council in which they demand the Council publish its stance on the monitoring of local city-oriented programmes broadcast by local Polish Radio stations. The third letter reads: “Not one of the monitored radio stations gives any justification for the claim that they fulfil a public service mission. As much as 90% of broadcasting time is taken up by popular music”. Representatives of commercial broadcasters emphasise that these programmes produced by public radio are for this reason too similar to the productions of commercial broadcasters, whose licence terms often impose much higher quotas of “localisation”, or locally-oriented content. “We cannot accept the paradoxical situation that private radio stations fulfil a public service mission to a greater degree based on the higher requirements in the terms of their licences.”<sup>32</sup>

### **Mission impossible?**

The political transformation in Poland has resulted not only in a decentralisation of the media market, but also to the country opening to Western cultural trends, which have led to lifestyle changes. The passing of Broadcasting Act, allowing

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<sup>30</sup> KRRiTV 2011.

<sup>31</sup> OBOP 2008, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.wirtualnemedi.pl/artykul/czy-rozglasnie-regionalne-polskiego-radia-nie-realizuja-misji> [accessed: 20.03.2014].

licensed commercial broadcasting, undoubtedly precipitated a fall in the popularity of public radio. The emergence of first commercial radio stations, the nationwide RMF FM and local stations, broke the monopoly of public radio, which now had to compete against private broadcasters. In 1990, the technological infrastructure of the public radio was obsolete in comparison to that of the newly-established and increasingly popular Radio Małopolska FUN, which would later become RMF FM, and Radio Zet. These two broadcasters would soon come to dominate the Polish radio landscape, attracting a high proportion of advertisers. With the expansion of television in Poland in the 1990s, its programming grew increasingly attractive, and radio lost some listeners to TV, especially in the late afternoon.

Radio is a universal medium as far as its range is concerned. One may listen to it at home, at work or in the car. No other medium is so widely available. Consequently, between 6 am and 3 pm radio is the most popular medium. 15 to 30% of potential listeners actually do listen to the radio in the aforementioned time span. It is not until the evening that the number of television viewers increases, but at about 11 pm radio listenership increases again.<sup>33</sup> For most of the day, radio has come to play the part of “sound wallpaper”, accompanying listeners in the various activities they perform. In terms of audience share, public radio is losing to commercial broadcasters, whose programming – formatted, repeatable and less ambitious (mostly music, attractive competitions with high monetary prizes; little spoken word) – appears better suited as a “background” at work and a relaxation aid after work. Recent listenership figures show that the most listened-to radio station is RMF FM, with an audience share of 22.6%, followed by Radio Zet at 15.9%. Polish Radio I has an audience share of 10.4%, less than half that of the leader, RMF FM. 7.5% listeners tuned in to Polish Radio III.<sup>34</sup>

Early commercial broadcaster in the 1990s provided an alternative to public ones, which were not open to the idea of formatting or establishing a target group of listeners and modernising the broadcast content so as to cater to their needs. Paradoxically, it was the “chains” of a public service mission which made this impossible for public broadcasters, whose remit forced them to produce content for a wide audience in a challenging market, with strong competition from private broadcasters. It needs to be emphasised that RMF and Radio Zet originally also had a “mission”; although it was not imposed with legislation, the “mission” resulted from the new broadcasters inheriting the mantle of promoters of the idea of a democratic, modern, civic society. This was to be achieved by offering breaking news, quality journalism marked by a pluralism of opinions and showing an openness to Western-style journalism with its myth of free speech, professionalism and the accountability of the journalist to society.

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<sup>33</sup> Radio Track Report 2013.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.radiotrack.pl/index.php/wyniki/ranking.html>, figures for November 2013–January 2014 [accessed: 10.03.2014].

## Funding Problems

In order to perform the tasks listed in the Broadcasting Act, radio fulfilling a public service mission must offer a wide array of genres. This combines classic information and opinion journalism with music, entertainment, literature, science and advertising. It must be emphasised that many of these genres are costly to produce (such as on-site news reports, reportage, radio play, concerts). It would therefore appear reasonable to expect that public service radio should be financed at a level appropriate to ensure the funding of ambitious productions such as these, especially when there is a large number of listeners who do not pay the radio and television license fee.

The current financial situation of Polish Radio S.A. is nothing short of dramatic. Polish Radio is financed from licence fees and advertising revenue. The non-payment of licence fees has drastically increased, and there are no efficient means for exacting the payment, which has led to a financing crisis. Revenue from licence fees in 2012 was slightly higher than the year before, but only 1.7 million households paid the fee, as opposed to some 4 million from which payment was due.<sup>35</sup> Polish Radio journalists regularly appeal to the government and the general public, writing open letters in which they protest against “marginalising culture and a lack of state policy supporting the public service mission.”<sup>36</sup> In 2012, the cost of performing its public service mission by Polish Radio was covered by licence fee revenue (70%), other public funding (6%) and the Radio’s own revenue (24%).<sup>37</sup>

Work is ongoing on a new Act of Parliament concerning the media. It is likely that the new Act will abolish the licence fee as obsolete, difficult to levy and too expensive to maintain, since the present system whereby the Post Office is responsible for collecting the fee is too costly. Financing public media directly from the budget is being considered. The Polish Radio would be awarded a broadcasting licence after it defines what it would want to do to perform the public service mission as defined by legislation; this proposal would then be costed by the National Broadcasting Council.

It is, however, difficult to encourage listeners and viewers to pay the licence fee for traditional media if they can access the same content elsewhere – on the internet, on their mobile phones, or as podcasts. Polish Radio programmes are also available from the Hotbird satellite on the Cyfra+ platform. The signal is broadcast as FTA (free-to-air) and does not require a Conditional Access System device.

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<sup>35</sup> KRRiTV 2013.

<sup>36</sup> M. Wyrwich, *Misja to nie pusty slogan*, „Niedziela” 2010, pp. 22–23.

<sup>37</sup> Media Publiczne 2012, KRRiTV, [http://www.krrit.gov.pl/Data/Files/\\_public/Portals/0/sprawozdania/spr2013/aneks\\_2013.pdf](http://www.krrit.gov.pl/Data/Files/_public/Portals/0/sprawozdania/spr2013/aneks_2013.pdf) [accessed: 4.04.2014].

## Conclusion

As it fulfils public service obligations, public radio in Poland is attempting to become not only an everyday companion to listeners (just like commercial broadcasters), but, first and foremost, a valuable friend with whom they can spend quality time. The value of this time consists mainly in spoken word broadcasts; information, comment and opinion journalism; education and culture. However, Polish Radio has the framework of a state-owned company, which stipulates that public radio is not entitled to draw material benefits, i.e., earn money from its activity. For this reason, public radio is financed with licence fees in order to make it independent of advertising revenue, as seeking this revenue would commercialise the radio, lowering the quality of broadcast content, making it less ambitious and diverse in terms of genres. However, an analysis of the changes in the Polish radio market between 2001 and 2010 shows that the most noticeable change is the growth in the popularity of RMF FM, a licensed nation-wide radio station with a universal appeal. Its market share grew by 40% (from 19% to 27%), and mature listeners (aged 40 or more) accounted for much of this growth. The community radio station Radio Maryja held on to its 2–3% market share. Polish Radio Programme I, however, has consistently lost popularity, with its 2010 market share consisting of two-thirds of that of 2001, while Polish Radio Programme III has improved its position. The years between 2001 and 2011 saw the growth of the market share of stations without a National Broadcasting Council licence, broadcasting exclusively online for fewer than 24 hours per day and produced mostly by young listeners.<sup>38</sup> Hence, the future of public radio does not appear too bright, as it is being overtaken by private competitors while the listenership of community broadcasters, who are growing in importance, remains stable.

Is it therefore unrealistic to attempt to perform the public service mission? One condition which might make it less so is the greater inclusion of audiences in the process of designing the programmes offered and financing broadcasters. This would require that the Board of the Polish Radio become involved in transforming the broadcasting structure so as to give the voice of listeners greater agency and greater weight in decisive issues concerning the structure of programming. This could take the form of public consultation. Listeners could also co-finance their preferred radio genres. The success of community broadcasters, who value interaction with listeners, should be a model for public radio to emulate.

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<sup>38</sup> J. Dzierżyńska-Mielczarek, *Rynek radiowy w Polsce w latach 2001–2011*, „Zeszyty Prasoznawcze” 2012, nr 4, pp. 30–53.



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Grażyna Stachyra

### Pojęcie „misji” w polskiej radiofonii

(Streszczenie)

Ustawa o Radiofonii i Telewizji uchwalona w grudniu 1992 roku dała podwaliny nowego porządku medialnego w Polsce po upadku komunizmu. Mimo kilku nowelizacji, jest wciąż obowiązującym aktem. Jedną z istotnych regulacji wprowadzonych ustawą jest pojęcie „misyjności” nadawców publicznych, jednak artykuł 21 nie definiuje precyzyjnie tego pojęcia. Zamiast tego nakłada jedynie na publicznych nadawców obowiązek realizowania licznych zadań. Ustawa opisuje dziewięć ogólnych zaleceń dotyczących obszarów realizacji misji. Chociaż dotyczą tylko nadawców publicznych, niektóre z nich można odnaleźć u nadawców społecznych i (w pewnym stopniu) komercyjnych. Artykuł analizuje pojęcie „misji publicznej” w polskim radiu nie tylko w aspekcie prawnym, ale też poprzez refleksję nad zawartością programową stacji radiowych w kontekście współczesnego dyskursu publicznego. Pojawienie się niepublicznych nadawców w latach dziewięćdziesiątych zaowocowało głównie rozrywkowymi strategiami programowymi adresowanymi do precyzyjnie definiowanych, dobrze sytuowanych, przedsiębiorczych odbiorców. Skutkowało to wykluczeniem niektórych grup słuchaczy (np. rolników, emerytów, dzieci) ze sfery zainteresowań komercyjnych stacji. Z drugiej zaś strony media publiczne (oraz do pewnego stopnia społeczne) zostały związane narzuconym im obowiązkiem wypełniania misji. Problem „misyjności” (lub jej braku), jej zakresu oraz sensu, był dyskutowany w ciągu ostatnich dwóch dekad. Niniejszy artykuł przybliży te kwestie.

Słowa kluczowe: misja radia, system mediów, strategia programowa, treści radiowe, radio publiczne, stacje komercyjne, społeczność radiowa.