

## The Development of Program Format Adaptation in Nordic Public Service Television

Heidi Keinonen<sup>1</sup>

University of Turku, Finland

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### Abstract

As highly standardized products of the commercialized and globalized television industry, program formats constitute a potential threat to public service broadcasting and national television industries. Despite their complex relationship with format imports and adaptations, public service broadcasters have produced format adaptations for decades. By examining the characteristics and development of format imports and adaptation in Finnish public service broadcasting, this article provides periodization from the 1960s to the 2020s. Finland is one of the Nordic Media Welfare States, but unlike its peers, it has had both commercial and public service television since the late 1950s, which resulted in a more competitive media environment. While formats provided many benefits to Yle, the Finnish public service broadcaster, they have also been a source of controversy for decades. Through periods of casual adaptations (1960s–1980s) as well as ambitious experimentation and long-lasting successes (1990s–2000s), Yle finally entered the age of format development and export in the 2010s.

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<sup>1</sup>  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1944-4894> | ✉ [heidi.keinonen@utu.fi](mailto:heidi.keinonen@utu.fi)

\* School of History, Culture and Arts Studies, University of Turku, Finland

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## 1. Introduction

Format adaptation has been claimed to contradict almost everything that public service broadcasting has historically stood for. Commercial global franchises that often represent entertainment genres have been claimed to constitute a potential threat to public service broadcasting and national television industries by importing highly standardized cultural products and eroding the creativity of local production companies (Jensen, 2013). Traditionally, PSB had to “serve the nation” and help to consolidate, build and transmit a national culture. In addition, in-house production has been favored and proudly emphasized (Bourdon, 2012). Nevertheless, public service broadcasters have produced format adaptations for decades, often with special focus on public services.

What exactly is this public service focus and how has it transformed over time? This study examines the characteristics and development of format adaptation in Finnish public service broadcasting from the 1960s to the 2020s. This study aims to shed light on the fluctuations and complexities of format adaptation in the public service context and, as a result, provide a periodization of format adaptation at the public service broadcaster Yle. This article presents numerous examples of format adaptation—innovative experimentations, success stories, and failures alike.

Research on television formats flourished in television studies in the late 2000s and the 2010s, but since then, it has mostly been replaced by issues related to streaming services and platformization. Overall, few publications have focused on format adaptation in the context of public service broadcasting (for example Jensen 2013; Esser & Jensen, 2015). However, the significance of program formats for the television industry has not diminished, and streaming services such as Netflix have entered the format business by producing multiple local adaptations of formats such as *Love*. Thus, this article contributes to the study of the globalization and transnationalization of media, and more specifically, to television studies and format studies.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. The Finnish media system

Finland is a small country with a population of 5.5 million. Situated in Northern Europe between Russia and Sweden, it is one of the Nordic Media Welfare States known for housing an adaptive public media sector with a high degree of legitimacy, complemented by domestically and globally successful media companies (Syvertsen et al., 2014). However, a unique national language distinguishes Finland from the neighbouring countries and the rest of the world.

Regular ad-funded television transmissions were launched by a group of radio engineers in 1956. Finland, along with the UK, was the one of the few European countries, which had both commercial and public service television. Yle’s television was established in 1958 with advertising-funded *Mainos-TV* (later *MTV*) leasing airtime from Yle’s channels. The Finnish broadcasting market was characterized by a

duopoly of public service and commercial television until the 1990s, when MTV got a channel of its own. The independent production sector emerged only after the great channel reform. Since then, the market has become more competitive with several linear television channels and streaming services. Now, both Yle and the commercial channels commission most of their fictional programming from independent production companies, which, in most cases, are subsidiaries of global media giants, such as Fremantle and Banijay.

The transformation was initiated in the 1980s, when Nordic party politics took a turn to the right transforming the media welfare state towards a competition state. In addition to the emerging neoliberalism, the Nordic Model was challenged by increasing globalization (Syvertsen et al., 2014). As the global format trade emerged in the 1990s, Finnish television companies were also adopting the trend and airing format adaptations. However, the number of format adaptations was relatively low during the first decade of the 2000s (Keinonen, 2018). While the 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed the export of a few Finnish formats, Finland has remained a net importer of program formats (Nylund, 2016).

## 2.2. Program format and format adaptation

In format studies, television format is defined as a program concept that has been sold and replicated outside its original territory. It is a complex cultural commodity, in which four dimensions can be identified. First, as format is a remake produced under license, it has a legal dimension. Second, format as a recipe combines immutable rules and principles with adaptable elements, but it also creates drama and an outcome week in and week out. Third, format is a proof-of-concept and, as such, provides risk management and predictability for television companies. Fourth, format as a method of production involves transfer of accumulated production expertise in the form of format bible and production consultancy (Chalaby, 2016). While all these dimensions can usually be identified in every program format, there is great variation in how detailed these dimensions are. Paper format, for example, is a format that has not yet been produced in the home market, and therefore, does not provide a track record. Similarly, a production format only includes information on the management and organization of a certain type of production, such as daily drama, while the content is created by the format buyer (Keinonen, 2017).

Most format scholars agree that the adaptation of television format is not simply about ‘filling the format with local content’ (Waisboard, 2004) but an interactive process including negotiation among different television cultures. Formats do not remain intact but are being developed by considering the experiences and innovations of different adaptations. Formats thus reflect the prominent characteristics of television cultures all over the globe—that is, the never-ending borrowings, inspirations and frequent exchanges of ideas and aesthetics (Agger, 2006). The need for adaptation is often explained by the idea of cultural proximity: viewers prefer programming that is culturally the most proximate (Straubhaar, 2007; see also Keinonen, 2009). The basic level of adaptation includes the translation of the texts and the use of national/local hosts, actors and participants, but in most cases, localization extends far beyond that and includes multiple sites and factors. The concept of cultural negotiation refers to a wide range of meaning-making processes within production, text, and reception, and includes both material and symbolic aspects.

Cultural negotiation thus includes business negotiations concerning the terms of the format contract, the discussions regarding adaptation, as well as the interpretation by the viewers (Keinonen, 2016a).

The global format industry is dominated by a relatively small number of giants, which develop and distribute formats, and produce local adaptations through their subsidiaries. A format can be acquired by a national television company for inhouse production or to be adapted by a local production company. Production companies may also pitch formats to the broadcasters. Due to the heavy outsourcing of program production format adaptations are now usually produced by production companies, which therefore balance between global influences and the national television cultures (Keinonen, 2016a). To commission a format adaptation, a broadcaster needs to find a format that matches the programming policy, target audience, and schedule.

Public service broadcasters and commercial broadcasters have different values, obligations and audiences (see Jensen 2009; Esser & Jensen, 2015). Adapting a commercial format to public service television thus usually demands careful consideration. Apart from differences in national and/or local cultures and production cultures, financial issues often contribute to the need for adaptation. Production budgets in Finland are usually far lower than in the other Nordic countries, not to mention the UK or US. Therefore, Finnish production companies need to find less expensive ways to produce the program while making sure that the overall look of the program remains the same (Keinonen, 2016a). As Aveyard et al. (2016, p. 5) summarize, “studying some of the many instances of broadcast remaking inside particular national boundaries over the longer term helps reveal more complex patterns of international contact than often supposed”. Studying the characteristics and development of format adaptation in Finnish public service broadcasting may thus reveal continuities and changes that illuminate the common patterns of globalization and transnationalization.

### 3. Method

The study builds on my previous research on format import and adaptation in Finland by combining the results with a new data set. The newly collected data contains thematic interviews, archival documents, and television texts. The data was collected in 2023–2024 for the Yle 100 Research Programme, which Yle launched to commemorate the company’s 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2026. The comprehensive four-year research project involves four Finnish universities. The Research Programme has granted me a unique access to Yle’s archives, personnel, and databases thus revealing new data that was not available during my previous projects.

The interviews with Yle’s producers and commissioners provided me with first-hand information about the processes of acquiring and adapting program formats at a public service broadcaster. As Bruun (2016) suggests, I consider my interviewees as exclusive informants. While the interviewees may represent cultural elite and act as “gatekeepers”, they differ from elite interviewees, who are expected to provide insight into the elite itself. My interviewees cannot be regarded as expert informants, either, as they cannot be replaced by other experts. Exclusive informants are irreplaceable (Bruun, 2016).

In the vein of triangulation, the interviews, archival documents, and television texts were analysed together. By combining earlier results and new data the article covers a period from the 1960s to the 2020s and provides a periodization of format import and adaptation at the public service broadcaster. The three periods (Casual format adaptation 1960s–1980s, Ambitious experimentation and long-lasting success 1990s–2000s, and Entering format development 2010s–) and their definitive characteristics are introduced by presenting examples from each period.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1. Casual format adaptations (1960s–1980s)

The roots of the program format trade have been traced all the way back to the 1940s' radio, but the credit of being the first television format has been given to *What's My Line*, which started on CBS in the United States in 1950. The quiz show was the first program, for which the broadcasting company acquired the concept, not only the scripts (Moran, 2013, 2016). In format research the decades from the 1950s to the 1980s/1990s have been described as a period of random or casual adaptations (Moran, 2013; Bourdon, 2012), and this also characterizes Yle's format adaptations until the end of the 1980s.

Yle's television inherited some of its genres, programming practices and personnel from public service radio, but the channel was also affected by the existence of commercial television. TES-TV, a regional television station operated by radio amateurs and funded by advertising, was already established, and Mainos-TV was leasing airtime from Yle's channel thus contributing to the establishment and funding of Yle's television. Therefore, public service television in Finland was born in a competitive environment. Both commercial television companies were adapting foreign program ideas as early as in the 1950s and 1960s—though without paying any license fees. Programs such as *Tupla ta kuitti* (*Double or quit*) and *Levyraati* (*Jukebox Jury*) became the longest-running shows on Finnish television (Keinonen, 2018). Scripted programs were also adapted early on. Mainos-TV acquired the scripts of the British sitcom *Hancock's Half Hour* and produced a Finnish adaptation titled *Kaverukset* in 1962–1963. Despite high viewer ratings, the show was cancelled after two years as the scripts were not particularly suited for the main actor's acting style. However, the main character lived on in a spin-off series written by a Finnish scriptwriter (Keinonen, 2009).

These early 'pre-formats' represent, as Moran states (2015), a regime in which sporadic and incidental imitation was widespread in television industries. However, it was apparently Yle who first contracted a format for legal adaptation. *Romper Room* was created in the United States in the 1950s and soon thereafter licensed by several broadcasters both in the US and abroad. The show is often named as one of the earliest television formats (Moran, 2009).

After TES-TV (later Tesvisio) encountered financial difficulties, Yle acquired the company and transformed it into television channel 2 in the mid 1960s. A few years later, TV2 was aiming to increase the amount of children's programming but was struggling with a restricted budget and the lack of staff at

the Department of Entertainment. Licensing a program format appeared as a cost-effective solution, and, instead of developing a new children's programme Yle TV2 decided to rely on an adaptation of *Romper Room*. The show was aired by the name of *Tenavatuokio/Toddler Trice* in 1968–1969 and 1973–1974, and produced inhouse, as all the programs at that time. *Tenavatuokio* was characterized as the biggest renewal of the channel in the spring season of 1968. Unlike any other children's program on Yle, *Tenavatuokio* was broadcast three times a week at the request of the distributor (Keinonen, 2016b).

The title of show provides an excellent example of cultural negotiation. Despite being a format franchise, *Tenavatuokio* was drawing from the existing national television culture as the title had a long history in Finnish television. Both the commercial broadcaster Mainos-TV and the local television station Tamvisio had broadcast children's programming using the same title in the 1950s and 1960s. While these shows had nothing to do with *Romper Room*, the title was already known by the audience and thus capable of producing cultural proximity for the new program (Keinonen, 2016b).

The episodes consisted of games, book readings, and other activities with children. The hostess of the show was a central figure in adapting the program format: she translated the English scripts in Finnish and introduced new ideas to the program. However, the British producer and scriptwriter of *Romper Room*, Joy Thwaytes, visited Finland and supervised the production carefully. In addition to scripts, the format package included props and kindergarten furniture, various materials and ideas, musical tapes or discs as well as promotional material. The *Romper Room* toys, such as bee puppets, hobbyhorses, roundabouts and musical instruments played a major part in the show. They also became one of the main sites of cultural negotiation, as they provoked discussion in the press and in the Department of Entertainment: the excessive amount of the toys as well as their foreign origin was criticized. The toys caused controversy also because they were not available in Finland. Throughout the production, Yle aimed at adapting the program to the Finnish context. Despite being a popular children's program, *Tenavatuokio* did not quite meet the educational objectives of the public service broadcaster. When the program was cancelled in 1974, it was replaced by original content (Keinonen, 2016b).

During the period of casual format adaptations, only few formats were licensed and adapted in Finland. Even fewer became long-lasting hits—others were replaced by original programming. However, it is noteworthy that the public service broadcaster was paving the way in establishing authorized format adaptations and, consequently, format trade in Finland.

#### **4.2. Ambitious experimentation and long-lasting success (1990s–2000s)**

According to Moran (2013), Chalaby (2012) and Bourdon (2012), the systematic format trade was established in the 1980s and 1990s. The change was linked to the adoption of new distribution technologies, such as cable and satellite television and the overall commercialization of broadcasting which increased the demand for content (Moran, 2013). This was also the time of increasing globalization in television industry.

In Finland, the professional format trade started in the 1990s with the import of formats such as *The Wheel of Fortune* (*Onnenpyörä*, MTV3, 1993-2001), *The Lyrics Board* (*Bumtsibum!* MTV3, 1997-2005) and *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* (*Haluatko miljonääriksi*, Nelonen 1999-2004, MTV3, 205-2007, Nelonen, 2016-) (Keinonen, 2018). It was the commercial television companies who were adapting the global hits, but Yle was also establishing a more active format policy. As Tiina Rautkorpi has stated, two major transformations led to this. The first was the big channel reform in 1993, when MTV removed its programs from Yle channels to MTV3 channel. Four years later, another commercial channel called Nelonen was established. As a result, a more competitive era for Yle was launched and the field of independent production companies grew and became more diverse. Second, Yle's obligation of providing diverse programming was included in the new Yle law. Because of these two changes, Yle aimed at both standardizing program production and producing diverse content (Rautkorpi, 2011).

In the 1990s, Yle's interest in formats was often characterized by technological experimentation. *Hugo* (1993–1995), for example, was an interactive game show for children. The program was an adaptation of the Danish *Skærmtrølden Hugo* format, in which players controlled a troll character by telephone keyboard on live television broadcast. It was one of the first interactive games in the 1990s (Yle, 2020/2021). Interactivity was also experimented in a drama production titled *Kahden vaiheilla* (1994), which was an adaptation of South American Globo TV's format *Voce Decide* (You decide) (Veiga-Pires 1994). Every episode consisted of a pre-recorded drama based on scripts that were included in the format package and adapted to Finland. The drama inserts alternated with live studio broadcasts in which the host introduced the story and two optional solutions for the dilemma. The viewers were able to vote for the preferred solution by telephone. The ending that gained more votes was then aired at the end of the episode (Yle, 1994; T. Tuovinen, personal communication, May 10, 2024). The storylines often involved moral dilemmas that concerned family-life or romantic relationships. As Timoteus Tuovinen (personal communication, May 10, 2024), who discovered the format while working at Yle's international program acquisition department recalls, it was the morality-like character of the stories as well as the opportunity to experiment with interactivity that made Yle license the format. The show did not, however, find its audience (Tuominen, 1994).

Another format adaptation titled *Pilkkopimeetä* (1997) provides an interesting example in which the long tradition of cooperation between the Nordic public service broadcasters was combined with the globalizing format trade and an efficient production machine. The adaptation of a British-Japanese format featured contestants performing tasks in a dark room. The show was shot by using a new BVS (Behind the Visible Spectrum) technology, which enabled the viewers to see what happened in the room. *Pilkkopimeetä* also pioneered as the first so-called 'carousel production' at Yle: four Nordic public service broadcasters recorded their shows at the SVT studio in Gothenburg, Sweden, by using the same cameras and staging, and thus considerably decreasing their production costs (Yle, 1997; Yle, 2009). The practice of shooting multiple adaptations of big reality formats in dedicated 'production hubs' became more common in the 2000s.

Yle was also interested in experimenting with genre hybrids and reality television. Jean K. Chalaby (2016) states that format trade and reality television became intertwined in the late 1990s when *Survivor*, one of the so-called super formats emerged, but, in fact, earlier examples do exist. The novelty of *Heartmix* (1996), the adaptation of Music Television's *The Real World* format, laid in the combination of scripted material and the real live events of the participants. The show was shot mainly in San Francisco, where seven young Finns shared a house. The production pursued to be quick and depict the events in real time: the episodes were shot and edited on location and aired within two weeks from shooting. The format was pitched to Yle by the production company, but as the collaboration reached a dead end and the show did not manage to find its target audience, it was cancelled after the first season (Yle, 1996; Yle, n.d.a; Yle, n.d.b; O. Tola, personal communication, February 1, 2024; Ruoho, 2001; Hautakangas, 2007).

While most of the format adaptations only lived for one season, some of them became the most successful programs at Yle. These include *Uutisvuoto* (1998–2018), an adaptation of the British comedy quiz show *Have I Got News for You*. In this comedy panel, two teams consisting of permanent captains and changing members compete in identifying the news of the week. The first reactions to the show were dubious, which may also explain why *Uutisvuoto* was never promoted as a format adaptation. However, the popularity of the program along with the overall internationalization of Finnish television culture brought about a more permissible approach towards format adaptations at Yle (Keinonen, 2018). Another example of a successful format adaptation is *Tartu mikkiin*, a localization of the Danish musical game show *Grib Mikrofonen*, which was aired by TV2 in 2006–2015. Despite a few exceptions, such as *Kahden vaiheilla*, format adaptations in 1990s and early 2000s were mainly pitched and produced for Yle by independent production companies.

The early 2000s saw a surge of the so-called super formats (*Who wants to be a Millionaire/Haluatko miljonääriksi*, Nelonen 1999–2005, 2016–2020, 2022, 2023 and MTV3 2005–2007; *Popstars*, MTV3 2002, 2004; *Idols/Idols Suomi*, MTV3 2003–2013; *Big Brother*, Sub 2005–2014) in Finnish television, but all these formats were aired by commercial channels. The overall number of format adaptations on Yle's channels remained few (Keinonen, 2018). Despite adopting a more active format policy, aiming for a diverse programming, and experimenting with technology and interactivity in the 1990s, Yle still had a complex relationship with format industry. The few successful format adaptations were not able to establish formats as a permanent part of Yle's programming.

### 4.3. Entering format development (2010s–)

In the early 2000s, a realization occurred at Yle, that some of the company's longest running and popular program, such as *Uutisvuoto* and *Tartu mikkiin*, were format adaptations. There had been a discussion about the need to deliver international quality content to younger target audiences. While this need was, in part, met by airing HBO's quality dramas, there was also an attempt to raise the bar in original programming. In addition, the taste of the Finnish audience had become more international. Thus, the changes at Yle and in the surrounding media environment resulted in a more transnational programming

policy. In 2012, Yle established a ‘format team’ to search for formats that would fit public service programming. The selected formats would then be adapted as inhouse productions (Keinonen, 2018).

As the team described, the main criteria for selecting formats were the originality of the content, adaptability, and the track record (especially in the Nordic countries which still provide a benchmark for Yle). The acquisition of format rights was often hindered by the cost of the license fees which could be as high as 30.000–60.000 euros. Also, the fact that many formats include product placement, which is not allowed at Yle, lead to a significant increase in production budgets. Cultural negotiation also concerned the program content. Yle’s 58-minute program slot posed dramaturgic challenges, as most formats were written for 22-minute slots with commercial breaks. Obviously, program formats also needed to meet the public service values, which at that time meant that they were able to combine facts with emotions or include a societal dimension which provided the audience food for thought and an opportunity to participate in public debate (Keinonen, 2018). As Pia Majbritt Jensen states, in adaptation ‘formats are made to correspond with their respective broadcaster and channel’s identity’ (Jensen, 2013). In this case, the products of the commercial format industry had to be localized for not only to the Finnish audience but also to the public service ethos.

The establishment of the format team as well as a number of successful format adaptations, such as the standup competition *Naurun tasapaino* (*Show Me The Funny*, 2013–2015), further contributed to more favourable opinions regarding Yle’s format appropriation. However, Yle was still trying to find a balance between the public service values and the competitive television environment. The fragile nature of this balance was clearly indicated by the adaptation of the British format *Got to Dance* (*Pakko tanssia*, 2013).

As earlier research has shown, it was only around 2010, that the number of format adaptations in Finnish television saw a significant increase (Keinonen, 2018). Various talent show formats, including those featuring dance, had grown into global franchises and popular culture phenomena. In Finland, commercial channels were airing adaptations of *Got Talent*, *Idols* and *The Voice*. Yle had also been looking for a big entertainment format and eventually decided to commission *Pakko tanssia*, which had the potential to attract different demographics, and particularly the huge number of Finnish dance enthusiasts. A few months before the show went on air in early 2013, the format ignited an intense public debate. Finnish tabloids published articles questioning the legitimacy of Yle adapting international formats instead of developing ‘local’ content. This contributed to negative audience expectations, and the shiny-floor dance show failed to attract large audiences (A. Nurmi, personal communication, January 24, 2024; Keinonen, 2016b; Keinonen, 2018).

*Pakko tanssia* was cancelled after the first season. A member of the format team and the executive producer of the show at EndemolShine Finland both believe, that the public debate resulted in low audience ratings. In addition, the newly emerged digital channels and social media outlets were taking their share of the viewers’ spare time. Thus, the adaptation was rather a victim of the ongoing public debate about the funding and obligations of public service broadcasting, than a failure in itself. At Yle, the show was considered a legitimate choice as it featured a variety of dance styles, including wheelchair

dance, which made it well suited with the public service values. (A. Nurmi, personal communication, January 24, 2024; Keinonen, 2018; Keinonen, 2016). Unlike the Danish public service broadcaster DR, which adapted traditional entertainment formats, such as *X Factor*, *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, and *Strictly Come Dancing* (Esser & Jensen, 2015), Yle emphasized the public service aspect.

The decision to cancel *Pakko tanssia* eased the tension between the public service broadcaster and the commercial television companies. In addition, Yle reconsidered its format policy: the format team was dismantled and Yle decided to focus on format development. The complex relationship with program formats was normalised and formats were established as part of the daily work in every genre. All these changes would not have been possible without the accomplishments of the format team and the knowhow acquired through format adaptation (A. Nurmi, personal communication, January 24, 2024; Keinonen, 2018). For Yle, the value of format adaptations lies not just in the opportunity to air popular programs. The appropriation of foreign program formats has provided Yle with the knowledge and skills needed in developing Finnish formats that can travel abroad. Scanning the global format trade has also taught local producers to evaluate the format potential of their own programs as well as to develop scalable and streamlined production processes (Keinonen, 2018).

While Yle still airs a few popular format adaptations, such as *Sohvaperunat* (2015–), the Finnish adaptation of the British reality show *Gogglebox*, which features ordinary people watching television and commenting the shows in their own living rooms, they have also managed to establish themselves as format developers and to create programs that have caught the attention of international buyers. *Mental* (Sekasin, 2016–2021) is a youth drama developed by Yle and a production company called It's Alive Films. Located in a closed ward at a psychiatric hospital, the series feature stories that are based on the real-life experiences of recovering mental health patients. Local adaptations of the show have been produced in France and Germany (Yle, 2016/2016).

After completing four seasons on Yle, the hospital drama *Syke* (Nurses, 2014–2017) was commissioned by the Finnish commercial broadcaster Nelonen. It has also been remade in Sweden with the title *Syrror*. *SuomiLOVE* (2014–2022) is a sentimental music entertainment show in which the attendants surprise their loved ones with the performances of their favourite songs. The show, developed in collaboration with Warner Bros. International Television Production Finland, attracted huge audiences on Yle's channels. Adaptations of the format titled *Soundtrack of Love* have already been produced in Belgium, Estonia, Switzerland and Cyprus. After the show was cancelled by Yle, the Finnish commercial channel MTV3 started to air the show in 2024 (A. Nurmi, personal communication, January 24, 2024; Warner Bros. International Television Production Finland, 2024). While it's not uncommon that formats developed by Yle travel to other Finnish channels, this was the first time a big Finnish entertainment show outweighed the global hit shows.

By scouting, commissioning, producing, and airing numerous format adaptations for decades Yle has increased the respective knowledge both inhouse and in production companies. Since 2010s they have also contributed to the development and export of Finnish program formats. While the public service

context has not been an easy ground for the import and adaptation of foreign formats, it has proved to be a unique asset in terms of format export. The Nordic public service broadcasters from Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland have coproduced television programs for decades and thus established permanent forms of collaboration. In recent years, the public service broadcasters have granted each other access to their program formats before they introduce the formats at the international trade markets. The Nordic network thus advances the sale of Finnish programs abroad (Keinonen, 2018). However, Finland has not yet been able to mimic the success of Swedish and Danish Nordic noir dramas, which have travelled the world as ready-mades and remakes (cf. Hill, 2016).

## 5. Conclusions

This article set out to examine the characteristics of format adaptation in public service broadcasting and, as a result, to produce a periodization of format adaptation at Yle. Public service broadcasting represents a deviant case in the globalized and commercialized television industry—public service values and public funding often entail a mixed format policy which demands more cultural negotiation than the revenue-driven approach of the commercial broadcasters. However, format trade is not an unknown territory for public service broadcasters.

It is noteworthy, that unlike the commercial television companies in Finland, Yle entered format import quite early by adopting the US children's program *Romper Room*. The adaptation marks the beginning of legal format trade in Finnish television. Nevertheless, the period from the 1960s to the 1980s can be described as a time of casual adaptations, as only a few localizations were broadcast on Yle's channels. The programming consisted mainly of original inhouse productions and imported ready-mades. The 1990s witnessed a remarkable transformation, and the decade was characterized by various technological experiments. While the increase in the number of format adaptations may have been modest, the programs introduced new forms of participation and reality television. The most innovative shows were rather short-lived, but format adaptations representing more traditional genres, such as comedy panel and game show, became successes in the early 2000s.

For the first 15 years of the new millennium, Yle had an extremely complex relationship with format import and adaptation. The establishment of the so-called format group did not bring a sudden change, but over time, popular format adaptations and the lessons learned from format trade helped in establishing formats in Yle's programming. Finally, around 2015, Yle entered the format export with some home-grown programmes that sold abroad. For Yle, the adaptation of foreign program formats (in addition to the increasing sale of ready-made drama), was a central way to become a serious player in the international television market (see also Jensen, 2013).

As Esser and Jensen (2015) have demonstrated, there is great variation between PSBs in terms of format policy. Yle has been prioritizing the public service values by airing diverse programs with a socio-cultural dimension. As the results of this study demonstrate, one can also find great temporal variation within each public service broadcaster. While PSBs are losing their specificity and becoming increasingly similar to

other (commercial) media companies, they are still the leading figures in their respective media markets. Therefore, the analysis of their format appropriation also sheds light to the complexities of the surrounding national television industries.

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### About the author

**Heidi Keinonen** is a Senior Research Fellow at the School of History, Culture and Arts Studies at the University of Turku, Finland. Her areas of expertise include television studies, media industry research, broadcasting, and media history. She has been doing research on media and teaching Media Studies at the universities of Turku and Tampere since 2004.