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Innovation — a core activity of public service media organizations

Innovation is for all times and ages. Over the centuries, innovation has been enabled by technological (r)evolutions – printing, radio waves, transistors, modulation, digitalization, etc. Innovation happens for us when ideas and technologies are combined to create a new media experience. If we look back on the innovations in media, their impact on society has been huge.

Today, innovation must be part of our daily routine. Innovation needs to take place in all core elements of the media experience: content, services, networks and devices. Today, we need innovation in all these domains. They have a major impact on our creative activities and economic models – indeed, on our survival.

New technological developments were an important part of the broadcasting organizations' work of the last century. By being at the core of technological developments, via their research centres, broadcasting organizations were “in control” of the evolution of broadcasting. They had, in short, an “insurance policy” for the future.

Today, most fundamental technological research is no longer carried out by broadcasters themselves. While some EBU members still have a team of experts with a strategic advisory role in technology, only a few EBU Members still have real research and development centres.

There are those who question the role of media organizations in technological development, and indeed, in media delivery. They see Public Service Media (PSM) organizations evolving to pure production houses. However we must never forget that the media of tomorrow will be defined by the total experience ... the combination of content, services, networks and devices (the media context). Perhaps it is understandable that the role of EBU Members in fundamental research must diminish but, in general, the role they need to play in innovation has grown.

Distinctiveness is a core asset of Public Service Media organizations. PSM organizations differentiate themselves from private broadcasters by their mission and by their action – not only by their content but also by the new service models they offer. PSMs serve as an “indirect investment organization” for innovative developments in society – a role that can be less readily played by fully commercial organizations.

PSM organizations have a key role in society to innovate and “test” new content, services and technologies. It is part of their remit as a public service organization, and it is important for their future. By taking innovation into our hands, we will make better decisions, and we will understand and control the future of (our) media. Public service broadcasters need to weight up all these things

when they decide on how much to allocate to “innovation”. It is an unwise man who has no insurance policy for the future.

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