

**Ib Bondebjerg, Francesco Bono (Hg.): Television in Scandinavia.
History, Politics, Aesthetics**

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This highly informative and well written anthology is the first comprehensive book on the history, politics and aesthetics of television in the Scandinavian countries. The book makes it possible to see resemblances and differences in Scandinavian media culture and to see national television history in a broader, international perspective. Like in many countries with a strong public service tradition, the number of channels from the 1980s on exploded over Scandinavia and brought competition in the air and through the cables. By focussing equally on the past and present this book shows how Scandinavian public service coped with the newest tendencies, and how Scandinavian television culture changed from a strongly regulated national phenomenon into an international multi-channel culture following the common European model with two or more competing national channels, some regional and local channels and a huge number of international stations through cables and satellite dishes. In this respect the book gives a general insight in how policy and culture are linked and how commercialization is dealt with within the context of a changing television culture. Something almost every country in Europe is confronted with.

Each of the articles gives us a clear insight in the specific national history of each of the Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Finland and Sweden), within the context of national history and national social and cultural developments through the years. This book also tells us that television can only be understood in that broader context. Following the articles, written by scholars who all are involved in long term media history research projects, you will find an institutional and political history of television in each country, in most cases strongly influenced by the social democratic tradition, whose ideals of political reform through the democratization of culture have gone hand in hand with a more orthodox tradition of popular enlightenment. This social democratic tradition has been challenged to give room to different levels off television programming with different ideologies: international (foreign channels), national (public service and commercial broadcasting), regional (mainly regional news programmes), local (most

private and financed by advertising, bingo, sponsorship). As the case of Finland shows concrete historical, political and economic factors dictated the formation of television broadcasting. And as a consequence, this is reflected in the organizational structure of television and in programming. Finland therefore seems to be an example of pragmatic media policy.

In addition concepts of programming, changing schedules and preferences and new programming trends are discussed. To speak to this last aspect, different approaches can be discerned, ranging from a more aesthetic one to general programming trends in news, documentary, infotainment and e.g. fiction. To give you an impression of what to expect, I'll point to just a few. Bondebjerg's contribution on modern Danish television is very illustrative of how political and institutional changes left traces in the programming practice. Especially fiction is considered to fulfill a specific task, being one of the most popular categories of television genres. By giving people contemporary, fictional stories on the reality and history of their country and themselves national culture can be stimulated. And this is seen as one of the most vital elements in a public service television culture. In Iceland however television fiction seems to be rather scarce unlike documentaries and non-fictional entertainment that are a much more pronounced aspect of the programming. This seems contradictory to the literary heritage which by many Icelanders is regarded as a key factor in the maintenance of national identity. There seems to be however a very down to earth reason for this. To keep costs low, which is impossible in fiction, this cultural heritage is played on by documentary oriented programmes which can easily show Icelanders' love for the rugged nature of their country and their pride in the language. The idea of national identity and the way in which television is able of reinforcing such, is one of the most important questions raised in this anthology. Finland e.g. shows a rise of nationalism in the programmes from the time on Finland applied for membership of the European Community. As an answer Finnish television on the one hand searched for the past and on the other hand called for authenticity and origins, programmes that emphasized everydayness and reality. How political conviction determined the television output shows the Norwegian case where for a very long time the idea was held that television programming should play a part in a wider socialization project. In Norway the national public service channel survived changes most strongly, appealing to more viewers than any other channel, being qualitatively dominant within many television genres. As such it played an important role in defining what it is to be Norwegian in a changing world. Finally Swedish traits in television programming are being discussed in terms of aesthetics in different forms of television programming.

Being the first attempt to cover television history in Scandinavia in a necessarily global way, this book points to a crucial development in European media studies, the tendency towards comprehensive media history research. In this respect the Scandinavian projects can serve as a great example for media history research in

other countries like the Netherlands. So far this book offers a framework to discuss changes in television culture in any European country.

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