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Looking for transparent and measurable performance criteria as an alternative for the membership requirement. The BNN case

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Abstract

The Dutch public broadcasting system is facing a problem which sounds all too familiar for every public broadcaster in Europe; their most loyal audiences tend to be older people and they seem to lack appeal for young audiences. BNN, the youngest member within the public broadcasting service in The Netherlands, and specifically aimed at teenagers and young adults, has to make head against the 'requirement of membership' (just like the other seven public broadcasting companies). The latter can be seen as a left-over from the past century, and is unequivocal; in order to have their broadcasting license renewed in September 2005, BNN needed 150,000 members by March 1st, 2004.

Nevertheless, it is not only BNN that has a membership problem, but also the other seven broadcasting companies suffer from shrinking membership figures. This may ultimately render their legal legitimacy highly uncertain. Although the requirement of 150,000 members is only half of what the other broadcasting companies need in order to be considered full-fledged broadcasters, this article explains why the criterion of permanent membership is hardly attainable for BNN in the long run.

In any event, for the coming five years, BNN's future seems 'safe.' No stone was left unturned to obtain the required member figure. Thanks to a major TV show canvassing for members, the figure of 153,000 members was attained and publicized (this figure still needs to be checked by the Directorate of the Media). In light of performance criteria considered relevant in, e. g. European media policy-making, it is argued that there are objective criteria, both qualitative and quantitative, other than the membership figure requirement that should be taken into account in order to decide upon the future of a broadcaster. Ultimately, BNN fulfills a crowbar function in denouncing the lack of viability of the membership figure requirement in the Dutch public broadcasting system.

Keywords: BNN, youth, The Netherlands, public broadcasting service, membership requirement, performance criteria

Dutch broadcasting policy: From membership figures to achievement as an indicator for broadcasting time

Until a few decades ago (the 1960s), Dutch society was characterized by different ideological blocks, whereby Catholic, Protestant, socialist and liberal segments were clearly distinguishable (Meireman, 1999). These divisions were evident in nearly all areas of Dutch social life, including the media. Club life in The Netherlands was dominated by religious and political segments and the Dutch broadcasting system was clearly a product of this 'pillarization' (e.g., Janssen, 1992). Radio and television broadcasts were produced by different broadcasting organizations each representing a separate social movement (such as the Protestant NCRV association, the Catholic KRO organization and the socialist VARA association). These broadcasting organizations, representing the different movements and groups, came into existence between 1920 and 1930 and were supported by their members. At present, the 'Holland House' (Bar-doel, Brants, and Plug, 2000) comprises eight broadcasting companies all of which are bound to membership numbers; the five classical networks dating from the twenties (NCRV, VARA, KRO, VPRO and AVRO) and the TROS, EO and BNN which became part of the system in 1966, 1971 and 1998 respectively. The Public Broadcasting Company ('Publieke Omroep') is the coordinating body of the public broadcasting system. 'Supplementary' programs, formerly also made by the NOS, were transferred to the Netherlands Program Institution (NPS) in 1995. In addition to this, there are also a number of small broadcasting license-holders which are not bound to membership figures, with a limited broadcasting time for public information, religious programming, educational broadcasting companies and political parties.

During the pre-war period, broadcasting companies were clearly subordinate to the 'pillars' to which they belonged. This power relationship gradually changed after the war. After the 1950s, the mutual alienation between the 'pillar' and the (media) organization developed rapidly. This made it more difficult for individual broadcasting organizations to retain the active support of their members, who increasingly became mere consumers of radio and television programs.

When the 1967 Broadcasting Act introduced membership numbers as a criterion for the division of time and money among the different broadcasting companies, the TV guide became the binding agent between the broadcasting systems and their members. These guides became instruments in what could almost be described as a quasi-commercial competi-

tive struggle between the different broadcasting systems. The old social tie was thus transformed into a mainly consumer-oriented relationship. As part of the broader movement of social democratization, halfway through the 1970s a number of attempts were made to breathe new life into the broadcasting companies, but their effect was very limited and temporary.

With the advent of commercial broadcasting systems around 1990, broadcasting companies acquired a new relevance; on the one hand, this was due to the desire of public broadcasting systems to differentiate themselves more, and on the other hand, it resulted from a demand by the government for a more powerful public profile. From the second half of the nineties a more fundamental reflection regarding future tasks and the legitimization of the public broadcasting system took place. Various broadcasting systems experimented with new methods of participation such as communities on the Internet. In 1996, the Ververs Commission presented a report suggesting a new foundation for the interests of the public broadcasting system, entitled *Terug naar het publiek* (Back to the Public) (Commission Public Broadcasting Service, 1996). The Concession Act (2000) talked of a 'tilted' perspective in the government's broadcasting policy and partly based this on the findings of the commission. The main question was no longer who had a 'right' to broadcasting time on the basis of membership figures and representation, but instead what Dutch society could expect. Past and future achievements were determining factors in whether a broadcasting company was allotted broadcasting time (van der Haak, 2001).

In the 2000–2010 Concession Policy Plan (NOS, 2000) this responsibility imposed on the public broadcasting system was developed in concrete terms in the form of the following main commitments: programmed annual report; annual brochure for the general public; newsletters for target groups; meetings with special-interest organizations and target groups; arrangements facilitating group visits; a television ombudsman program on how the system operates and public response; the use of the Internet for debates; a visitation commission (audit) to assess performance and to make recommendations; a five-yearly registration of existing broadcasting systems and the acceptance of new broadcasting systems which stand for a true enrichment of the existing order. The visitation and periodic registration of broadcasting organizations had already been implemented. Moreover, individual broadcasting systems had to prove that their members "are able to influence the policy in a manner that is verifiable and democratic" (NOS, 2000: 11). This visitation procedure takes place in times that are rather gloomy for the public broadcasting service; serious budget cutbacks have been announced (a total of € 40 million in 2004, which amounts to approximately five percent of its yearly operations budget, up to € 64 million in 2007).

BNN in the 'Holland House'

BNN is the youngest member in the 'Holland House,' and was founded in 1998, at a time that The Netherlands was already a 'de-pillarized'/ individualized society, and the belief that Dutch public broadcasting was clearly in need of change and rejuvenation was gaining support (e. g., Munk, 2002). Initially BNN focused on young people between 15 and 25 years old (Libbenga, 1998), a group unfamiliar with the member principle, that had grown up in a 'de-pillarized' society. Today the target group is broader and divided into two age groups: 13–19 and 20–34. BNN was granted a license valid from September 2000 to September 2005. All public broadcasting companies in The Netherlands are bound by law to provide a varied range of good-quality programs. In addition to this, the different broadcasting systems must also have a sufficiently large number of members if they are to continue to exist in the future. In practice this means that all the public broadcasting companies in The Netherlands must have at least 300,000 members by 2004. During a debate on the media budget (25th November 2002) the former Secretary of State of Media Affairs, van Leeuwen, showed his readiness to reduce the minimum membership figure to 150,000 for BNN, in the form of a proposed amendment of the act. The existing limit of 300,000 members continued to apply to the other established broadcasting companies. But BNN, like all other Dutch public broadcasting companies, needs to obtain a new license for the 2005–2010 period.

Social developments

De-pillarization and commercialization

In the 1960s, the familiar blocks started to crumble slowly but surely (de Hart and Dekker, 1999). Indeed, the main ideology of the public broadcasting organizations after 1960 (such as TROS and BNN) centered on the lack of association with any social or religious movement. The influence of organizations based on an ideology clearly decreased. This de-pillarization is partly responsible for increasingly forcing people to make individual choices, and has an impact on young people in particular. After all, they are at a stage of life in which many changes take place and in which many choices still have to be made (Keuzenkamp and Wittebrood, 2000). This individualization causes a membership crisis in clubs that have been compartmentalized since time immemorial (Meireman, 1999).

At the start of the 1980s, the monopoly position of the public broadcasting system in The Netherlands came under pressure. Initially this was caused by the fact that it was now possible to receive foreign public and

commercial broadcasting stations by way of cable television and satellite transmitting stations¹. In 1992 the Media Act was modified so as to facilitate internal commercial broadcasting too². Amongst other things, this commercialization resulted in a large number of public and commercial radio and television broadcasting stations becoming available to the Dutch citizen.

Willingness (or lack thereof) of young people to join a club versus individualization

With the exception of girl and boy scouts and sports clubs, young people today are less often a member of an organization or a club than in the past (Prins and Janssen, 2001). Apparently, it has become extremely difficult to get adolescents and young adults to join a club on a permanent basis. There are different reasons for adolescents' lack of interest in joining a club. The fact that organizations and clubs find it difficult to keep existing members and to recruit new members seems to be related to a number of fundamental changes in modern society. Family, church and working life have acquired a new significance over the years. In regard to family life, the number of marriages is decreasing and the number of divorces is growing (Laermans, 1993). This implies that people are less inclined to engage with one another for a long period of time. The decreasing number of church members indicates that the church is in danger of losing all contact with young people. Political parties also find it difficult to recruit new members. In addition to this, the unwillingness of the youth to commit themselves is expressed in the field of work, namely that young people are unwilling to dedicate their lives to one job (Prins and Janssen, 2001). And, if young people are members of a club, then it is only for as long as they are interested in it (Loosveldt and Pickery, 1996). In most cases, adolescents only become a member if it serves them personally to do so and if they are convinced that membership is something that suits them (Draulans, 1993). The powerful cultural-consumptive range available to adolescents in cities causes a low degree of commitment (Maes, 1993). Young people are generally unwilling to make choices that force them to become involved. This was described by Prins and Janssen (2001) as fear of commitment, but could also be seen as an unfelt need for more permanent bonds among today's young people. Money can also form a hindrance, however small the amount may be (Hooghe, 1999). If young people have only limited funds at their disposal, they will save on expenses by not spending it on low priority needs, such as membership of a broadcasting company. Indeed, young people have always been associated with a lack of money. However, this problem is worse for BNN than it is for other broadcasting

networks. After all, BNN is an association that focuses on young people. Relatively speaking, in regard to other public broadcasting stations the problem facing BNN here is far greater.

Research questions and method

In spite of the reduction from 300,000 to 150,000 members, the minimum membership requirement seems to be a difficult condition for BNN to meet in the long run. Indeed, a central issue in the study at hand is defining BNN's position in regard to this membership requirement. This brings us to the following questions in our study:

Based upon the knowledge that today's young people hardly feel the need for joining a club on a permanent basis, how can BNN maintain its position within the Dutch public broadcasting system which continues to be bound to the membership requirement? Therefore, what objective criteria, other than the legal membership number, can be found in order to substantiate the continued existence of BNN within the public broadcasting system?

In order to answer these questions, a multi-method approach was adopted, characterized by mutually-reinforcing components. One component was a literature search concerning social and media developments of the last twenty years, and the participation of young people in clubs. In addition to this, an illustrative quantitative survey was carried out by way of the snowball method³ among 203 young people (13–19 years old) and (young) adults (20–34 years old)⁴ resident in The Netherlands. The study also included a limited number of in-depth interviews with experts in the field of young people. Furthermore, a number of secondary analyses of policy documents and of in-depth interviews with a number of employees at BNN were carried out. The Structure Conduct Performance-model (Bardoel and van Cuilenburg, 2003: 24) is used as the central measuring instrument according to which BNN's contribution to the Dutch public service broadcasting is assessed in terms of supply factors (e. g., market competition, program distinctiveness) and public characteristics (e. g., volatility of the audience, specific needs and wishes). An attempt is made to find objective criteria other than the legal membership number which substantiate BNN's continued existence within the public system. The European Commission also urges the development of instruments to facilitate a systematic monitoring of the distinguishing function of the public broadcasting system (Machet, Pertzidou, and Ward, 2001).

The Structure Conduct Performance-model (Bardoel and van Cuilenburg, 2003: 24) allows us to assess how and in which particular media context and market structure a media company like BNN operates.

The application of the structure conduct performance-model to BNN

BNN has an internally and externally open and informal corporate culture. BNN products are made both for and by young people. Indeed, this becomes evident when we learn that the average age of permanent and temporary BNN employees is 31 years. In addition to this, a number of young members of BNN act as 'area supervisors,' who act as a sounding board between BNN and its members. Amongst other things, they offer advice on programs and BNN's website⁵. Moreover, BNN offers young talent the chance to present itself. In the radio program *BNN-United*, permanent BNN presenters are aided by young talented people on a six-month traineeship with BNN and are allowed to present fifteen minutes of radio in this program every Monday night. Moreover, BNN has plans to introduce this into a television program too (van Leeuwen, 2002).

The following SCP-model (Figure 1) illustrates the specific situation of BNN, by way of catchwords.

Market Structure

Defining the market structure involved a study of the following factors: competitors, diversity/distinctiveness, formats and issues, content, persons and groups, and geographical coverage.

Previous research, as well as our own explorative quantitative investigation (van Summeren and d'Haenens, 2003), has shown that young people are more inclined to watch commercial stations than public broadcasting stations. Commercial broadcasting stations which, like BNN, attempt to reach young viewers and listeners are important competitors for BNN (such as RTL4, Yorin, Net5, SBS6 and TMF). Our quantitative survey has shown the VARA and the NOS to be the main public TV competitors for BNN. As far as radio stations are concerned, the most important *competitors* are the commercial Radio 538, Sky Radio, Yorin FM and Noordzee FM.

In terms of *diversity/distinctiveness*, BNN clearly attempts to distinguish itself from both public and commercial broadcasting stations by its approach and tone⁶. BNN uses its own individual style in creating its three products (radio, television and the Internet). During the early phases that followed its establishment (1998) BNN's motto was, 'fast moving television and whatever happens, happens'. The set-up changed when it was granted additional broadcasting time in 2000 when BNN acquired a broader range of programs and attempted to include more depth in its programming (Satink, 2000). In recent years it has presented a wider range of programs (from humor to infotainment). The choice

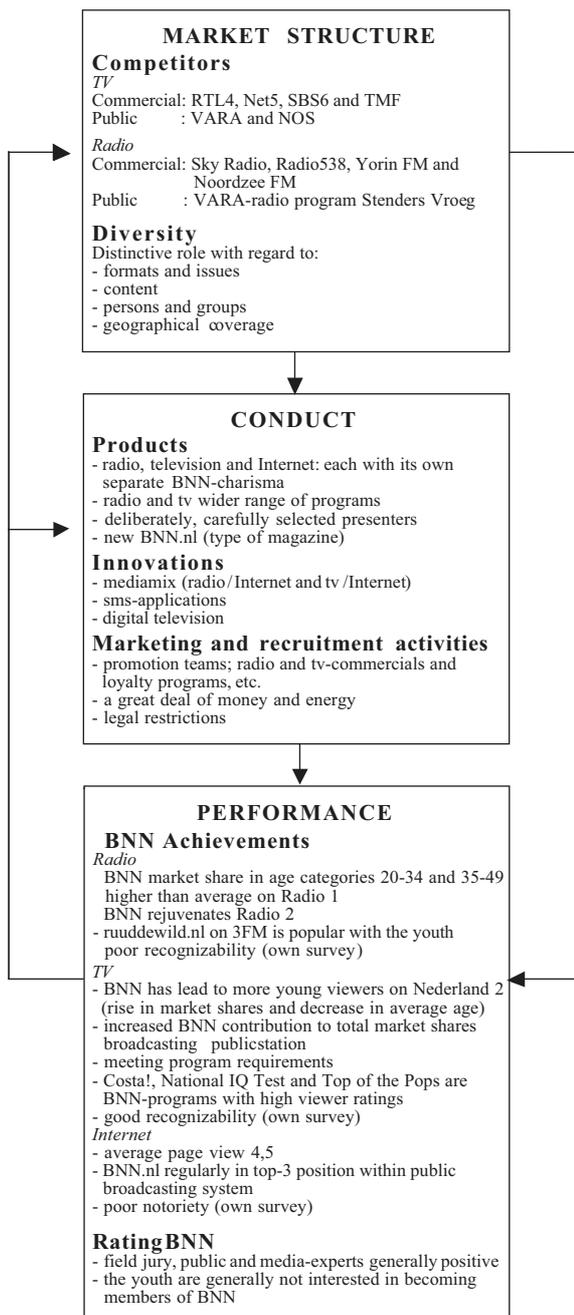


Figure 1. The SCP-model applied to measure BNN's contribution to the Dutch Public Service Broadcasting.

and purport of the topics, use of language, design and the charisma of the presenters all leave their mark on the BNN programs⁷. BNN interprets the four empirical dimensions of media diversity (McQuail, 1992) (1. formats and issues, 2. content, 3. persons and groups and 4. geographical coverage) in the following way.

In terms of *formats and issues*, BNN interprets the legal program regulations in its own highly individual way. Its approach is somewhat different from that of the large established broadcasting structures. In drama serials such as *Finals* and *Cut*, for example, reporting styles taken from documentaries and current affairs are applied to drama. In creating its products, BNN makes every effort to make use of unexpected camera positions, intelligible language which appeals to youngsters, and a daring and direct approach. Key words that are also applicable to BNN products are: daring, individual, confrontational, amenable, humoristic, refreshing and with a zest for life. Our own survey has shown that this BNN-feeling is also actively recognized by the public.

When it comes to *content*, BNN brings a wide range of topics to the attention of its mainly young audience. As far as content is concerned, BNN is open to all subjects. BNN presents difficult subjects with a dose of humor. BNN's low-threshold documentary films deal with a wide diversity of subjects, ranging from organ donation to aids, and from the war in Afghanistan to life with a parent who has cancer. In this way, BNN attempts to bring world issues closer to young people. Topics that mainly interest young people are: travel, music and health matters (Vierkant, 2002). All these themes are dealt with in BNN programs. However, there is more to BNN than simply complying with popular preferences. It also activates less popular subjects. A good example of this is *Lijst O* (List O), a political program for young people. Under the motto 'for those who do not like politics,' BNN examines the bond that exists between young people and the political world and to what extent politicians are aware of how young people perceive their world⁸, hoping to narrow the gap between young people and the political world by way of this program.

BNN programs are in fact directed at all social *groups*. Of course, there is a special focus on adolescents and young adults⁹. In various programs BNN concentrates on certain groups in Dutch society, such as the 'new' Dutch in the 'Big Integration Show.'

Because area managers from all the provinces of The Netherlands are represented, BNN adds color to the diversity on a basis of *geographical coverage*. Young urbanites as well as young people from rural areas are heard in a variety of BNN programs, such as *Lijst O*.

Conduct

The Market Conduct description comprises aspects such as product strategy, innovation, investment and advertising (Bardoel and van Cuijlenburg, 2003).

Over the years BNN has extended its range of radio and television programs. A part of the *product strategy* involves the careful and deliberate selection of BNN presenters (van Leeuwen, 2002). This choice of presenters is of course strategic since young people need programs in which there are people with whom they can and wish to identify. In addition to these so-called 'old' media, BNN has, from the very start, also made use of the 'new' medium of the Internet, which offers a range of opportunities. BNN's aim is to find the right balance between the three products (radio, television and the Internet). The station recently created a new website in the form of a magazine that acts as a supplement to different programs, which it intends to renew every six weeks with a new theme and daily updates. The Internet allows the receivers to adopt a more active role. Through the Internet, viewers and listeners will be provided with an interactive supplement to the television and radio programs. In the television program *Lijst O*, for instance, young people send their viewpoints to BNN's website from where they can be passed on to the prime minister and the party leaders.

BNN uses the Internet, interactive television and mobile telephones for a more personal, *innovative* approach to its mainly young audience as well as to offer them a more extensive service (i. e., through cross-media applications). One of the innovations which greatly interests BNN is the linking of SMS, i. e., text messaging, to certain BNN programs. During the live program *National IQ Test* answers to the questions could be sent by text message and the Internet.

BNN's *member recruiting* endeavors cost a great deal of time and money. When writing this article in the fall of 2003, BNN had a membership of about 114,000. This number has to rise to 150,000 by March 2004. Consequently, BNN started a large-scale membership recruitment campaign. An added difficulty, on top of youngsters' reluctance to join clubs, is that the legal age for joining a club is 16. Although this legal restriction also applies to other broadcasting networks in The Netherlands, it affects BNN more extensively than any other. Indeed, it means that only a section of the BNN target group can actually become a member of this young people's broadcasting station.

Nevertheless, BNN has done everything imaginable in order to recruit new members and keep its existing members. First, BNN promotion teams have been traveling all across the country to recruit members. Additionally, BNN has tried to recruit members at various events held

all over the country (such as Queens Day in Amsterdam and the ‘Mega-festation’) and through the television show in the fall of 2003. BNN can also be joined through the Internet, and uses radio and television commercials to try to persuade young people to join the broadcasting company. There is, however, a legal restriction on the number of these commercials a broadcasting company can transmit during its air-time on radio and television (Directorate of the Media, 1999).

As part of BNN’s *marketing strategy*, new members are rewarded with a free gift or a discount offer. The Media Act states that this gift must be related in some way to one of the main tasks of the broadcasting company and that BNN may not advertise the gift during its air-time. In addition to this, BNN members are sent an edition of *Update* magazine four times a year. BNN members also receive a small gift once a year in appreciation of their membership. During the national members’ day, members may air their views on BNN programs and presenters and are also free to make suggestions. In order to recruit and maintain its members, BNN launched a so-called loyalty program in March 2003. This means that BNN members enjoy privileges not available to non-members.

Performance

We will now attempt to answer the question how BNN is positioned within the Dutch broadcasting world, looking at radio and TV market shares, number of visitors to the BNN site, and awards from expert juries and the general public.

The *position of the second channel (Nederland 2)* has clearly improved due to the public broadcasting company’s new style (its attention to sports) and the advent of BNN, which has managed to attract a younger audience to the public broadcasting network. This is expressed, for example, in the drop in average age whenever BNN broadcasts and in the rise in market share of Nederland 2 in regard to youngsters in the 13–19 age group and young adults aged between 20 and 34. The average age on Nederland 2 has dropped from 49 to 36 (KLO IandA, 2002). This younger image is important for the public network. The improved position of Nederland 2 is also evident in increased channel loyalty (KLO IandA, 2002). In all, BNN has acquired itself a very clear and distinctive presence on television, with fixed time slots.

The radio program *BNN United* has had a rejuvenating effect on Radio 1, which does not usually attract many young listeners (te Nuijl, 2001). In both the 13–19 and 20–34 age categories the market share of BNN in 2002, compared to 2001, on Radio 2 rose (KLO IandA, 2002). On 3FM the listener ratings (2.3% in 2002) for the BNN program *Ruud-*

dewild.nl were relatively high (KLO IandA, 2002). In September/October 2002 this program took second place amongst youngsters in the 13–19 age category, and was one of the 25 most popular radio programs on radio 3FM (van Leeuwen, 2002). The participants in our own survey also admitted to enjoying the program concerned; surprisingly however, in many cases they did not link *Ruuddewild.nl* with BNN. This suggests that BNN's recognizability on the radio is not strong. Since radio 3FM also aims for BNN's target group and is very similar to BNN in tone and style, it is very difficult for BNN to play a distinctive role on this channel. In all, BNN's poorer recognizability on radio can almost certainly be attributed to cross-channel programming.

In the year 2000, BNN more than met the program regulations defined in the Media Act¹⁰, with scores above the required averages (regarding information and education; culture and art; European product; Dutch-language and Frisian-language products and Dutch independent product) (van Leeuwen, 2002). Compared to 2000, in 2001 BNN's contribution to the total market share of the public broadcasting network rose (from 0.3% in 2000 to 0.7% in 2001) (KLO IandA, 2002). A number of BNN's TV programs did really well. For teenage viewers in the Netherlands for example, the drama serial *Costa!* was number 1 across all the public broadcasting networks. *Top of the Pops* and the *National IQ Test* were programs with high viewer ratings.¹¹

The BNN site has a page view of 4.5, which means that visitors to the site look, on average, at four to five pages on each visit. This is a high score in view of the fact that most public networks have an average page view score of 1.8 (van Leeuwen, 2002). As far as the number of visitors is concerned, BNN regularly occupies a top-three position within the public broadcasting networks¹². Despite the popularity of the BNN website with regard to visitors, the vast majority of the respondents in our own explorative survey state that they have no knowledge of BNN.nl (van Summeren and d'Haenens, 2003).

The assessment of BNN products includes the evaluation of expert juries and the general public. In 2002 the BNN-radio program *Ruuddewild.nl* won a Marconi Award in the category for best radio entertainment program. The founder of BNN, Bart de Graaff, who died in May 2002, received a posthumous Carrière Award in September 2002. In 2002 Ruud de Wild was declared the best DJ in The Netherlands at the Hitkrant Awards. The film and serial *Costa!* also won a Hitkrant Award¹³.

Looking at the overall reception by the youngsters participating in our own survey, the vast majority was positive about BNN. More than 69 percent considered BNN to be an enrichment of the Dutch public broadcasting system. Young people value: a) BNN's youthful charisma; b) BNN's distinctive, innovative, fresh, individual and original style, describing BNN as 'different' and 'less stuffy and lethargic' than other

broadcasting networks; c) BNN's outrageous, sharp, funny and enthusiastic presenters; d) BNN's program formulas which keep audiences aware of social problems and discussions in manner that is more accessible and less ambiguous.

The youngsters participating in our exploratory survey voted BNN their favorite public broadcasting company. However, only a very small proportion of are willing to become a member of BNN. Consequently, there is appreciation for the broadcasting company, but there is very little willingness to support BNN in the form of membership. The respondents in the survey at hand can be divided into four different categories:

1. The first and largest group (47%) comprises young people who a) express appreciation for BNN, b) are not a member of BNN at present and c) have no plans to become a member of BNN because, for example, they have objections in principle to joining anything or because they do not want to tie themselves to anything without good reason. Another important reason is a lack of money. A number of young people in the survey have also stated their ignorance of the fact that one can become a member of BNN.
2. A second group (27%) is also of the opinion that BNN is an asset and should definitely continue to exist. This group of young people are not members of BNN at present, but are willing to join or at least to consider joining.
3. The third group (3%) comprises a few participants who express great appreciation for BNN and are already members.
4. Finally, the fourth group (22%) comprises young people who do not feel drawn to BNN in any way, who have a negative opinion of BNN and have absolutely no intention of ever joining it. In their view, BNN does not present any interesting subject matter on its programs. They do not see BNN as enriching the Dutch public broadcasting system. They would be only too happy to see BNN disappear and will not miss the company in any way (van Summeren and d'Haenens, 2003).

In short, a vast majority of respondents in our survey sees BNN in a positive light, but are generally not members and have no plans to join. This corresponds with the earlier finding that young people today are unwilling to tie themselves to any club (apart from a sports club or a youth organization).

Conclusions: In search of objective criteria of measurement

The EU Amsterdam protocol (1997) allows a member state a free choice in financing its public broadcaster, on condition that the latter fulfills

the task that has been imposed on it. The present study examined the way in which BNN has put this public task into operation through formats, issues, main tasks, extra tasks and sidelines that are to be found attractive by its target audience. These angles were looked at as ingredients of a monitoring tool which tried to reveal BNN's distinctive features within the Dutch public service broadcasting.

The Dutch case illustrates the choice of a so-called 'third way' as an alternative for organizing the broadcasting sector in terms of state or market. Meanwhile, this principle is transformed into a 'package' of entrance conditions for public broadcasting organizations, in which the membership requirement, although no longer tipping the balance, remains an important condition.

In the light of professional literature and confirmed by the results of interviews with experts in the field of young people and our own survey results – while close to eight in ten youngsters are sympathetic towards BNN, only three percent proved to be a member, and only one in four considers future membership – immense efforts will be needed on the part of BNN to hold on to the requisite number of members and to meet this disproportionate membership criterion in the long run. Since most of the broadcasting companies in The Netherlands can still rely on a sufficient number of members at present, the membership requirement does not yet form a pressing question for them. However, a possible decision of leaving the broadcasting information – that so far belongs to the broadcasting companies and is exclusively made available in their TV guides as binding agents between themselves and their audiences – to other publishing groups, would most probably entail considerable drops in these membership numbers. Consequently, it is not only important for BNN, but also for all the other public broadcasting companies in The Netherlands that the regulation regarding the number of members is dropped or modified. In the light of a society that is changing and becoming more individual-oriented, the principle of recruiting members would appear to be an outmoded strategy. However, BNN was allowed to join the public broadcasting system on the basis of 60,000 members in 1998, and realized at the time that at some point in the future it would have to face dealing with the membership requirement criterion. Therefore, it is important to examine the ways in which BNN has been attempting to increase its membership numbers.

In order to leap from 60,000 to 120,000 members in 1999, BNN spent 1.4 million guilders on member recruitment. In September 2003, BNN set aside a new budget of over 1 million Euro to increase its membership. A highly emotional campaign to save BNN (with as slogan "We zitten in de shit. Dus word lid" [We're in deep trouble. Please become a member]) on TV, on billboards along the highway, and through short mes-

sages on cellular phones, was seen as the only way to persuade people to join. The durability of an expensive, large-scale campaign like this is extremely doubtful. The public broadcasting network in The Netherlands should ask itself whether it would not be better to leave the membership principle and to emphasize the wishes, interests and needs of audience groups (social demand), which could guarantee a better and more direct link with the public at large. The fact that BNN is already trying to meet this social demand is apparent through the presence of area supervisors and the proposed loyalty program.

The recruitment of members cost BNN a great deal of money and energy and in the end could be at the expense of its main task. Should the acquisition of members prove to be a financial drain, the principle of 'good governance' clearly comes into play. And this occurs precisely at a time when the public broadcasting network has set in motion a process of more transparency and responsibility with regard to public funds. Furthermore, previous research has shown that in Dutch society today, young people are little inclined to join a club, or at least far less compared to the willingness of other groups to do so. Consequently, in addition to examining the number of legally required members, we have also looked at other objective, both quantitative and qualitative, criteria of measurement in order to substantiate the continued existence of BNN in the public broadcasting system.

Since it is up to the member states to fine-tune the mission statement of the public service and to choose appropriate financing solutions, ingredients for measuring performance would certainly need to include financial accountability on the basis of economic performance measures, audience performance based upon audience shares and reach. Moreover, the public broadcasting service is to be assessed according to its power to discriminate its programs from those of the commercial sector, its internal pluralism, and its contribution to a production climate which gives room to innovation. This assessment is currently being held by a so-called 'visitation commission' (audit) (as imposed on the Dutch public broadcaster by the Concession Act, 2000). In order to substantiate the continued existence of BNN within the public broadcasting system, it is important, in addition to the legally required number of members, to also consider other objective, comparable criteria of measurement (with a view to a European comparison as proposed by the European Commission).

*Ratings*¹⁴ are an example of such objective criteria of measurement. In the target group of 6 years and older BNN achieved an average rating of 2.3 in 2000 and 2001. In 2003 the average rating increased to 3.0¹⁵. *Market share* is a second example of an objective criterion of measurement¹⁶. Since the participation of BNN in the public broadcasting sys-

tem, there has been a rise of the market share in BNN's target group on *Nederland 2* (the teenage category of 13–19 and young adults in the age group of 20–34 years old). In addition to this, the continued existence of BNN and other broadcasting networks in the public broadcasting system can also be substantiated by way of figures indicating the *annual reach*¹⁷. In the age category 13 to 19 years old, the BNN's annual reach rose from 84.1% in 2000 to 86.1% in 2002 (up to September 30). There was also an increase in the annual reach for BNN in the age category 20–34 years old: from 84.6% in 2000 to 90.4% in 2002 (up to September 30) (KLO, aggregated data). A fourth objective criterion is the measurement of *appreciation scores*¹⁸. This method gives us a direct insight into the public's appreciation of the broadcasting network's range of programs. In the age category of 6 years and older, BNN received an average appreciation of 7.0 in 2000 and 2001. In 2002 the average appreciation in the target group concerned rose to 7.2 (KLO, aggregate data).

Another, perhaps more qualitative, measurement criterion is to examine whether broadcasting networks actually succeed in reaching their *target groups*. As has already been mentioned, BNN was founded with the aim of changing and rejuvenating the Dutch public broadcasting system. Consequently, BNN is mainly focused on teenagers and young adults in the age group from 13 to 34 years old. The fact that BNN does reach its target group is evident from the fact that since its advent on the second public channel on Monday nights, the average age of viewers has dropped (from 49 to 36 years old). The public broadcasting company in The Netherlands is striving for a younger image. BNN is successful in attracting a younger audience to the public broadcasting system. Also in terms of *program regulations* as described in the Media Act, BNN met all program regulations and scored highest of all the public broadcasting companies in regard to Dutch and Frisian-language productions in 2000. Moreover, since the start of net profiling the increase in the number of Dutch drama productions has spearheaded the public broadcasting system's program policy. BNN has contributed towards extending the amount of Dutch drama on the public broadcasting company with programs such as *Finals*, *Costa!* and *Cut*¹⁹ and co-produces several Dutch movies (van Leeuwen, 2002).

Should the different broadcasting companies be measured according to the ingredients as included in the structure conduct performance-model, and to objective criteria of measurement (e. g., ratings, appreciation figures, servicing target audiences, meeting the program regulations as stipulated in the Media Act), including criteria allowing to assess the station's distinctive character (as looked after by the visitation commission), then the study at hand can only lead one to conclude that, BNN has proved itself during the last five years and deserves to keep its place

in the public system. Nevertheless, its recognizability on both radio and television could improve considerably. The niche may be narrow (young people as target group), but the public is served in a manner that is broad, innovative and special. In The Netherlands BNN is a youth brand with a content that is appreciated as such by the young people themselves; the study at hand has put forward sufficient arguments supporting this from literature and its own survey. Consequently, without BNN there is no clear programming for the youth in public broadcasting in The Netherlands. If public broadcasting is aimed at being at the service of all members of society, then surely it should also offer a place to young people. Or in the words of Gerard Timmer (in van Gool, 2003: 26), BNN's current president: "I am the last to deny that BNN does not figure among the Top 10 of best viewed programs among youngsters. This list consists of films and football contests, attracting mass audience including youngsters. But that is not what only matters. What does matter is that BNN succeeds in showing young people that the public service broadcaster is not a gray, dusty environment, but on the contrary, a platform where programs can be found which are somewhat more meaningful than what usually is on offer on commercial channels".

Notes

1. [<http://www.omroep.nl/nos/gsd/mediawet.html>]
2. [<http://www.omroep.nl/nos/gsd/commercie.html>]
3. The principle of this is that a few key figures (or respondents) are used to build up a network of potential respondents from which the investigator can make a selection (Linders and Hijmans, 1995: 544). In the study at hand, however, this method did not result in participants who are by definition BNN-minded.
4. It was not possible to do a survey based on a representative random check within the given time. Since the results of the study at hand have been tested and related to other studies wherever possible (such as lifestyle-study by Vierkant, 2002), it may be assumed that a random sample survey would be of little additional value.
5. [<http://www.omroep.nl/bnn/rayons.index.html>]
6. [<http://www.omroep.nl/bnn/Bnn/Faq/>]
7. [<http://www.omroep.nl/bnn/Bnn/Faq/>]
8. [<http://www.ad.nl/print/1032325128518.html>]
9. [<http://www.omroep.nl/bnn/Bnn/Faq/>]
10. All public broadcasting companies combined must 1) devote 35% of the total broadcasting time to information and education 2) devote 25% to culture (of which 12.5% to art) and 3) ensure that at least 25% of the programs come from independent producers (at least 17.5% per network). For each network 4) no more than 25% of its broadcasting time may be spent on entertainment and 5) at least 50% of the broadcasting time must be made up of European productions. 6) At least 50% of the European productions must be originally Dutch or Frisian.
11. [<http://www2.omroep.nl/bnn/Bnn/Persberichten/januari.html>]
12. [<http://www2.omroep.nl/bnn/Bnn/Persberichten/index.html>]
13. [<http://www2.omroep.nl/bnn/Bnn/Persberichten/februari.html>]

14. "The average percentage of the relevant target group watching the program or the channel" [<http://www.kijkonderzoek.nl>].
15. The average viewing figure was calculated for all BNN programs irrespective of their broadcasting time, over the period from January 2002 up to and including September 2002. The average viewing figure was calculated for the period 6–12 p.m. over the period from October 2002 up to and including December 2002.
16. "The percentage of viewers watching the program or channel, on the basis of the viewing public as a whole" [<http://www.kijkonderzoek.nl>].
17. In the survey at hand, 'annual reach' is defined as follows: "The percentage of people who watched the channel concerned in a particular year and on a particular day for at least 15 minutes without interruption".
18. The Television Appreciation Study was given a new format in January 2002; a representative panel of 8000 people in the age group of 13 and older now assesses the television programs of both the public and commercial channels, using the Internet. In addition to allocating a report figure, the new set-up also examines the so-called 'quality features' of a program (KLO IandA, 2002).
19. And in the future probably a soap series.

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