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Public Service Broadcasting-Friends groups as a microcosm of public interest media advocacy

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This article is concerned with the interdependencies between public service broadcasters and the third sector, an area in which there is little research that has provided in-depth analysis of case studies. It investigates and compares three public service broadcasting (PSB)-Friends groups in the UK, Australia, and South Africa. By means of analyzing semi-structured interviews and archival data, we address development, institutionalization and policy impact of the Voice of the Listener & Viewer, ABC-Friends, and SOS Coalition. Drawing on resource-mobilization theory we argue that, in particular, material, human, and informational resources, contextualized with political opportunities, have analytic value in explaining similarities and differences between the groups, which are conceived as a microcosm of public interest media advocacy.

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Introduction

Public service broadcasting (PSB) organizations hold a special, privileged position in the Western democracies where they have been set up and are designed following the role model of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). This entails the Reithian notion to inform, educate, and entertain audiences while preserving their independence from both state control and market forces. In their ongoing transition to converged media environments, PSBs face unique challenges. For instance, they have to fulfill their democratic remit and comply with public accountability demands (Hutchinson, 2017; Vanhaeght and Donders, 2016). At the same time they have to deal and compete with an increasing number of actors beyond the broadcasting sector who are affected by and participate in processes of media policy-making. Among the actors who participate in multi-stakeholder governance are government departments and regulatory agencies (public sector), corporate groups, platforms and intermediaries, such as Alphabet Inc, Youtube or Netflix (private sector), and social movement organizations (SMOs) (the third sector) (Lund and Lowe, 2013, p. 67).

There is a large body of research that focuses on roles of governments and regulators when discussing media policy and PSB development. Key issues of inquiry include political interference into the independence of PSBs (e.g., Hanretty, 2011), which in many PSB regimes manifests itself in terms of the amount of (direct or licence-fee) funding granted (Berg and Lund, 2012; Campos-Freire et al., 2020; Herzog and Karppinen, 2014; Jensen et al., 2016). Independent regulatory agencies have been examined by various authors, who have scrutinized their democratic accountability and public interest orientation, taking into account national idiosyncrasies such as monitoring PSB standards and compliance with state aid, and distortion of competition rules (Lunt and Livingstone, 2012; Schulz et al., 2014). The regulation of platforms and intermediaries is another highly topical PSB and media policy issue (Van Dijck et al., 2018; Nielsen and Ganter, 2018) and includes net neutrality (Ala-Fossi, 2016), algorithmic recommender systems (Hutchinson and Sørensen, 2018) and novel conceptualizations of media pluralism, such as exposure diversity (Burri, 2015; Helberger et al., 2018).

Compared with the above-mentioned research concerned with the interdependencies between PSB, public- and private sector, the third sector plays a niche existence in PSB scholarship. A search in the Scopus database for "public service broadcasting" in combination with the terms "government", "regulation" and "market", for instance, produced 74, 74, and 119 results, respectively, whereas the combination with "civil society" led to merely 16 results.[1] This relatively small amount of research about the intersections of PSB and civil society is largely conceptual and theoretical in nature (Cammaerts, 2009; Hamelink and Nordenstreng, 2007), and, if empirical, tends to neglect in-depth analysis of single cases. Analyzing data from 29 European countries, Baldi and Hasebrink (2007) investigated how media organizations and media regulatory authorities build accountability systems and allow for audience participation in media governance. More recently, Eberwein et al. (2011, 2017) assessed media accountability in 33 countries. The authors distinguished between established instruments of media accountability (e.g., press councils, ombudsmen) and innovative instruments of media accountability such as SMOs (Jempson and Powell, 2011, p. 211). In a similar vein, although not always directly linked to PSBs, other studies have categorized and classified SMOs (Mueller et al., 2004; Napoli, 2009), providing a broad overview of the field. What is missing from the body of research mentioned above, however, are in-depth case studies, which allow an understanding of the role of SMOs in the contested politics around PSB. Given that there is a virtually universal scholarly perception that these groups

have a substantial impact on public policy (Hilton et al., 2013, p. 266; Rashid and Simpson, 2019), whether directly or indirectly (Burstein and Linton, 2002, p. 398),[2] this imbalance between conceptual work and more detailed case studies carries particular weight.

This article sets out to address this shortcoming by zooming in on three key case studies of PSB-Friends groups. These groups, at times also referred to as viewers' associations (Hasebrink et al., 2007; Mitchell and Blumler, 1994) or PSB challengers (Horz, 2018), were first established in Australia in 1969. They exist in a variety of countries, which have PSB regimes. According to Baroni et al.'s (2014, p. 142) classification, they are citizen groups with similar "observable, policy-related activities." More precisely:

> They are associations which promote *non-profit aims* related to media development; they are open for citizens from a broad range of societal groups and build on a strong *sensitivity for the concerns* of the viewers; finally they use different means of *public communication* in order to articulate and promote their position in the public discourse … representing viewers' interests and needs. (Hasebrink et al., 2007, pp. 82, 83, italics in original)

PSB-Friends groups are independent, non-profit, and non-governmental membership bodies with a formal organization that aim to influence policy and legislation. They are multiple-issue groups that advocate adequate and secure funding, as well as political independence of PSB organizations and make a case for certain issues in relation to programming (e.g., plurality, original productions, educational content) while fighting others (e.g., advertising). PSB-Friends groups support PSB organizations, for example, by launching campaigns during PSB licence-fee settlement processes. However, in their capacity as "critical friends" (Kovacs, 2003, p. 227), they can also have uneasy relationships with PSB organizations, such as when the groups interfere in internal processes and attempt to hold the PSB organizations to account. Still, PSB-Friends groups' advocacy activities are primarily rule-conforming (Gamson, 1990, p. 41; Piven and Cloward, 1991), though some groups, to varying degrees, maintain their identity as grassroots organizations.

In this article, we argue that Voice of the Listener & Viewer (VLV) and ABC Friends, two of the best-known PSB-Friends groups across the globe,[3] have, according to the reading of secondary literature and first-hand interviews, a track record of public policy impact. Broadly conceived, this entails that these two groups have explicitly or implicitly influenced laws, policies, or regulatory measures. Both groups are compared with their non-institutionalized counterpart in South Africa, the SOS Coalition. Over time the VLV engaged in outreach activities with the ABC Friends and the SOS Coalition, which inspired this selection of cases. In the following sections we outline the resource-mobilization approach as the theoretical underpinning of our analysis before we address methodological issues. Subsequently, the article offers three case studies of PSB-Friends groups. This is followed by a discussion section, which examines material, human and informational resources, and links these to political opportunities. We argue that, channeled by political contexts, regulatory frameworks and traditions of civil society involvement in the media, the experiences of PSB-Friends groups serve as a microcosm of the interdependencies between PSBs and the third sector and thus bear relevance for the field of public interest media advocacy more widely.[4]

Media governance and resource-mobilization theory

The concept underlying our investigation of SMOs is media governance, a term with a variety of meanings and uses.

According to Freedman's (2008, p. 14) broad definition, it refers to "the sum total of mechanisms, both formal and informal, national and supranational, centralized and dispersed, that aim to organize media systems according to the resolution of media policy debates." Whereas some scholars (e.g., Puppis, 2010) emphasize its value as an analytical concept, others (e.g., Bardoel and d'Haenens, 2004) use it in a more normative sense, which regards multi-stakeholder processes that include civic and professional groups as valuable for advancing democratic deliberation. According to this view, the inclusion of SMOs, which are assumed to be accountable to their members, strengthens the democratic accountability function of PSB (Mitchell and Blumler, 1994). In contrast to, for example, international relations scholarship on interest groups (Halpin, 2019, p. 482), a normative view of media governance is widespread among media and communication scholars (Ganter, 2013; Ginosar, 2013, p. 366).

Apart from drawing on media governance, the theoretical basis of our study is the resource-mobilization approach (RMT). RMT is part of the study of social movements, understood as 'sentiment[s] and activit[ies] shared by two or more people oriented toward changes in social relations or the social system (Ash Garner and Zald, 1987, p. 293). In essence, RMT is concerned with questions "upon *how* movements form and engage in collective action" (Carroll and Hackett, 2006, p. 86, italics in original). Vital for this matter is the meso-level, which refers to the conditions, either favorable or unfavorable, that facilitate or hinder specific SMOs in their ambitions to pursue their goals.

The social movements literature has produced various typologies of resources. Edwards and McCarthy (2004) differentiate between moral, cultural, social-organizational, human, and material resources, whereas Cress and Snow (1996) distinguish moral, material, informational, and human resources. Adjusting these typologies to the idiosyncrasies of the PSB-Friends groups investigated in our exploratory study, we are particularly concerned with material, human, and informational resources. First, SMOs need to have a sustainable funding model at their disposal (Nownes and Neeley, 1996). Second, they require human capital and expertize (Ramos, 2006). Third, they need to have established good media/journalism contacts (Klandermans and Goslinga, 1996), which make the views of the group known to the public and, aided by a group's membership base (McAdam, 1996; see Kriesi, 2004), potentially allow them to mobilize a broader movement (Löblich and Wendelin, 2011, p. 902). We address these resources in the context of political opportunities and movement mobilization in more detail in the discussion section.

Research design, data, and methodology

For our investigation of PSB-Friends groups we adopt a comparative case study research design, which offers the best guarantee to "focus on a 'case' and retain a holistic and real-world perspective" (Yin, 2014, p. 4; see Snow and Trom, 2002). Rather than being theory testing, the three case studies are descriptive and interpretative in nature, aiming to identify key issues in which the groups were particularly influential (Broughton Micova, 2019, p. 82). Following Grossmann (2012), we adopt a policy history perspective on perceived interest group influence. Thereby, we set out to individualize comparison. This involves "contrast[ing] specific instances of a given phenomenon [SMOs development and advocacy activities] as a means of grasping the peculiarities of each case" (Tilly, 1984, p. 82).

Besides secondary data, the research is based on three series of semi-structured interviews. Interviewees included past and present leaders of VLV, ABC Friends and SOS Coalition, public intellectuals, and academics who work in the area under study. We used snowball sampling techniques for selecting informants.

Interviews for the UK ($n = 10$)[5] and Australian ($n = 8$)[6] case studies were conducted between February and April 2015 and June and July 2017. Interviews ($n = 8$)[7] as well as participant observation for the South African case study were conducted between October 2014 and February 2017. The interviews lasted between 32 and 78 min. Two-thirds of the interviews were carried out face to face, with the remaining interviews being conducted via Skype and telephone. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

As media policy is a field "governed by elites" (Herzog and Ali, 2015, p. 38) we conceive the interviews as elite interviews (Dexter, 2006; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). This involves power dynamics coming into play (Hertz and Imber, 1995) and our engagement with the informants can be described as "studying up" (Gusterson, 1997). In the interviews conducted we examined group foundations, key people and key points in group histories in the context of domestic policy developments, regulatory regimes and idiosyncrasies (Empson, 2018). To counter bias we triangulated the interview data with secondary sources, press coverage—in the UK case—files of the VLV Archive[8] and the BBC Written Archives Center, and—in the South African case—field notes from participant observation. The interviewees provided background information that informed our elaboration of the case studies below. Apart from that, they also served as the means of disclosing experiences, views and perceptions of key people who played incisive roles in the developments of the groups under study. At some points in the analysis we bring in interview extracts. Having outlined the research design, data and methodology underlying our study we now turn to three PSB-Friends group case studies, starting with the VLV.

Voice of the Listener & Viewer

The two best-known and most influential SMOs in the post-war historical development of British broadcasting are the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association (NVLA, now rebranded as Mediawatch-UK) and the slightly younger VLV. Whereas the NVLA, founded in 1965, emerged from Mary Whitehouse's "Clean Up Television Campaign" and is a single-issue interest group focusing on broadcasting standards and ethics, the VLV remains the only British organization that speaks for listeners and viewers on the full range of broadcasting and media issues. According to its mission statement, the VLV

> supports the independence, integrity and secure funding of the BBC and the work of broadcasters and program suppliers who demonstrate commitment to public service broadcasting ... Mindful of the need to protect program quality it encourages public service broadcasters to build relationships and a feeling of shared ownership with listeners and viewers. (VLV, 2019a; see VLV, 2018)

The VLV[9] was founded in 1983 by journalist and PR specialist Jocelyn Hay. The trigger for its foundation was that the BBC planned to turn BBC Radio Four, a mixed speech service, into an all-news and public-affairs channel. When the plan for reorganization was leaked in October 1982 it provoked an outcry in the British press and among the public as it involved moving beloved programs, such as *The Archers*, to other parts of the BBC radio network or even to abolish them (Hendy, 2008, p. 264; Theaker, 2004, pp. 125–130). By the end of 1982, the BBC received more than 2000 complaint letters, with many listeners, including Jocelyn Hay, pleading for a rich variety not a focused Radio Four (Hendy, 2008, pp. 272, 295).

In the early 1980s there was no statutory body taking care of consumer interests in broadcasting in the UK. The consumer bodies were not interested in broadcasting matters and, therefore,

on 14 November 1983, Hay launched VLV. The inaugural meeting took place on 17 November 1983 at the Westminster Cathedral Conference Center in London. It was attended by 62 people, including four members of the newly formed steering group. Hay never intended VLV to be a single-issue campaign like the NVLA. Her interest in radio and the BBC was much broader.[10] Still, the plans for Radio Four were the perfect trigger for the VLV and the group's future mission, as Radio Four and its mix of programs epitomized "the quintessence of the Reithian ideal" (Hendy, 2008, p. 273). The VLV also aimed to stand for more than just saving this one station from change. As Hay noted in her inaugural speech as VLV chairman, the group was committed to preserve the concept of PSB and to fill "a gap in collective representation" (in Barnett, 2013, p. 4).

Under Hay's leadership the VLV issued a regular newsletter and organized a series of conferences, including its annual conference. It regularly responded to public consultations, addressing a large variety of media policy issues over time. The required expert knowledge came from members of the VLV board and academics from the University of Westminster, to whom the VLV was closely linked since its inception (Ali and Herzog, 2019, p. 256). Beyond this, Hay was in close contact with a variety of senior people from the BBC, media regulation bodies and the world of business who all gave valuable advice. The long-serving radio correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, Gillian Reynolds (2008), dubbed Hay as a "perceptive and persistent woman" and "possibly the best lobbyist in the whole UK. … Successive BBC chairmen and directors-general, Secretaries of State … have all learned to take her very seriously." From its second annual conference in 1985 the VLV was already institutionalized within the array of British media governance organizations (Barnett, 2013, p. 6). The BBC, however, was undecided about how to deal with it. Monica Sims, the Director of Programs, BBC Radio, thought that

> [t]his could be a useful group for the BBC and it could be very helpful to radio. Its support, for instance, during the licence fee campaign might be welcome, and from what I know of Mrs. Hay, it is not likely to turn into a cranky, up-market pressure group [such as NVLA]. [W]e should encourage them and give them any information we can. (Sims, 1983)

On the other hand, David Hatch, Managing Director of the BBC Radio Network and, as such, in charge of overseeing the proposal to turn Radio Four into an all news channel, urged caution:

> [Hay] is being created by us as some kind of media guru who represents an important constituency. She really doesn't. She is now making a quite naked bid to take over from Mary Whitehouse and the Viewers and Listeners Association. I believe at the last count she had less than 5000 members … yet she appears in programs alongside Home Secretaries, Chairmen of Radio Authorities, Director Generals, as if her views were of equal weight and importance. (Hatch, 1989)

Across time, there are three campaigns in which the VLV was particularly influential and had a direct impact on British media policy. During the first half of the 1990s the VLV campaigned against the sale of the BBC transmitter network. Although the key goal of preventing privatization was not achieved, a notable success of the VLV campaign, which according to one interviewee was "a very helpful addition to the BBC's campaign" concerning this matter, was that £200m of the respective revenues went to the BBC instead of to the Treasury (Barnett, 2013). According to Jocelyn Hay:

> With pro bono help from a sympathetic lawyer and public support from Ray Snoddy of the *Financial Times* we threatened to take the government to judicial review if the Treasury kept the proceeds of the sale (as it had from the sale of the transmitters of the former statutorily-funded Independent Broadcasting Authority). The government backed off and in the end the BBC got to keep all of the proceeds from assets bought with licence-fee income. (in Theaker, 2004, p. 129)

The second successful campaign in which the VLV was involved as a founding member was Public Voice, a coalition of voluntary organizations formed in 2000 to lobby on the upcoming Communications Act 2003. The Public Voice coalition achieved the inclusion in the Act of a "public interest test", which must precede major media mergers (see Parliament of the United Kingdom, 2003, p. 375; Freedman, 2005, p. 6). Third, after the VLV had lobbied for several years for the free-to-air satellite platform FreeSat, the BBC and ITV in 2008 built the platform offering an alternative to Freeview (House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005, p. 32).

In the recent BBC Charter review process, the VLV, whose membership has been described as "3000 strong … a little crusty, middle-class and old fashioned" (Brown, 2008), made a case for setting up an independent body to decide on the BBC licence fee (the licence fee body) (VLV, 2015). The proposal was not successful but may be reconsidered in the British political discourse (Ramsey and Herzog, 2018). Most recently, the VLV advocated the cause that the costs for television licenses for the over-75s should be covered by the government and not by the BBC (VLV, 2019b). The VLV generates most of its income from membership fees (£30 per year and member) and donations.

ABC Friends

The ABC Friends were founded under the Name "Aunty's Nieces and Nephews" in Melbourne in April 1976 to oppose planned spending cuts of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and to give voice to the opinions of listeners and viewers. Originally, it was a very small group of about six people with few resources. Still, after their campaign, the Fraser government (1975–83) revised its plans and set up an independent review, which led to a Charter for the ABC, incorporated in the ABC Act 1983 (Bear, 1981; Hamer and Factor, 1996, p. 3). Growth of the group was speedy. By November 1976 the ABC Friends[11] were able to fill Melbourne Town Hall, which has space for 2000 people (Monie, 2016).[12] The group evolved in a decentralized way and fairly autonomous branches in the six states of Australia were created. Beyond this, a network of regional branches and sub-branches emerged.[13] Partly caused by the decentralized structure but also by the group's grassroots character, there was no one person who could be singled out as the key determining ABC Friends' leader (akin to Hay). Instead, the ABC Friends were always steered by a group of people, with the presidents of the state branches (particularly Victoria and New South Wales), as well as national spokesmen playing particular important roles.

Over time, various reviews of the ABC, continuous budget cuts enacted by communications ministers and cabinets on both sides of the political spectrum, but also the demise of long-running (current affairs) programs such as *This Day Tonight* and the departure of many experienced broadcasters led the ABC Friends to engage in advocacy work. They launched a variety of campaigns, which involved rallies, stalls in pedestrian zones, opinion articles in newspapers, preparing and submitting petitions, expressions of disquiet vis-à-vis ABC management and lobbying politicians. The late 1990s was a period of great activity by ABC Friends right across Australia (Inglis, 2006, pp. 377, 384). It was

also a time when the ABC Friends were highly influential. For example, they mobilized people to submit to the 1996 Mansfield review of the ABC (see Brown, 2001), resulting in 10,615 submissions, the largest number that, up to then, any government inquiry had ever received in Australia. Subsequently, ABC cuts were reduced significantly. In a variety of cases, the ABC Friends had a substantial impact, resulting in the moderation of planned ABC funding cuts (Factor, 2017). In addition, the group was instrumental when it came to preserving Radio Australia, the ABC's international radio service, when the Howard Coalition government (1996–2007) sought to close it, a success, which has since been undermined.

The ABC Friends follow similar goals to those of the VLV: campaigning for the preservation and political independence of the ABC; making a case for transparency and open governance; and, in general, rejecting market-driven PSB politics (Wells, 1993). In June 2015, ABC Friends established a National Executive that co-ordinates policy and campaigns. As a result, to some degree, the group is undergoing a restructuring towards centralization and increased professionalization. The ABC Friends, overwhelmingly "left-wing conservatives" (Simons, 2017, p. 56), maintain close links to the Parliamentary Friends of the ABC, who comprise approximately one-third of the 151 members of parliament (Reynolds, 2017). In 2017 ABC Friends had ~8000 members plus many sympathizers and supporters across Australia, many of those in advanced age. Since then, through social media and proactive campaigning, their membership and support base diversified and grew to ~57,000. Members pay an annual fee of AUS$ 30. This income is supplemented by donations. According to Peter Monie (2017): "the size of donations is increasing, particularly when we can make the case that we really need the money for some particular activity. Even from younger people we're getting increasing donations through our Facebook promotion of ABC Defenders."[14] In 2018/2019 the ABC Friends have campaigned for adequate government funding for the ABC and the preservation of shortwave frequencies in rural areas.

SOS Coalition

The SOS Coalition is in a sense an extension of the South African Campaign for Open Media (later reconstituted as the Campaign for Independent Broadcasting), a 1990s' civil society-based campaign that included trade unions, civic organizations, cultural and political formations, academics, journalists and media practitioners that aimed to restructure broadcasting in post-apartheid South Africa on a democratic basis and in the public interest (Louw, 1993, p. 47). At its outset the SOS Coalition adopted a specific focus on the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). Kate Skinner, the first National Coordinator of the SOS, notes:

> When the SOS was set up in June 2008, we thought of it as a short-term campaign that would last a few months. Then, the 2008 SABC board needed to be removed because of political interference by the President. The instability from 2008 has not abated. There is a sense that the SABC will always be contested [and that] this is a long term and ongoing project. … Civil society will always be required to keep the public broadcaster accountable, transparent and independent. (Skinner, 2014)

Later the Coalition adopted a broader systems-level approach, focusing on the role of all three tiers of broadcasting in the country: public, community and commercial. The Coalition makes the case that community broadcasting should play a local public-interest role. It also demands requirements for commercial broadcasters, enforced through their licence conditions, to play limited public-interest roles

(e.g., fulfill local programming quotas and certain language requirements, provide news content) (SOS Coalition, 2019).

According to their constitution, the group is a membership-based coalition representing unions, NGOs, community media, independent film- and TV-production sector organizations, academics, freedom-of-expression activists and concerned individuals. It lists 28 organizations as members, but only very few individuals (SOS Coalition, 2012, pp. 42–3). When the SOS Coalition came into being, it incorporated a "working group" approach. Its founding members included representatives of Media Monitoring Africa, The Freedom of Expression Institute, Broadcasting, Electronic, Media & Allied Workers Union (~2500 members), and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Skinner, 2014). Many of these members still form part of the SOS Coalition today. As was the case in 2008 when the members congregated for the first time, the SOS Coalition of today aims at creating a PSB system dedicated to high-quality content and diverse, citizen-orientated public programming. Their efforts are geared towards ensuring that new comprehensive legislation is drafted for the SABC (and community media) that ensures their effective governance and funding (Milton et al., 2018). To safeguard the SABC's independence from government, the SOS Coalition campaigns for the SABC to be reconstituted as a Chapter 9 constitutional body.[15]

There are two pillars to the SOS Coalition: legal/advocacy work and policy submissions. As part of its lobbying tactics the Coalition writes submissions, commissions research, engages the media, organizes public meetings and, where appropriate, pickets and protests. At the time of writing, the group has a number of court cases pending that relate to, among others, challenging the memorandum of incorporation, the Broadcasting Act, the Companies Act, the constitution of the SABC board, the digital migration policy, and the sale of the SABC archives to corporate giant Multichoice. The Coalition further engages broadcasting policy through submissions to Parliament and lobbying of Parliamentarians. It has three pillars of finance: foundation grants,[16] contributions from members, and donations. Following a Coalition's campaign, not only is the current SABC board able to exclusively appoint non-executive members; they are also able to discipline and/or remove any such members. This makes the current board the most independent of its kind since 1994 and constitutes a significant victory for the SOS's legal work and their advocacy activities in parliament.

Resources, political opportunities, and mobilization

In the previous sections we introduced three PSB-Friends groups, which are all formally organized, follow the same overarching goals and use similar advocacy tools and means. There are also some differences between the groups. The VLV, since its inception, has been a national organization that strongly opposed marching on broadcasting premises, partly because this contradicted Hay's understanding of effective campaigning, and partly to stress the difference to the NVLA, which the BBC, in particular its Director-General Hugh Carlton Greene (1960–1969), took strong objection to. By contrast, the ABC Friends, to some degree, maintain their identity as a grassroots activist group. Camping outside ABC buildings and protesting in front of politicians' offices have been part of their campaign repertoire for decades. Beyond that, as June Factor notes:

> [The VLV's] base in Britain depended more on high-status figures than it did in Australia. That doesn't mean that there weren't a lot of very ordinary everyday people who supported VLV. … We [in Australia] would pull out the famous when we needed them. (Factor, 2017)[17]

Irrespective of these differences both groups have achieved significant policy impact (perceived interest group influence) and are thoroughly institutionalized within the domestic constellations of actors involved into media policy-making.

The SOS Coalition shares many features with VLV and ABC Friends. It regularly responds to government consultations and maintains dialog with policy-makers and regulators while at the same time (akin to the ABC Friends) preserving its identity as a grassroots organization. Still, the SOS Coalition is also distinct from the other two cases as the group features a lower degree of institutionalization and operates in a different national, political, regulatory and cultural context. In the following we, first, discuss material, human and informational resources in light of the development of the groups outlined above. Second, we address political opportunities and reflect about social movement mobilization.

In terms of material resources, the experience of the three groups under study exemplifies that membership fees are unlikely to provide more than a part of a group's funding needs (Hay, 2004, p. 4). Other funding sources the VLV, a "modestly funded organization" (Rashid and Simpson, 2019, p. 73), has drawn on over time are grants by charitable trusts and foundations, sponsorship (e.g., by UNESCO) and bequests by long-standing members. The ABC Friends income comes from membership subscriptions, public donations and fundraising activities. The SOS Coalition depends primarily on donor funding and donations. None of the three groups receive government funding. Based on the case studies above it seems fair to reason that groups within the wider field of public interest media advocacy require a steady and diverse base funding to be fully functional. The amount of this funding does not need to be exceptionally high, as the issue of copyright reform in the US exemplified. Between 1998 and 2010 SMOs, including Free Press, which advocated a public policy vision that entailed fair use and primacy of the public domain, spent $1 million for their advocacy activities. Even though this was only one-tenth of a per cent of the money that defenders of the private property vision spent, the impact of civil society advocacy was deemed considerable (McChesney, 2013, pp. 92–95).

Human resources, including expertize, constitute the second vital factor with implications for SMO institutionalization, and policy impact. In his investigation of Canadian Aboriginal Protest, Ramos (2006) conceives it as one of the three most important resources of SMOs. First, human capital means that, apart from a leader or leadership team, a group has available some basic infrastructure, including technology, office premises, and secretarial staff (McCarthy, 1987). This factor applies to the three groups under study. Second, a key feature of PSB-Friends groups is their orientation to influence media policies and laws, and to articulate constructive criticism. Concerning this matter, familiarity with prominent people inside the political debate is vital. Colin Brown, since 2012 Chairman of VLV, was Director of Corporate Affairs at the BBC (1994–2000) and before that held a similar position on the board at British Telecom. Furthermore, in 2014 the VLV archive was inherited by Professor Jean Seaton, the Official Historian of the BBC, which hints at the familiarity between interest group and PSB organizations. With regards to the ABC Friends, National President Margaret Reynolds has been an Australian Labor Party (ALP) Senator for Queensland (1983–1999) who held two ministerial apppointments. In addition, the ABC Friends can mobilize political support by addressing the Parliamentary Friends group, which at the time of writing is convened by Hon Darren Chester MP, the Deputy Leader of the House of Representatives, and includes representatives from four opposition parties. The SOS Coalition maintains a distance from political affiliations, but does participate in parliamentary processes through written submissions to the parliamentary subcommittee on communications, as well as attending parliamentary sessions and hearings on broadcasting and communications. Through their presence in this sense, relationships with MPs from all sides of the political party lines are formed that can become important for the organization to get their positions heard.

In their orientation to influence laws and policies, the three groups under study respond to government consultations, and for this they are reliant on experts. Over time, the VLV built up a network of experts, with many of them having professorial status at the University of Westminster. The ABC Friends and SOS Coalition also have close links to academics and legal experts who take an active stance to defend PSBs from governmental interference and make a case for the relevance of PSB in the digital age (Milton, 2016; Simons, 2017). For the PSB-Friends groups under study, but also for public interest media advocacy more generally, making use of and involving these experts in advocacy work requires skills such as persuasive power, effective coordination and division of labor (Carroll and Hackett, 2006; Edwards and McCarthy, 2004; Napoli, 2009, p. 412; Napoli and Aslama, 2010; Thompson, 2020). The SOS Coalition, for example, is organized into subcommittees that focus on particular aspects of the Coalitions advocacy and activism. In this sense, the legal subcommittee is tasked with observing the policy landscape in relation to issues that will need more than diplomacy. It engages legal expertize to amplify the policy work the Coalition is doing in relation to safeguarding the democratic space of PSB in South Africa's fledgling democracy.

In terms of informational resources, the VLV notes that it is vital "to develop and maintain relations with the public and also with broadcasters, government departments, policy-makers, regulators and others, whose opinions may be influential in broadcasting, the press and new media matters" (Hay, 2004, p. 4). The VLV employs a public-affairs manager and the ABC Friends National Inc and the SOS Coalition also list various office holders. By means of fruitful public-relations management and established journalism contacts a group can effectively spread their message (Löblich and Wendelin, 2011, p. 910). However, whether this leads to either direct or indirect policy impact or, more broadly, the mobilization of a social movement depends on such external factors as the political and regulatory contexts and domestic traditions of civil society involvement and advocacy. Beyond this, group membership plays a role (Gamson, 1990, p. 151). A large membership can make it easier for a group to reach a critical mass, attract recognition from policy-makers, and eventually have policy impact.

VLV and ABC Friends have achieved high degrees of institutionalization, which enabled them to sustain "larger-scale activities over time" (Picard, 2020, p. 201), because they took advantage of political opportunities. According to McAdam (1996), this is likely when, first, the political system is open; second, SMOs understand, can access and utilize elites within the polity; third, they have elite allies; and, fourth, the likelihood of repression is low (see Kriesi, 2004). When the two groups were set up in the UK and Australia no other regulatory body represented the views of audiences in terms of PSB matters. In the UK, perhaps surprisingly, the Consumers' Association did not take on an active role in relation to broadcasting (Hay in Theaker, 2004, p. 127). Gradually, VLV and ABC Friends made use of this space and, aided by their membership bases and political opportunities, took the positions as critical friends of the BBC and ABC. The SOS Coalition, by contrast, is a resource-deprived group with a strong reliance on organizations and unions as members, which operates in a South African political environment that is becoming increasingly suspicious of SMOs that challenge government- and state-owned institutions. During a recent SOS

Coalition picket at the SABC headquarters, SABC Chief Operating Officer Hlaudi Motsoeneng asked "[W]ho are these people who are making this big noise, saying they represent the public. Actually when they march to SABC they're 50" (Ferreira, 2015). Kate Skinner reflects on the group's lack of a large base of individual supporters as follows:

> Ultimately, SOS hasn't been as effective as it wanted to be as it concerns grassroots input … We wanted grassroots participation and we felt that the way to do [it] was through including mass-based organizations as members. … The idea was that representatives from these campaigns will filter decisions and issues down to their members. I don't think they did … these organizations didn't work out as effectively as we had hoped. (Skinner, 2014)

In spite of the absence of a large individual membership base, strong ties within legal and journalistic circles and having the ear of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Communications, means that the SOS continuously lobbies successfully in favor of a democratic PSB environment. Such lobbying involves seeking legal remedies, engaging parliamentarians or garnering public support through op-eds in newspapers.

In this article, we examined three groups with a formal organization who set out to participate in the domestic polity rather than to fight dominant institutions (Piven and Cloward, 1991). At various times the three groups under study have cooperated with like-minded groups. According to Peter Monie: "In the early days of Friends of the ABC we did work quite closely with the unions and they helped to organize some of those big meetings in Melbourne Town Hall." The ABC Friends also tried to cooperate with the social media campaign GetUp! (see Vromen and Coleman, 2013), which from time to time runs a campaign about the ABC, but experienced differences in the respective approach. Over time the VLV has been part of the Campaign for Quality Television, the 1990 Broadcasting Consortium, Public Voice and many more consortia and campaigns. "You would go to their conferences", one interviewee recollects about the VLV, "and they would be a platform for a variety of interest groups." As Vincent Porter (2015) puts it, part of the VLV's strategy was "making allies, and keeping these allies as long as they were useful to viewers' interests." In our interviews cooperations were assessed as principally serving the means to engage in collective action on a single-issue (see Schweizer, 2020). In this regard, we found that the SMOs under study were at times in a state of flux. They bonded, formed coalitions and mixed up in different ways and then split apart again. No interviewee explicitly articulated as a goal the mobilization of a broader social movement. We explain this notion by the dry assessment of media policy as a field, which does not commonly attract large-scale public attention (Potschka, 2012, p. 245). Seen from a different angle, the issues of concern for public interest media advocacy (e.g., sustainable PSBs, media concentration, media independence, press freedom) are, at best, on the periphery of a broader social movement's issue agenda (Carroll and Hackett, 2006; Mueller et al., 2004; Napoli, 2009). The classic RMT measure of resource mobilization, the number of new (activist) organizations founded in a specified period (Ramos, 2006), is accordingly inapt at grasping the particularities of both PSB-Friends groups and public interest media advocacy. Still, the three SMOs under study were concerned that their issues resonate more widely and that they play a role in agenda-setting.

Conclusion

In this article, we have introduced and compared three PSB-Friends groups. VLV and ABC Friends have a track record of perceived policy impact, while the SOS Coalition features a lower degree of institutionalization. We explain this finding by examining material, human, and informational resources. Whereas the three groups share many similarities in these regards they also exhibit differences, which are most striking in terms of political opportunities. When VLV and ABC Friends were set up, external conditions, such as the political climate and regulatory environment, were favorable and, aided by their membership bases, allowed for group institutionalization and policy impact. In contrast, the SOS Coalition operates in a political environment that is less open to exertion of influence from the third sector.

Corroborating conclusions of previous research (Carroll and Hackett, 2006; Napoli, 2009) our interviews with group leaders and other actors concerned revealed that VLV, ABC Friends, and SOS Coalition aim to influence policy-processes by, first, participating in the polity and making proposals for regulatory change, and, second, by making proposals from bottom-up. A limitation of our study has been that we mainly interviewed stakeholders from within the groups. The "outsiders" we interviewed were usually sympathizers of the groups and had been suggested by previous interviewees as being valuable informants. As one of the goals of our exploratory study was to introduce PSB-Friends groups as a special type of actor within public interest media advocacy, we accepted this shortcoming. For future qualitative studies that set out to investigate the impact of other SMOs within public interest media advocacy it may be useful to also systematically draw on data from external sources, such as regulators, governments, and other policy actors. RMT opens up many new scholarship avenues in this regard.

Data availability

Notes

1 The search exercise was carried out on 18 February 2020.

2 For instance, the Nordic countries historically feature a high level of civil society participation in media policy-making, which materializes in that representatives of listener associations and other SMOs are appointed to PSB oversight boards (Lund and Lowe, 2013, p. 66).

3 Another key PSB-Friends group, whose investigation goes beyond the scope of this study, are the Friends of Canadian Broadcasting.

4 We borrow the notion of "microcosm" from Steemers and D'Arma (2012, p. 68).

5 Interviewees for the UK case study included John Clark (former Director of Gillette International, Director and Trustee of VLV for 16 years); Manfred Kops (member of the European Alliance of Listeners' and Viewers' Associations [EURALVA] Board of Directors, 2002–2013); Vincent Porter (Emeritus Professor of Mass Communications, University of Westminster, long-serving member of the VLV Board, former President of EURALVA); Jeanette Steemers (Professor of Culture, Media & Creative Industries, King's College London, VLV Trustee, 2009–2015, 2016 to present); Andrew Taussig (Director, Foreign Language Services, BBC World Service, 1995–2000; VLV Trustee, 2004–2013).

6 Interviewees for the Australian case study included June Factor (former President, ABC Friends Victoria and their National Spokesperson, 1996–1999); Gerard Goggin (Wee Kim Wee Chair in Communication Studies, Nanyang Technological University Singapore); Fiona Martin (Associate Professor in Convergent and Online Media, University of Sydney); Peter Monie (President, ABC Friends Victoria, 2016 to present; Margaret Reynolds (National President of the ABC Friends, 2017 to present).

7 Interviewees for the South African case study included Kate Skinner (founding member and First Coordinator of the SOS Coalition, 2008–2012); Sekoetlane Phamodi (Organizer, 2013–2014, and Coordinator of the SOS Coalition, 2014–2016); as well as viewers and coalition partners not referenced in this article.

8 After VLV founder and leader Jocelyn Hay's death in January 2014 the VLV archive was inherited by Professor Jean Seaton, the Official Historian of the BBC. The archive comprises about 30 meters of unvetted files in boxes.

9 The VLV was founded as Voice of the Listener (VoL). The new name VLV was adopted after a consultation of its members in 1991. Reasons for the name change were that VoL misleadingly suggested that the group was solely concerned with radio. To simplify matters in the following we always refer to VLV.

10 Jocelyn Hay was also the Founding President of EURALVA.

11 Over time the group operated under the names Aunty's Nieces and Nephews, Friends of the ABC and, since 2014, ABC Friends. To simplify matters throughout the article we always refer to the ABC Friends.

12 In July 2018 the ABC Friends filled Melbourne Town Hall again.

13 At the time of writing (May 2020) the ABC Friends have six autonomous State Branches and around 20 regional local groups, all in New South Wales or Victoria. The National Committee co-ordinates policy and represents the organization to the Parliament, the ABC and various other organizations, but the action is in the State Branches.

14 When the ABC Friends discussed whether they should have a policy to encourage people to leave money in their will, they decided against it. Still, Peter Monie (2017) remembers one bequest by a long-standing member.

15 Chapter 9 institutions are named for their place in the South African constitution. The term refers to state institutions supporting constitutional democracy. These institutions are independent of government, subject only to the constitution and the law, and report annually to parliament.

16 Key financiers are the Open Society Foundation South Africa and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

17 For instance, two former presidents of the ABC Friends in Victoria were high-profile politicians. Rupert Hamer served as Premier of Victoria (1972–1981) and Janet Powell was a Senator for Victoria (1986–1993). Former Labor premier John Cain was also an ABC Friend (Inglis, 2006, p. 485).

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Competing interests

Additional information