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Party for everybody?

Professionalism vs. professionalised amateurs in the Eurovision Song Contest

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Introduction

The Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) is the biggest television entertainment show in the world and one of the most important flagships of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and its international television programme exchange Eurovision. While the statutory aim of the event is to produce and broadcast “a state-of-the-art, prime-time entertainment programme, world-class live television production” (eurovision.tv, 2022b), there have been amateurs alongside professional actors from the very beginning of the event, who accompany and support the programme in essential areas with voluntary commitment. The article sheds light on the cooperation of amateurs and professionals at the ESC and raises questions about the use of (paid and unpaid) volunteer labour at such an event, analysing the perceptions of this matter

by different stakeholders, and discussing its consequences in the light of public service media organisational values.

Even in the early years of the ESC, interested amateurs played a decisive role in the composition of the juries, in which professional players from the music industry were expressly not wanted in order to prevent record companies and music publishers from influencing the results. The jurors did not receive a fee for their participation, although their participation was crucial for the show. In the meantime, the juries consist only of (more or less) prominent representatives of the music industry who receive a fee for their participation or are rewarded by media presence.

In the late 1980s, media interest in the ESC waned in many countries and the participating broadcasters had difficulty finding enough interested journalists who wanted to report on the competition on site and had themselves accredited for this purpose. The vacant places were therefore increasingly filled by ESC fans who enthusiastically took advantage of this opportunity as reporters for various fan media. However, the growing number of accredited fans also brought problems as delegations faced requests for free promo materials and escalating costs for receptions without actual media output. In recent years, the EBU has therefore taken steps to reduce the number of accredited fans or to channel fans' interest in up-close contact with artists in other ways, such as through the Red Carpet event.

On the other hand, the opening of press accreditation has given many fan or amateur journalists the opportunity to professionalise their work and thus also to earn money when editorial offices that did not send their own staff to the ESC buy on-site coverage from non-professionals at reduced rates. This did not create a real competitive situation, as the interest of professional journalists was predominantly low. In some areas, however, a cut-throat competition arose that had existentially threatening effects.

On the musical level, too, a paradigm shift has taken place since the early 2000s. While in the first 30 years of its existence, participation in the ESC was mainly reserved for professional musicians who had become successful in the traditional way, the emergence of casting shows meant that more and more musical amateurs were sent to the competition in order to capitalise on the hype surrounding their casting victory, also with regard to the ESC's audience figures. Often enough, however, these artists were not up to the demands and pressure of the

“state-of-the-art, prime-time entertainment programme, world-class live television production” and failed due to a lack of experience, which in some cases had serious consequences for their further career prospects.

Last but not least, the EBU, the national broadcasters and local city hosts are making increasing use of volunteers who offer their labour free of charge to look after delegations and carry out a variety of support activities. This practice is also highly controversial within the public service members of the EBU, as it runs counter to the principles of public value.

Conceptual Considerations

The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) is the world’s leading alliance of public service media with 112 member organizations in 56 countries and an additional 31 Associates in Asia, Africa, Australasia and the Americas (European Broadcasting Union, 2021a). The Eurovision Song Contest, originally created for promoting the idea of an international “exchange and production of common television programmes, in order to cost-effectively increase the programming material for national broadcasting organisations” (eurovision.tv, 2021) has become one of the flagship entertainment programs of the umbrella organization. Programmes with a wide reach like the ESC are essential for maintaining and expanding PSBs competitiveness vis-à-vis commercial providers within the dual system (Zeller, 1999, p. 301). The need to operate in a competitive environment has been addressed for the ESC through introducing the so-called Reference Group, a committee of elected representatives of the EBU’s member broadcasters dealing with all questions related to the contest, negotiating and reconciling the various and sometimes conflicting interests of national broadcasters, politicians, musicians, spectators, and fans – including commercial interests (Wolther, 2006, p. 31 f.). One of the biggest challenges for PSBs is to ensure the public value and citizen interest while competing with private actors (Goyanes, 2021), especially in economic terms since PSB is required to differentiate their public funding and activities from their commercial ones to avoid that governmental and institutional revenues are subsidizing private interests (Flynn, 2015). This situation has various implications for the assignment of volunteers and amateurs in the Eurovision Song Contest.

Professionals, Amateurs and Volunteers

What is the difference between a professional and an amateur? The answer is not straightforward, and the difference is becoming more and more fuzzy in the present, where increased leisure time has allowed for the personal pursuit of interests to a high level of proficiency, and where the internet has presented new opportunities to break into particular work markets. We often define a professional as someone who does 'a thing' for money, and an amateur as someone who is doing it for love. However, when we throw the issue of competence into the mix, things get complicated. In the common understanding of who is a professional competence is implicit, but we all know that this is not always the case. In the case of an amateur, on the contrary, a lesser competence may be implicit. However, with the new ways of understanding work, we recognize that many amateurs are highly competent in doing 'things' they are not paid for.

A clearer cut division of work is between paid and unpaid work. One type of unpaid work is volunteering. Officially, persons in volunteer work are defined as all those of working age who, during a short reference period, performed any unpaid, non-compulsory activity to produce goods or provide services for others (International Labour Organization, 2019). We often associate volunteering with dedicating time and skills to support the most disadvantaged members of society, but also economic entities aiming for profit can call for voluntary work. This particular exchange of labour involves personal investment and returns that make the experience worthwhile for the person offering their labour. However, when one enters into this kind of relationship, it is not clear from the outset what the actual return will be.

In this context, the issue has been raised about the exploitation of volunteer work by organisations. So, when does volunteer work become exploitation? Exploitation in general can be defined as taking place when one economic agent takes unfair advantage of another agent. Therefore, in the context of volunteering, exploitation has been described as existing "when someone has an experience which gives them far less return on their investment, of time and/or money, than they should expect" (Conservation Careers, 2022). Both international and national legislations, and specially dedicated organisations, such as trade unions, protect the rights of individuals as economic units offering labour in the marketplace. However, since a volunteer is defined as someone who offers to do something of their own free will, without

pay, and that the understanding of the return on their investment can be very broadly defined (from employability to having fun), the identification of exploitation can be difficult.

Ethics and Professionalism in the Age of the Internet

The internet brought about profound changes in how we engage with work and how we experience the distinction between private and public domains that carry important ethical implications. This elicits interesting considerations for our topic.

The internet has become a new medium of and for work, enabling both new roles and jobs, but also affecting the traditional means of working and the professions inhabiting them. The 'traditional' professionals have been offered new ways of promoting themselves and delivering their services, but also the amateurs found a way to cash in their expertise and skills bypassing gatekeepers and relying on consumer ratings for validation of their competencies and goods. However, the internet is not a free space, and the dominance of big corporations and the monetisation of our eyeballs raises serious ethical questions about consent and privacy.

Definitions of what is private and what is public became more permeable with the internet, and particularly with the development of social media platforms. The remit of what is public has advanced considerably, as technological means have allowed for immediate capture and public sharing of what would once have been private and allow it to remain publicly available for a long time. Similarly, the internet also fuzzed the distinction between personal life and one's work-related activities. The fusing of these two trends gave more importance to the exposure of personal endeavours, including amateur activities and/or fandom interests pursuits, that in this new digital labour market, could be well combined to elicit returns (monetary or otherwise) for individual and organisations/corporations. This, besides issues of consent and privacy, creates complex and diverse challenges for traditional conceptions of professionalism, which value competence and judgement against (somewhat) agreed criteria, in opposition to the use of personal value judgements.

Precarious Work in the Cultural, Creative and Media Industries

Culture, creative and media industry workers, estimated at nearly 30 million worldwide, make a significant contribution to their countries' economies and societies (EY, 2015). Their working arrangements, due to the creative and collaborative nature of the work and technological developments, are quite diverse, including freelance, self-employment, and part-time work (International Labour Organization, 2019). While this allows for independence and flexibility, issues may arise affecting their working conditions and the equitable treatment of those providing their labour for the cultural, creative and media sectors regardless of contractual relationship.

Considering that public service media organisations are central to this article, there are ethical implications to consider in how they engage with providing work opportunities. The values associated with public service orient these organisations to shape the world of work to provide decent, inclusive, socially just, stable opportunities. Decent work is defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as “productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity” (European Commission, n. d.). Work is considered as decent when: it pays a fair income; it guarantees a secure form of employment and safe working conditions; it ensures equal opportunities and treatment for all; it includes social protection for the workers and their families; it offers prospects for personal development and encourages social integration; workers are free to express their concerns and to organise. The issue of decent work, particularly when we are focusing on the arts and entertainment sector, is paramount. Work in this sector has been historically seen as ‘not real work’, however the recent COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how this world of work is at the same time, fundamental for defining humanity, and fragile, in terms of being recognised and supported as such by governments.

The entertainment and the music industries are often described as precarious and marred by inequality. Many roles in the cultural, creative and media industries are connected with substantial amounts of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1982) emanating from the exposure of those who perform those roles to public recognition (either in terms of wider publics or professional publics). Therefore, to an extent, one could say that the payment for performing a particular role, operates not only at monetary level, but also at a symbolic level: being

chosen to perform such a role might be considered 'sufficient' payment by those performing the role, and their peers, and become part of the industry-accepted practices (e. g. being a jury). For the Eurovision Song Contest, a case study argues that "no labour is ever entirely unpaid, and that while volunteering is indeed a form of free labour, an important part of the compensation that volunteers receive is a feeling of identity and belonging that comes with the experience of eventfulness" (Stiernstedt & Golovko, 2019, p. 249). However, exploitation of work in these sectors and the fact that only some can 'afford' to be 'exploited' (issue of class/economic power) is well evidenced by research in different sectors (Brook et al., 2020) and public service organisations working in these sectors have an obligation to set and follow decent standards of work and need to ensure, even in terms of volunteering, that there are equal opportunities.

The Four Battlefields for professionals, amateurs and volunteers in the ESC

For a systematic analysis of the challenges related to the recourse to voluntary work in the Eurovision Song Contest the authors have divided the roles that can be performed either by professionals or by amateurs and volunteers into four different tasks: Jury assessment, musical performance, media work, and supporting the ESC as a city event.

Jury assessment

From the very first edition of the ESC, in 1956, the decision on the winning song was in the hands of national juries. These juries were composed of a varying number of individuals representing the respective competing countries. At the beginning, they watched the show in the venue the show took place; later, they would view the dress rehearsal in their own countries through an internal television circuit. For the many years the audience could not vote, the EBU demanded broadcasters to choose jurors who could represent the heterogeneity of viewers in terms of age, social class, education, as well as musical taste (even though the assessment of the latter presents serious difficulties). Therefore, changes to the composition of juries throughout the history of the ESC help to illustrate perceived differences

between professionals and amateurs and the importance of professional judgment and public participation (and representation) in the ethos of the contest.

The final decision on the jury's composition is in the responsibility of the broadcaster. To create juries representing a cross-section of their national TV audiences, broadcasters had to find a balance between people who were linked to the music and/or the media industries and those who were not. Since the national juries decided about the winning song on behalf of the audience, their composition raised questions on democracy of the few over the many (for more information on voting in the ESC, see Orgaz et al. (2011) and Mantzaris et al. (2018) as two examples of the large research corpus existing on the topic). The first time the audiences at home had the chance to express their opinion through voting was in 1997 (a trial in five countries), but only in 2003 EBU made the televoting mandatory for all competing countries. In 2009 the jury was reintroduced in the final and, in the following year, also introduced in the semi-finals, in an attempt to balance the audiences' tastes and preferences with professional expertise and to reduce the influence of diasporas and the presumed 'block voting' on the outcome of the voting.

In the agreement every national juror has to sign (European Broadcasting Union, 2021b), one can find the parameters guiding the voting process. The individual votes must be independent and impartial, and influencing other jurors is forbidden. The names of the jury members are disclosed, but only after the final show. Jury members are forbidden to make any public remarks about the songs or performances before the winner is announced. The rules also assure that jurors do not take any personal advantage for assuming this task.

Judging music is challenging because it is difficult to separate objective parameters like the ones demanded by EBU from emotional factors and individual taste. Professional skills and experience are highlighted in the EBU's rules: each juror must vote "in a fully fair and objective way" based on defined criteria, using the "professional skill and experience" to assure that there is no discrimination on "nationality, political opinion, gender" among others. The EBU indicates four objective parameters for assessment of the songs and performances: "composition and originality of the song", "quality of the performances on stage", "vocal capacity of the performer(s)", as well as the "overall impression of the act". In fact, the EBU

does not give any technical parameters to evaluate the songs, leaving the criteria for quality and originality to the jurors' discretion.

In order to do a historically informed analysis on the dichotomy between professional and amateur (non-professional) juries in the ESC, the authors managed to retrieve regulations from the past (partly in Portuguese translation) as well as the names and professional activities of some Portuguese national jurors. The oldest data refer to 1969 where you can observe a balanced composition of the jury in terms of gender, age and professional background; however, the jury members represented only a very small part of the Portuguese audience, since they belonged to privileged social groups. A change can be observed in the rules for the ESC 1976 (European Broadcasting Union, 1975) when the national jury had to be composed of public figures. Music professionals such as professional composers, musicians and singers, music editors, recording manufacturers, as well as national broadcasters' employees and even people with an interest in the music industry were excluded. In the year before the trial introduction of televoting, the rules for the ESC 1996 show a completely opposite perspective on the jurors' experiences: out of a group of sixteen people, half of them were required to represent the heterogeneity of the national audience, but should demonstrate their interest in popular music; the other half had to include professionals linked to the music industry: composers, authors, singers, musicians, maestros, journalists, or radio/TV producers, but only two of them could be linked to recording or music edition companies. Moving to an analysis of more current regulations, the *Rules of the 63rd Eurovision Song Contest* (European Broadcasting Union, 2017) indicate that the broadcaster must ensure the representativeness of the jury in terms of gender, age and background, and that this group should be constituted by radio DJs, artists, composers, authors of lyrics or music producers. However, jurors cannot be employees of the participating broadcasters, must not have been part of the national jury in the preceding two years, and cannot be related to any participants in the contest (neither performers nor authors). Broadcasters must ensure the "complete independence, impartiality, fairness, and objectiveness" of their respective national jury (European Broadcasting Union, 2017). In the last five years we can recognize a pattern in the Portuguese juries: the jurors have been mostly musicians (both singers and authors), many of them prior participants in the Portuguese national selections (cf. eFestival, 2021, 2022; ESC Portugal, 2017, 2018, 2019). With a few exceptions, all of them are linked to music industries: radio producers, managers, journalists, dancers, or ESC hosts. Professional competence in the music

industry has emerged as a priority criteria for jury selection, particularly after the introduction of televoting.

However, data also indicates that, during the period in which voting in the ESC was performed only by national juries, the EBU made several changes to ensure that such restricted groups reflected the diversity of the European public. The representation of the younger audiences was important as well as the independence from music industry. Nevertheless, in the late 2000s, only ten years after the successful introduction of televoting, the professional juries were reintroduced¹ and became more important than ever with the dual composite voting system directly confronting professional jury and audiences voting.

Interestingly, the 'block voting' tendencies the juries were supposed to put an end to is still evident in the jury voting. Moreover, in the ESC 2022, the EBU's independent pan-European Voting Partner detected irregular voting patterns in the jury votes of six countries taking part in the Second Semi-Final: Azerbaijan, Georgia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, and San Marino (eurovision.tv, 2022a). In accordance with the Voting Instructions of the Contest, the EBU exercised the right to remove the votes cast by these six national juries, clarifying what it considers an irregular vote: "Does the result reflect the overall taste of the other professional jurors? Bearing in mind that they are all music professionals requested to vote on the basis of the same criteria laid down under the Rules of the Contest (e. g. a national jury puts at the top of its ranking (a) song(s) that the majority of the others rank lower." This indicated that the EBU relies on professionalism, which includes hallmarks of some uniformity of opinion/taste, if working through specific criteria.

It is very difficult to obtain such a uniformity in the televoting, and sometimes the bookmakers' odds, fan media tastes and the actual results of the contest differ significantly since the geographical, cultural, and social diversity of the national juries and the audiences watching and voting does not allow for 100 % accurate projections. In the wide range of people participating in the televote, it would be difficult to define what parameters guided their choices, even if those parameters were purely based on musical assumptions. Voting processes, juries' decisions as well as audiences' tendencies are always under heavy scrutiny

¹ When televoting became compulsory in 2003 the juries were only there as a backup if televoting failed or if the country could not put up a proper televoting system due to their technical infrastructure.

and criticism. They trigger both rational and emotional reactions and lay on a set of prejudgments based on everyday hypotheses (this country's jury will certainly vote for its neighbours, that singer's social media strategy will pay off in televoting). When the EBU decided to let the audience vote with the help of televoting, the issues of representativeness, democracy as well as fairness seemed to be solved; finally, the ESC would mirror the social context of a democratic Europe.

However, the struggles appear when televoting processes are observed in detail: problems with population density and diaspora, economic issues related to paid phone calls, security, bots, as well as the eternal issue of musical taste (e. g. Raykoff, 2021). Televoting has always been closer to the audiences' tastes than any national jury decision, but the juries' opinion can be seen as more legitimate, as they are industry professionals (and thus 'competent'). Nevertheless, in music evaluation it is always difficult to separate rational elements from sensorial and emotional fruition. All voting systems can be criticised. The EBU does not rely on the arbitrariness of televoting and, combining the audiences' votes (which can be seen as a loose and broad form of an amateurs' jury) with the votes of professionals, tries to ensure the existence of clear systems and parameters to evaluate songs. In fact, the popular voting in the ESC is the biggest election in the world, and for the EBU, "[t]he integrity of the voting, both by the national juries in each country and the viewers voting by phone or SMS, is essential to the show's success" (eurovision.tv, 2022a). In the field of voting the EBU has managed to create a space for peaceful coexistence of professionals and non-professionals sharing the same responsibility: to pick the song they consider worthy of an ESC win.

Musical performance

"Free and unpaid labour is nothing new in the media industries; in fact, it is an intrinsic part of how the media industries are organized" (Stiernstedt & Golovko, 2019, p. 232). This is all the truer for singers and musicians. The idea of 'work' or 'labour' related to what musicians and singers actually do – particularly in the popular music genre – has been frequently challenged. "What do you do for a living?", a relatively simple question, posed to a musician/singer who answers: "I am a musician" can have the counter-question: "Yes, but what do you REALLY do for a living?". It is a common story amongst music professionals. On the other hand, and

maybe as a consequence of this undermining attitude, musicians are often asked to offer their work in exchange for “promotion” (for example, in TV shows).

Musicians are, indeed and often, very generous professionals, as was evident during the pandemics when thousands of videos appeared on social networks (and the need to sell tickets for these performances was not yet an evidence), whether because of a sense of altruism triggered by the lockdown situation or because egoistically there was an urgent need to make music – or maybe both. The truth is because generally there is passion involved in music making, there is also a general sense (for a non-musician) that this professional activity is ‘more pleasure than work’ as this concept is commonly understood – and therefore less valuable, ideal to be ‘offered’ under several justifications – charity and self-promotion being the most used. Particularly within popular music professionals, who only recently can learn in schools that provide formal education, the practice of ‘unpaid work’ – which often has nothing to do with volunteer work, but is rather an imposition by the media industry – has been a common trait of the profession.

Regarding the ESC, the role of musicians and singers has evolved throughout the years, following music industry trends and other relevant aspects. In its first three decades, professional musicians with a reasonably solid career constructed in the traditional way were the main participants of the ESC; however, following Steve Albini’s statement regarding the ‘shrinkage of the music industry’ (Albini, 2014), ringing out “the middle, leaving the bands and the audiences to work out their relationship from the ends”, a number of structures and professionals – namely professional recording studios, session musicians and singers – practically disappeared. Those professionals (especially the singers) were often a recurring choice from the composers, who were looking for an experienced singer and interpreter for the national selections. The emergence of talent shows with its display of hundreds of aspiring musicians and singers filled, up to a certain point, this ‘middle slice of the industry’ that was swollen as a result of the digital revolution, providing a source of recruitment for these song competitions. Nevertheless, talent shows also brought less experienced musicians and singers to the Eurovision stage, once a forum where experience and professionalism were highly rated (and expected, bearing in mind that a participation involves live singing in front of live audiences, direct broadcast and a competition ...).

In the ESC, from 1999 on, performances ceased to be musically accompanied by an orchestra, which was replaced by an instrumental playback. Until 2019, apart from the instrumental playback, real backing vocalists singing live were accepted on stage; from 2021 onwards, (as a temporary decision due to the pandemic) nobody except the chosen singer/group is allowed to perform live and the backing vocals – in case there are any – must be previously recorded (usually as a part of the instrumental playback). However, this temporary decision might result in eliminating backing vocalists permanently from the ESC stage (and with them, the presence of the delegation's vocal coaches) considering the PSBs need to save money.

The very definition of the ESC – the biggest television entertainment show in the world (after losing its statutory purpose to “promote high-quality original songs in the field of popular music, by encouraging competition among artists, songwriters and composers through the international comparison of their songs” (European Broadcasting Union, 2002) back in 2004) – corroborates the idea of enlarging its scope to other performative areas than music which fit into the very generic term of ‘entertainment’. In recent years, where an obvious trend for the ESC's stage performances to become increasingly technology- and choreography-oriented has been noticeable, the backing vocalists being more and more replaced by dancers who lip-synch (usually in a very incorrect way). This has opened the way to musical amateurism on a stage where the live performance of songs competing with each other, with an estimated audience of several hundred million viewers throughout the world and a state-of-the-art technological production is supposedly the essence of the show.

From the perspective of a professional musician, the changes described above have had repercussions in considering the ESC a less interesting seasonal work opportunity or, better said, only interesting for a much more limited number of actors in the music scene – on a first stage the composers and the performers (sometimes one and the same person/persons), later the performers who will be on stage together with the main singer/singers, dancing and/or pretending to be playing and singing. Going back a few decades (end of the 1970s until mid-1980s) and according to several Portuguese sound engineers consulted, the “craziness” (how one of them called it) around the national selection and the ESC started months before, with recording studios fully occupied with the recording of the demos to send on tape to the national broadcasters and later, after being selected, the final recording of the song (often turned into a single record to be launched after the national selection). The fact that there

were, at times, recording labels in the process meant there was financial and organisational structure to trigger this musical turmoil involving diversified stakeholders and actors, from TV and radio stations to recording studios, sound engineers, professional session musicians and singers (from the classical and popular genre), producers, composers, fashion designers and the print media.

In conclusion: musicians, for many considered ‘non-workers’, are often ‘used and abused’ to offer what they do for a living under many justifications, a practice which has nothing to do with volunteering. The present format of the ESC, as stated earlier in this article, employs many volunteers for a number of different functions and activities, music not being one of them. But if the dichotomy ‘volunteer vs. non-volunteer’ seems to have no bearing in this discussion, the one distinguishing a professional from a non-professional does, as blurred as these lines may, at times, be. Considering a professional as someone who does ‘a thing’ for money, and an amateur as doing it for love, a musician is both: someone who does a thing for love and earns money from it. He/she has it all: money and pleasure². Unfortunately, and more often than not, reality goes more in the ‘pleasure’ direction, which is why highlighting the musical competence of the musical actors involved in the ESC as an indisputable need for the success of the show (as well as questioning certain decisions, such as the elimination of live backing vocalists), and requesting public broadcasters to assume their role as relevant instruments in their respective national music industries and cultures, bears a significant relevance.

Media work

In preparation for the Eurovision Song Contest 2020 in Rotterdam, which had to be cancelled due to the COVID 19 pandemic, several publications appeared in the Netherlands, which on the one hand wanted to take profit from hosting the contest in their own country, but on the other hand also tried to familiarise the national audience with the complexity of this European TV institution – an audience that had become alienated from the ESC after eight unsuccessful

² Only this ‘pleasure’ (or better said ‘love’) for their profession that musicians nurture can justify the fact that in some countries “the entrants [in the ESC] are expected to fund their own performances” (<https://www.mirror.co.uk/tv/tv-news/how-much-stars-paid-eurovision-26912304>).

final qualifiers between 2005 and 2012, and slowly found its way back to the old enthusiasm with the successes of some established artists like Anouk, the Common Linnets and finally Duncan Laurence. Thus, a booklet (2019) appeared in the popular "voor-dummies" series, which compiled the most important facts about the ESC on 167 pages – also details that normally remain hidden from occasional viewers.

The author, the then 24-year-old student Charlotte Valérie van Tilborg, is neither a writer nor a journalist: she is part of the approximately 70-strong Wiwibloggs team, a worldwide group of ESC fans who, under the leadership of the American William Lee Adams, a former writer for TIME magazine, report voluntarily around the year on the Eurovision Song Contest and its current and past participants (Ouhajji & Bezemer, 2019). Correspondingly self-confident, van Tilborg summarises in her publication the topics "fans, media and bookmakers" in a joint subchapter on the promotion of the festival and writes: "The media is an incredibly important aspect in the history of the Eurovision Song Contest. After all, the media ensures that the Eurovision Song Contest continuously receives the necessary attention in the news and is thus an important link between the Song Contest and the viewers" (van Tilborg, 2019, p. 85).

In reference to the term "pseudo-event" coined by Boorstin (1962), Scherer and Schlütz (2003) defined the Eurovision Song Contest and its national preliminary rounds as a "media-staged (pseudo-)media event", which is organised by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and its public service member broadcasters in order to trigger media coverage. Accordingly, the organisers were open to the emergence of fan journalism at the end of the 1980s, when the interest of traditional media in the competition waned in many countries and more and more ESC fans took over reporting for various media for a small fee or even unpaid, in return for the opportunity to attend rehearsals and press conferences up close (cf. Wolther, 2022).

With the emergence of Web 2.0, numerous opportunities developed from 2003 onwards for fan journalists to generate coverage (web radio, blogs, etc.) and meet a demand that was insufficiently served by the broadcasters themselves. The Dutchman Sietse Bakker revealed the enormous potential that social media opened up for the ESC by setting up the website ESCtoday and, after the communications student had initially been rejected by the EBU officials because of his youth (cf. FunX, 2011), was hired from 2007 onwards with a team of

volunteers to look after the official websites of the Eurovision Song Contest, Junior Eurovision Song Contest and Eurovision Dance Contest.

The success of the young entrepreneur, who over the years rose to the position of Event Supervisor of the Eurovision Song Contest and was finally responsible as Executive Producer for the contest in Rotterdam, reveals the opportunities and challenges that arise from the use of volunteers for public broadcasters. For on the one hand, Bakker and his company WOW!Works (later: SCRN) succeeded in writing an unprecedented success story as a youthful career changer, which helped to keep the format attractive for the youth target group, but on the other hand, the use of volunteers in the journalistic field raises a lot of questions.

The team included editors, video reporters and photographers from across Europe, and worked closely with the internal EBU team on the Eurovision Family of Events. Bakker recognised their individual expertise and professionalism, valuing their contribution: "EBU's core Eurovision Song Contest team, Eurovision.tv would never have become what it is today without the commitment of a team of some 10 volunteers, that contribute to Eurovision.tv 365 days a year. They are our eyes and ears across Europe [...]. They make our heart beat!" (eurovision.tv, 2009). However, the fact that, according to the Swedish daily newspaper Aftonbladet (Ek, 2015), WOW!Works received 400,000 euros a year for looking after eurovision.tv did not go unnoticed.

Fedderson and Werwinski (2015) criticised in an article on eurovision.de the fact that eurovision.tv relied on volunteers to take care of the press and communication work around the Eurovision Song Contest. However, regardless of the cost savings for the EBU and its members, which are cited by Executive Supervisor Jon Ola Sand in the article as a justification for this construct, and the argument he puts forward that the fans did their (unpaid) work with pleasure, the question arises as to whether it is justifiable according to the journalism ethics and standards to remunerate journalistic work with any kind of experience gain.

This does not concern the EBU alone, but numerous newspaper and magazine editors who over the years have relied for their reporting on the (mostly unpaid) services of fans who were accredited in return. But how critical can journalism be when its remuneration consists of receiving accreditation and thus privileged access to rehearsals, press conferences and events around the competition from those you are reporting on? Does this possibly lead to a self-

censoring silencing a critical approach so as not to endanger one's own privileged access? Is this in line with the PSB principle of independent, free media reporting?

Also unresolved is the question of how to deal with copyright in the case of text, image and video materials created on a voluntary basis when, for example, photos are made available free of charge on eurovision.tv and used by print and online media for their own – paid or unpaid – reporting, which professional photojournalists such as the photographer Rolf Klatt note with concern (cf. Wolther, 2022). Are these to be treated as materials sent in by the audience with a transfer of the publishing and dissemination rights of the material to the broadcaster free of charge (for the legal situation in various European countries see (Franquet et al., 2013)? How can royalty claims be justified in the case of commercial use on the part of the authors, if, for example, the success of websites and social media channels is based on this voluntarily created image material and generating revenue from advertising?

In recent years, a whole cosmos of fan media has arisen on the basis of photographs and videos provided free of charge. These can be understood as part of a grassroots journalistic movement that has flourished on the ground prepared by the public broadcasters. In turn, many fan media believe that their voluntary work makes an essential contribution to keeping the media-staged (pseudo)media event ESC popular. Are these fan media to be understood in a certain way as an extended arm of the EBU and its member broadcasters? And are they therefore subject to special supervision and care?

In a book article on the "Eurobody", i. e. the corpus of factual ESC history and its references to other realities, the literary scholar Apostolos Lampropoulos underlines "[the fans'] insistence on the comforting depoliticization of the event" (Lampropoulos, 2013, p. 167) and defines queerness as a way of keeping the political discourse out of the competition, since queerness as a non-threatening political expression offers an alternative to other political issues that threaten the contest. Does volunteer journalism at the ESC tend to exclude politically sensitive issues that are preferred by professional journalists? And does it thus support the efforts of public broadcasters not to allow themselves and their programmes to be politically instrumentalized?

This further raises the question of how fan journalism can be reconciled with a certain editorial line. On 1 July 2022, Dave Goodman, Communications Lead for the Eurovision Song Contest

tweeted: "Today marks the start of a new era for the @Eurovision Song Contest. For the first time all the content on all our digital platforms will be created internally @EBU_HQ. We're looking for freelancers with great writing or video production skills too. Get in touch!" (Goodman, 2022). The EBU has made itself independent of external service providers, who in the past relied on fan journalists for economic reasons.

Goodman's tweet suggests that the EBU wants to regain interpretative sovereignty over the ESC with this step, which was already evident in an exclusive deal with the video platform TikTok that drastically reduced the possibility of rehearsal recordings and their distribution in social media. What is much more significant, however, is that it no longer talks about volunteers, but about freelancers who – hopefully – will be adequately remunerated for their journalistic work. So, are the days of fan journalism at the ESC numbered? Certainly not. The current media landscape offers lateral entrants an unprecedented permeability. Those who have worked their way up from journalistic amateurs to media professionals will also have the opportunity to prove themselves in the future – not as volunteers, but paid. However, one challenge remains for the public broadcasters, namely to raise the potential that can be gained from the professionalisation of these amateurs.

Supporting the ESC as a city event

Volunteers supporting the ESC as a city event have formed an important part of the ESC since the late 1990s (Feddersen & Werwinski, 2015). The Host Broadcaster(s) and Host City of each ESC edition recruit and rely on volunteer work in the run-up to the shows and during the event weeks across a range of areas and functions, from providing tourist and venue information, to accreditation and transport logistics, and hosting and supporting of national delegations and general press. Using readily available EBU³ and other data from various ESCs, the authors aim to provide a select and limited analysis of this practice in the light of criticisms that it may constitute exploitation, and would therefore not be in line with public service values.

³ Search for keyword 'volunteer' on the eurovision.tv website performed on 27 July 2022: <https://eurovision.tv/search?search=volunteer>

Hundreds apply every year to volunteer at the ESC. The volunteers, with ages ranging from 16 to over 70, provide unpaid work for the ESC Hosts, in different roles in the period of March to May. The majority are young adults, speaking different languages and wanting to meet people from different countries/cultures, looking to develop work experience (in the hope of increasing their chances of future employment), and with an interest in music and often already fans of Eurovision. The latter often cross national borders to offer their work, wanting to experience the backstage of the televised and city event. The reported number of volunteers, in the last 10 years, are around 500 volunteers per edition⁴. It was difficult to find data to put these numbers in perspective, in terms of the overall work force of the ESC. However, for the 2018 ESC in Lisbon, volunteer numbers were reported at 400, while 900 people are reported as being involved in the event, including staff, suppliers and artists (Farinha & Moutinho, 2018). Working with these numbers, we calculate the percentage of volunteers at 30 %. This may indicate a high reliance on unpaid work, but it is in keeping with other mega events, since, for example, the 2018 Winter Olympic Games had 28 % volunteers in its work force (Bada, 2018).

The tasks being required of a volunteer, indicated at the start of the section, are fairly similar across the different ESC editions, and often described as simple and routine tasks, both of a practical nature, but also of a symbolic and communicative nature (Stiernstedt & Golovko, 2019). However, the use of volunteering has raised labour relations issues in different countries hosting the ESC. Trade unions are often important voices in this debate. For example, in 2018, in Portugal, the CENA-STE trade union, which represents entertainment and audio-visual sector workers and musicians, criticised RTP, the Host Broadcaster, for promoting “bad and outdated work practices” recruiting volunteers for the ESC, and demanding that they have a work contract and remuneration, since this labour seem to be necessary for the event to happen, thus being roles that can be occupied by specialised and remunerated workers (DN/Lusa, 2018). The Union further connected this issue to systematic use by RTP of precarious work ties, noting that this was not in line with the important and essential public service broadcasting service. Volunteering for the 2022 ESC in Turin was also denounced as

⁴ The numbers we found besides those reported in the text are: 2010 Oslo, 500 volunteers; 2011 Düsseldorf, 500 volunteers employed from all over Germany and Europe; 2018 Lisbon, 400 volunteers; 2019, over 500 Israeli citizens were recruited to volunteer at the ESC in Tel Aviv; in the 2021 ESC Rotterdam 600 volunteers (many recruited for the 2020 cancelled edition) were required to support the organisation of the events, even with fewer visitors and reduced events due to the COVID-19 pandemic; for 2022 Turin used 600 volunteers.

part of non-ethical institutional practices and a range of protests took place against the use of unpaid work and volunteering to replace paid work at the Municipality of Turin, and other public and private organisations (Penna, 2022). These later accusations were possibly exacerbated by the post-COVID context, in which the cultural and creative workers were amongst those suffering the most in terms of loss on income and employment.

These issues are also picked up and argued on the online world, often via reporting and reactions on fan media outlets. Arguing for and against volunteering, issues of exploitation of low-level labour, expertise and competencies, commercial and charitable purpose, non-monetary/symbolic return/pay are often discussed. Online commenting on a Wiwibloggs article (ten Veen, 2019) on the topic illustrates well some opposing arguments. Against volunteering at the ESC, for example, the user Pandelis (2022) says: “Volunteerism has become another code word to dupe young people into providing free labour [...]. People should be PAID when they provide work. [...] I can only accept volunteering work in charity organisations that provide help to people in need”.

The association of volunteering with charity is strong and ‘showbiz’ does not fit the category – perhaps EBU, and the national broadcasters need to develop a better strategy to communicate the values and the need to protect public service media, particularly in entertainment. Others, supporting volunteering at the ESC, pick up on the issue of competency and expertise to perform a role and argue: “I disagree with the idea that volunteers are doing work on the same level as managers and executives. If they were, they would be paid employees. Volunteer work is so low level, so low skilled” (Amor, 2019). Adding to this argument, journalist and Eurovision expert, Emanuele Lombardini (2022), defends the practice saying: “[...] the presence of volunteers [at the ESC] [...] has always been a way to allow fans of the event to feel part of it when it arrives in their country, instead of just passively watching it in the arena”. He argues that volunteers are an intrinsic part of the event: the ESC “[...] would not exist without the volunteers, because the volunteers are part of the event, as much as the fans, the singers, the choreographers, the costumes and the journalists”. Despite these cyclical discussions, the high number of applicants to the volunteering positions every year indicates that they are sought after opportunities, appreciated by those directly involved.

It is undeniable that the use of volunteers brings economic advantages to the ESC Hosts in terms of savings made to public budgets (particular in a context of a very competitive media landscape) and does also generate earnings for those in charge of recruiting, hiring and training volunteers (Stiernstedt & Golovko, 2019). The ESC Hosts positively view and appreciate the work of volunteers. For example, the Volunteer Manager of the 2017 ESC Kyiv described them as friends and assistants (Eurovision.tv 2017). Also, the EBU recognises the importance of volunteers in enabling the ESC: *“Volunteers are an incredibly important part of the production of Europe's favourite TV show. Without them, it wouldn't be possible to produce such a large and dynamic music event”* (eurovision.tv, 2011). For those doing the volunteering, there are a range of benefits from engaging in this type of unpaid work. In objective terms there is some ‘in-kind’ payment for the volunteer work, which seems to be fairly standard across ESC editions, including: event t-shirt or relevant uniforms, meals, work insurance, certificate of participation, a ‘goody’ bag. EBU does highlight that “[v]olunteering provides candidates with unique experience and insight into the production of one of the largest television programmes in the world” (eurovision.tv, 2018). Therefore, it is no surprise that those with ambitions of working in television production, events and experience management, are drawn to these opportunities. However, non-work related motivations also apply: having fun (which also feeds into making personal memories, developing stories of and for self and others) and seeing what goes on behind the scenes (and make visible to others access to exclusive spaces), meeting new people from all over the world (developing personal experiences of international cultural relations), showcasing/representing their country/city (citizens ambassadors for city/country cultural diplomacy) and developing English and other language skills are also mentioned by volunteers as drivers for their application and as the ‘symbolic payment’ or ‘capital’ they get from being part of the ESC as volunteers.

In our conceptual considerations, we noted that integral to volunteering is a matter of personal investment and returns that make this experience worthwhile. The NPO spokesperson, in the context of the ESC 2020 Rotterdam volunteering recruitment process, admitted that the volunteering role demanded a lot from people, but explained that “the role also offers a special experience and a unique insight into the event at the same time. We are therefore looking for people who are interested in this investment in time because of their love for the Song Contest” (nos.nl, 2019). The continued high number of ESC volunteer

applicants seems to indicate that the return on their investment is worthwhile. However, there is more to be done by EBU and the ESC Hosts to explicitly and more broadly communicate how their volunteering practices are necessary to survive in a context of shrinking public budgets and that they are in line with the public service media mission to be of public benefit in terms of information, education, and entertainment.

Conclusions

The developments outlined in this paper raise many questions regarding the relationship between professional and non-professional actors in PSB television productions. In principle, the approach of opening up a competition such as the ESC to non-professional interested parties is in line with the basic democratic principles of the PSB, as in this way participation and involvement in the sense of public value is made possible. On the other hand, the question arises as to whether and when this opening may or must be reversed if the professionalism of the offer is thereby jeopardised – an aspect that is of decisive importance especially against the background of media convergence, since the tasks of the PSB will shift more strongly to the online area in the future.

The fact that professional and non-professional players can work together towards a common goal and contribute to the success of the competition is exemplified by the division of responsibility for song rating between viewers and expert juries. In the other areas examined, however, the involvement of non-professional or voluntary work proves to be more problematic.

Against the background of public value, television broadcasters need to be clear about the extent to which they see music promotion as a central task of public television – bearing in mind that a win-win situation for the competition itself can be generated from closer cooperation with musicians and the music industry, because despite all the rule changes, the ESC is still a music competition, and the excellence of the television show cannot be maintained in the long term without a corresponding excellence in music performance.

In the area of media work, public television cannot and must not continue to rely on volunteers and thus enter into unfair competition with journalists and photographers who

need to earn their living from their work. However, this does not mean that potentials discovered in the voluntary media work of fan journalists should not be used. Weighing up which media representatives should be allowed to benefit from privileges that the EBU thankfully grants them will remain a challenge. Solutions honouring the voluntary efforts of many fans need to be found, helping them to develop their journalistic skills to the benefit of the programme.

Finally, with regard to the voluntary work involved in supporting the ESC as a city event, the decision-makers need to make their efforts more transparent. It must be comprehensible to everyone that volunteer work within the framework of the ESC is not only justified by a special gain in experience, but also represents a contribution to the goals of public television and thus to public value and the society itself.

The Eurovision Song Contest offers public service broadcasters an enormous wealth of experience. A respectful way to acknowledge the work and commitment of its employees – whether they are full-time workers or volunteers – will be crucial for the future of public value in PSB.

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