

# ‘Being a drama producer is not in the least artistic work’ – Adopting streaming production culture at the Finnish public service broadcaster

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## Abstract

Since the early 2010s, the emergence of global streaming platforms has introduced new strategies and practices in the production of drama series. The new paradigm, here titled as streaming production culture, has penetrated even the so-called legacy television companies, such as Nordic public service broadcasters. This article seeks to establish streaming production culture as an analytical concept that brings together two recent transformations in the television industry: platformisation and transnationalisation. The conceptualisation is legitimated by examining the adoption and impact of streaming production culture at Yle, the Finnish public service broadcaster. An analysis of thematic interviews with producers and managers, complemented by additional data sources provides detailed examples of how streaming has transformed the publishing, budgeting and financing, co-producing, development, and marketing of Yle’s drama series. In this process, Yle’s producers have shifted from being creators of in-house drama to facilitators of content produced by independent production companies.

## Keywords

streaming, platformisation, transnationalisation, public service broadcasting, television production

## Introduction

During the last decade television production in Europe experienced several major transformations. The emergence of transnational streaming platforms fundamentally altered not only the consumption but also the production, funding, and distribution of drama series. New strategies and practices introduced by the subscription video on-demand (SVOD) services have gradually

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penetrated even the established production cultures, such as those of the Nordic public service broadcasters. This increasingly common mode of production is here called ‘streaming production culture’. This article aims to introduce streaming production culture as an analytical concept, in which two of the main transformations of television industry, platformisation and transnationalisation, are merged.

As Gary Edgerton (2023) states, in the US, television industries entered the era of TVIV in 2013 when Netflix started to emerge as a ‘legitimate content creator and industry leader’ instead of merely providing a SVOD library. TVIV is characterised by streaming as technological, industrial, aesthetic, cultural and consumptive practice. The latest stage in television development reflects a post-Fordist economic model preferring first-order commodity relations via subscriptions and the dematerialisation of television and video content through transition to virtual transactions, a commitment to neo-liberal deregulation and consolidation and the realignment of the relationship between Hollywood studios and Silicon Valley technology and entertainment giants. By adopting a transnational general entertainment strategy Netflix has brought TVIV also in other parts of the world (Edgerton, 2023: 131). In her study on public service broadcasting in Norway Vilde Schanke Sundet confirms Edgerton’s argument by stating that streaming has fundamentally changed the rules of the game, forcing national media companies to adapt to the standards and strategies of their international competitors (Schanke Sundet, 2021: 34–35).

As an analytical concept, streaming production culture brings together two major developments in screen industry: platformisation and transnationalisation. Rooted in the emergence of digital communication networks, platformisation refers to the rise of the platform as a dominant infrastructural and economic model of the social web (Helmond, 2015). Streaming services and social media platforms, which previously complemented linear broadcast and theatrical cinema, have now taken centre stage. Platformisation involves institutional shifts in markets, infrastructures, and governance, as the design of platform’s business model shapes its economic environment (Helmond, 2015; Poell et al., 2022: 7, 38). Unlike social media platforms, such as YouTube and Facebook, which depend on user-generated content, Netflix and other SVOD services operate as closed online TV services. However, they both are characterised by the use of recommendation algorithms and gathering user data through the service (Lobato, 2019: 36–37). The emergence of streaming services and other platforms has also had similar impacts on professional practices, production models, and the management of content production (see e.g. van Dijck and Poell, 2015). These impacts can be described as the platformisation of culture, a concept introduced by Jeremy Wade Morris (2020) when analysing the ways in which cultural goods and user practices are re-formatted to adopt to the pressures of platformisation.

Platformisation is integrally intertwined with transnationalisation. As SVOD services crossed national boundaries, they created a more globally oriented television market. Schanke Sundet (2021: 34–35) identifies four challenges global streaming services have posed for the national broadcasters in the context of drama production: (1) retaining the audience, (2) creating world-class content, (3) gaining visibility, and (4) securing content rights. Netflix with its impressive scale is placing severe pressure on European broadcasters and pay-TV services (Iordache et al., 2022: 237; see also Raats and Iordache, 2020: 8). However, by contesting the dominance of English-language drama, streaming services have also provided national television companies with new opportunities in financing, production, and distribution. As a result, the internet era has seen a significant rise in international co-productions, particularly for high-end drama, and in global success for European productions (Johnson, 2019: 90; Barra and Scaglione, 2020: 16, 20–21; Schanke Sundet, 2021).

The two intertwining dimensions of streaming production culture, platformisation and transnationalisation, have had profound, and sometimes contradicting, impacts on the production and

aesthetics of public service drama. In this article these impacts are conceptualised through the notion of streaming production culture and examined by analysing the transformations of drama production at the Finnish public service broadcaster Yle. Before presenting the results, Yle's role within the Finnish media market will be briefly outlined. Following the description of the empirical data and methodological approach, the article discusses the early evolution of platformisation and transnationalisation in Yle's drama production from 2015 onwards. The effects of adopting streaming production culture are illustrated with numerous examples.

## Yle as a public service broadcaster

Finland is situated in the Northern Europe and known as one of the Nordic media welfare states characterised by a strong, yet adaptive, public media complemented by both domestic and global commercial media companies (Syvertsen et al., 2014: 2). With a current population of 5,5 million and a distinctive national language Finland has a rather small media market.

Yle was established in 1926 as a radio broadcaster with public funding and public service remit to inform, educate, and entertain. In 1958 the company introduced regular television transmissions. While Yle was not allowed to air advertising, the high costs of establishing a television network were covered by leasing airtime to a commercial television company called MTV. Until the channel reform in 1993 which granted MTV its own designated channel, Finnish television was characterised by a duopoly of public service and commercial television. During its first four decades, Yle's television relied heavily on in-house production. However, from the 1990s onwards with the emergence of a private production sector, Yle gradually shifted towards commissioning external content. This transformation had already begun in the 1980s, when Nordic party politics shifted to the right, turning the media welfare state into a competition state (Syvertsen et al., 2014: 10–11). For Yle, the 1990s was a period of development and experimentation in serial television drama and entertainment (Keinonen, 2025).

In 2007 a number of new channels emerged as television transmission was digitised. At the same time, domestic and transnational streaming services entered the market. Yle's BVOD (broadcaster video on-demand) service Yle Areena was also launched in 2007. Currently, Yle is financed through a broadcasting tax. With an annual budget of about €550 million (in 2024), Yle plays a central role in supporting the domestic creative industries (Yle, 2025). In 2025, Yle remains the only Finnish public service broadcaster operating three linear television channels. It competes for the audiences with 14 commercial free-to-air linear channels and several streaming platforms, including global giants, such as Netflix and Disney+, as well as domestic services such as Elisa Viihde Viaplay. There are also dozens of pay-TV channels, however in Finland pay-TV subscriptions have largely focused on sports and have never reached the level seen in the other Nordic countries.

## Methods and materials

The study draws from production studies, a relatively small research tradition within television studies and media studies. As John T. Caldwell formulates, production culture is understood as 'the cultural practices and belief systems of film/video production workers'. These practices and beliefs reflect the dual nature of production culture: while television production is influenced by macroscopic economic processes, they also function on a microsocial level as local cultures in their own right (Caldwell, 2008: 1–2). Therefore, media production is explained as 'creativity within constraints', and media workers are simultaneously described as the creators of popular culture and as the functionaries of capitalism. While production studies borrow from social sciences and

humanities, they place the lived realities of people involved in media production at the centre when theorising production as culture. Production studies thus build on the analysis of empirical data about production (Mayer et al., 2009: 2–4).

As this study explores the adoption of streaming production culture at Yle, it analyses the practices and beliefs of those involved in the company's drama production. The data for the research were collected in 2023 and 2024 as part of the Yle 100 Research Programme which was established to commemorate and celebrate the company's centenary. The programme provided a unique access to Yle's personnel and archives. Researchers from the Yle and culture sub-project conducted and analysed approximately 80 thematic interviews with current and former Yle production personnel and management. As the sub-project investigated Yle 's role in producing, mediating and preserving culture over the past 100 years across different platforms, the interview themes varied depending on each researcher's objectives and interviewees' expertise. Eight of these interviews, addressing the financing, production, and distribution of drama series, were analysed for this article. Two of the interviews involved two participants, while the remaining seven were conducted individually. Interviewee titles included Creative Director, Head of Drama, Producer, Executive Producer, Commissioner, and Production Manager. While all the interviewees provided a written informed consent, not all agreed to the publication of their names; therefore, the interview data have been anonymised.

All the interviewees are considered as exclusive informants, as they have irreplaceable information about the subject. While this kind of data gives access to the 'backstage' of the production, it may also be highly personal (Bruun, 2016). Hence, the interview data was complemented with personal communications, Yle's annual reports, production documents archived by Yle Drama, and a selection of Yle's drama series published between 2015 and 2024. A close reading and thematic analysis of the data offers rich details of the adoption of streaming production culture at a public service broadcaster. As a result, the impacts of adopting streaming production culture were arranged in five thematic categories: publishing, budgeting and financing, co-producing, marketing, and content development.

While a few studies have examined the impact of streaming services on established production cultures (see Navar-Gill, 2020; D'Arma et al., 2021; Schanke Sundet, 2021; Idiz, 2024), research on how streaming production culture alters the creative practices in European fiction production remains scarce (Idiz, 2024: 2130). This study contributes to the field of production studies by introducing streaming production culture as a new analytical concept, but also by providing a detailed account of the transformations in the everyday work of drama producers. Furthermore, it enhances understanding of the mechanisms of platformisation and transnationalisation in the contemporary screen industries.

## **Entering the age of platformisation and transnationalisation**

As the definition of streaming production culture suggests, its adoption at Yle represented a two-fold transformation. Year 2015 marked a new and intensified period of platformisation and transnationalisation in drama production. At Yle, platformisation entailed prioritising the streaming service over broadcast television. Yle launched the BVOD (broadcaster video on-demand) service Yle Areena in 2007 – around the same time as Channel 4, BBC, and RAI established their online television services (Chalaby, 2022: 227). Initially, Yle Areena functioned as a catch-up service: series were made available for a limited time after their television broadcast. Many national broadcasters struggled to build their catalogues and recommendation systems as quickly as stand-alone streaming services, and therefore continued to rely on their linear channels well into the 2010s.

Yle became a pioneer among European media companies when it began experimenting with full-season release on Yle Areena in 2014. While drafting a new publishing policy, Yle monitored the strategies employed by both global streamers and other Nordic public service broadcasters (interview February 5, 2024; Leino, 2021: 70–71; Johnson, 2019: 59; see also Schanke Sundet, 2021: 6). Since 2015, the internet has been considered equal to radio and television for all content distribution, and Yle Areena has been designated the primary release platform for full drama series seasons (interview 5 February 2024; interview 2 December 2024; Hokka, 2024: 55–56; Leino, 2021: 70–71).

Transnationalisation was embraced at Yle through new models of financing, co-production, and distribution. The company has played a leading role in the internationalisation of Finnish drama production while also seeking recognition as a player in the global screen industry (see Grundström et al., 2020). The year 2015 stands as a watershed moment not only for platform adoption but also for Yle's transnational engagement. In 2014, Yle signed its first multi-territory distribution deal for *Tellus* (2014), a six-episode drama on ecoterrorism. Originally not intended for international distribution, the series caught the attention of Germany's ZDF Enterprises, which sought to expand into the Finnish market. *Tellus* was later broadcast in Germany, Sweden, and Norway, among others (Yleisradio Oy, 2015: 9, 12; interview 15 November 2023). A few years later, Yle aired *Sorjonen* (*Bordertown*, 2016–2020), an international co-production with large-scale distribution via Netflix. These series paved the way for the transnational financing, production, and distribution of Finnish drama series (interview 1 February 2024; interview 5 February 2024; Grundström et al., 2020). The rise of streaming platforms increased international interest in Finnish drama and triggered a shift that ultimately led to the dismantling of Yle's in-house drama production (interview, 2 December 2024).

The roots of this development can be traced back to the late 1990s and the implementation of a commissioning model, influenced by neo-liberal globalisation and a more market-oriented approach in media and cultural policy, including public service broadcasting (Keinonen, 2025; McGuigan, 2005). In 2015, a new Head of Drama was appointed, whose vision of positioning Yle as a key exporter of Finnish drama aligned with the ambitions of the Creative Director. Together, they drove the shift from in-house production to commissioning. Company strategy was adjusted to support internationalisation, for instance by allocating increased resources to script development (interview, 5 February 2024; interview, 2 December 2024; Yleisradio Oy, 2014: 8; Yleisradio Oy, 2015: 8–11).

However, the success of Nordic noir could not be replicated without external funding. To increase budgets, Yle expanded commissioning, as production companies were able to access a broader range of funding sources and negotiate more competitive agreements with actors and production crew than Yle could internally. With external funding – such as national and regional production incentives – a budget of €1.5 million could be raised to €3.5 million, while Yle retained exclusive rights as the main commissioner (interview, 2 December 2024). In-house drama production was almost entirely phased out. This shift was reinforced by a parliamentary working group report recommending a 30–35% increase in external commissioning by 2022 (LVM, 2016: 3; Yleisradio Oy, 2017: 7). Drama was particularly affected, as it was well-suited to external commissioning (interview, 5 February 2024; interview, 2 December 2024).

Today, both Yle and commercial broadcasters commission nearly all of their fiction content from independent production companies – many of which are subsidiaries of global media conglomerates such as Fremantle and Banijay. Large-scale in-house drama production at Yle is no longer feasible: production facilities have been dismantled, most experienced directors have retired, and new ones have not been hired. Aside from youth genres, the latest in-house drama serial was the satirical spy comedy *Pysäyttäkää Nyqvist* (*Stop Nyqvist*, 2022) (interview, 15 November 2023; interview, 22 November 2023; interview, 18 January 2024; interview, 1 February 2024).

## Impacts of streaming production culture

The following sections examine the impacts of streaming production culture on Yle's drama production and on the daily working practices of drama producers. The analysis is structured into five thematic areas: publishing, budgeting and financing, co-producing, content development, and marketing.

### *Publishing*

The first category of impacts within Yle's production culture concerns publishing. As audiences today expect to access content anytime, anywhere, streaming requires broadcasters to acquire flexible and long-term publishing rights. Such rights also offer room to experiment with new platforms and publishing models (Schanke Sundet, 2021: 44).

In the early years of Yle Areena, both international and domestic series were typically made available for only a few weeks. As global streaming services began acquiring multi-year rights for entire series, this practice gradually opened the door for Yle and other broadcasters to pursue similar deals (Leino, 2021: 76). Over the past decade, there has been a marked shift in rights agreements: in 2015, Yle commonly signed 3-year contracts, whereas by 2024, it was negotiating rights lasting between 7 and 15 years (interview, 5 February 2024). For Yle, the key issues in rights negotiations are the length of the viewing window and the exclusivity of rights – meaning that, during the agreed period, content can only be accessed via Yle's platforms. As a public service broadcaster, Yle aims to best serve the needs of taxpayers. Accordingly, the designation of Yle Areena as the primary release platform also accelerated the outsourcing of drama production. In-house productions required Yle to pay what were described as 'unreasonable sums' for exclusive cross-platform rights, while independent production companies could negotiate more favourable terms with creative personnel (interview, 18 January 2024; interview, 1 February 2024).

This outsourcing significantly transformed the producers' role and authorship. In the mid-2010s, the data-driven nature of streaming platforms initially appeared to offer Hollywood television writers greater creative freedom than traditional broadcasters. While creativity and data might seem at odds, streaming services managed to intertwine the two to successfully position themselves within the market for television-style content (Navar-Gill, 2020: 2). However, this was not how Yle producers experienced the transition. Rather than focussing on creating and producing drama series, they increasingly found themselves negotiating publishing rights, supporting externally commissioned productions, and pitching projects to potential funders. Their work shifted away from internal productions and towards the independent sector (interview, 18 January 2024).

When the previous Commissioner of Drama retired, the Head of Drama assumed his responsibilities, thereby overseeing both in-house productions and commissions. Since then, this individual has acted as Executive Producer or Commissioner for nearly all drama series. While this consolidation of authority streamlined decision-making and reduced conflicts over budgeting and responsibilities (interview, 15 November 2023), it also resulted in a notable erosion of producers' influence. Some producers expressed frustration at feeling reduced to secretarial roles, merely relaying information between the Commissioner and production companies. One producer bitterly remarked that 'being a drama producer is not in the least artistic work'. Others, however, found the constant cultural and organisational changes both exhausting and inspiring, as they enabled experimentation across different genres and roles (interview, 18 January 2024).

The prioritisation of BVOD releases led to a deepening of datafication. As Schanke Sundet (2021) notes, streaming fosters a new relationship with audiences, which in turn demands a new

drama strategy from public service broadcasters. Her interviewees highlighted the growing need to understand the audience more thoroughly and to better capitalise on available viewership data, both in publishing and content development. Although audience insights have informed scheduling and production decisions at NRK and Yle since the 1990s (Schanke Sundet, 2021: 36–38; Keinonen, 2025; Nikunen and Hokka, 2020: 1–2), streaming has profoundly altered how these metrics are used. At Yle, the BVOD viewership is tracked weekly, while audience data for linear television is no longer shared with producers. As a result, high linear ratings no longer hold significant value. Metrics are now geared towards Yle Areena and Yle’s website, with a strong focus on the under-45 demographic. Despite the fact that Yle’s linear channels continue to reach large audiences – including younger viewers – older segments no longer influence programming decisions (interview, 18 January 2024; Mykkänen, 2024: 109–110).

Audience data becomes even less accessible when content is released via external streaming services or social media platforms. While commercial platform companies have spearheaded the datafication of cultural industries, they are notoriously unwilling to share user data – thus limiting access for public service media organisations (Poell et al., 2022: 73; see also Colbjørnsen, 2021: 1276). These opaque data practices stand in stark contrast to the public service values of transparency and universality (Nikunen and Hokka, 2020: 1–2).

### *Budgeting and financing*

As Schanke Sundet notes, a globalised television market entails globalised production budgets. Streaming services have raised the bar for television drama, as rising audience expectations regarding quality have led to increased budgets and higher production values. This development poses a challenge for small national broadcasters, who struggle to enter transnational markets and compete with global streamers. While drama budgets at Norway’s NRK have grown, they still fall significantly short of those commanded by international players (Schanke Sundet, 2021: 39–40; see also D’Arma et al., 2021: 4).

The same applies to Yle. Although the late 2010s witnessed notable growth in drama budgets, Yle’s spending still lags behind that of global giants – more so than other Nordic public broadcasters. For instance, the budget for the first season of *Sorjonen* was approximately €300,000 per episode, whereas in 2024, transnational drama productions in Finland cost between €500,000 and €800,000 per episode. In high-end productions, the budget per episode may reach up to €1.5 million. Larger budgets translate into higher production values: for example, the filming schedule for a 45-min episode has increased from four to seven working days (interview, 5 February 2024).

However, such multi-million-euro budgets necessitated multiple sources of funding. As Catherine Johnson (2019) notes, broadcasters traditionally relied on licensing content across several distribution windows to generate revenue. She identifies two primary financing models in online television. The first, deficit financing, involves paying production companies less than the actual cost of producing the programme. In return, the production company retains some or all secondary rights, enabling it to profit from subsequent distribution (Johnson, 2019: 83–97). The second, cost plus, entails paying the full production costs plus a modest profit (Doyle, 2016). In this model, the broadcaster or streaming service retains all rights, including those for secondary markets. By accepting greater financial risk, the commissioner also stands to gain the rewards (Johnson, 2019: 84). In Finland, both models are used, but the profits for production companies remain relatively modest, making financial sustainability a persistent concern.

Yle’s financial contribution to a drama series depends on the size of the budget, ranging from full funding in smaller domestic productions to around 50% in more expensive series. The larger Yle’s

financial share, the more control it exercises over the content and release schedule (interview, 1 February 2024; interview, 18 January 2024). For example, the six-episode drama *Jarno ja minä* (*Last to Brake*, 2024), a biographical series about Finnish professional motorcycle racer Jarno Saarinen, had a total budget of approximately €10 million. Half of the funding came from Yle, while the remainder was sourced primarily from production incentives. Neither foreign broadcasters nor SVOD services participated (interview, 18 January 2024; interview, 1 February 2024).

Co-productions are becoming increasingly common as a means of sharing costs (Johnson, 2019: 84). In response to growing global competition and rising budgets, the Nordic public service broadcasters have strengthened their collaboration. In 2017, the five public broadcasters formalised their cooperation through a joint drama strategy titled N12, aimed at enhancing competitiveness through co-productions and programme exchange (Yleisradio Oy, 2017: 10). Although the Nordic countries have a long history of drama collaboration, the N12 initiative brought greater systematisation and continuity (interview, 7 May 2024).

In practice, the N12 strategy means that within a 12-month period, each participating country produces a set number of high-quality series to be aired by the others, who in turn co-finance the productions. In 2024, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway each committed to providing three series; Finland to two; and Iceland to one. The series pitched by Yle ranged from crime and thriller to comedy. For Finland, participation in N12 added an average of €7–10 million to drama development. For international distributors, the collaboration served as a mark of quality, as Finnish series were presented alongside high-profile Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish productions. In this way, N12 supported increased international funding and boosted the export potential of Finnish drama (interview, 1 February 2024; interview, 5 February 2024).

### Co-producing

The arrival of streaming platforms brought the transnational dimension to the forefront of television culture (Chalaby, 2022: 29). Barra and Scaglioni (2020) describe the 2010s as witnessing ‘the European television fiction renaissance’ – a new golden age of television driven largely by transnationalisation. This period was marked by an increase in production volumes, the growth of premium content intended for international circulation, a shift from TV movies, miniseries and soaps to mid-length original drama productions, and a notable rise in the global distribution of European series. Over the past 10–15 years, a host of new opportunities emerged for European producers, as pay-TV networks and production companies sought international co-productions and SVOD services began investing in original programming. At the same time, European production companies began to adopt an internationally oriented mindset, developing drama series with transnational appeal from the outset (Barra and Scaglioni, 2020: 17, 26).

This European renaissance in television fiction has also influenced the international distribution of Yle’s drama output. In the early 2010s, the number of transnational co-productions in Finland remained low and was largely limited to collaborations within the Nordic region. These productions typically had limited distribution (Bondebjerg et al., 2017: 79–97). Around 2015, Yle began pitching completed series to international distributors, often with modest expectations – usually, only two distributors would express interest. By 2024, however, Yle had established relationships with approximately 16 distribution partners, and producers began presenting ideas at a much earlier stage to identify potential co-financiers. International distributors were increasingly offering minimum guarantees – flat fees paid to producers regardless of the performance of the series. Yle Drama’s stated goal was to produce four internationally funded drama series each year (interview, 1 February 2024; interview, 5 February 2024).

International co-productions have significantly reshaped national production ecologies and influenced the kinds of stories being told (Johnson, 2019: 90). Narratives conceived with transnational appeal from the outset have become more common, as they offer a natural basis for international co-production and distribution. *Invisible Heroes* (2019) serves as a prime example of Yle's transnational co-productions. The six-part historical drama recounts the story of Finnish diplomats who helped save thousands of people during the 1973 Chilean military coup. The real-life events provided an organic entry point for international collaboration. Yle's Head of Drama, who also acted as Executive Producer, facilitated a partnership between the Finnish production company Kaiho Republic and the Chilean production company Parox. The project involved dual directors, screenwriters, and production teams – one from each country. The cast also included actors of various nationalities, with dialogue spanning five different languages (interview, 22 November 2023; interview, 5 February 2024).

The total budget of €3.7 million was assembled from multiple sources. Yle served as the main commissioner, while Chilean commercial broadcaster Chilevisión joined as a co-commissioner. The Nordic public broadcasters SVT, NRK, DR, and RÚV contributed to funding through the N12 collaboration and, in return, secured the rights to broadcast the series. *Invisible Heroes* also received financial backing from other Finnish, Chilean, and Nordic institutions. In Chile, the project was awarded the largest production incentive in the country's history (interview, 22 November 2023; interview, 5 February 2024). In addition to airing in the Nordic region, the series has been distributed in the Benelux countries, Estonia, Spain, North America, and beyond (Ecchorights.com, 2020).

As *Invisible Heroes* illustrates, one of the core responsibilities of Yle's Head of Drama is to assist production companies in establishing international networks and partnerships. Since 2015, his focus has shifted from creative content development to business negotiations – primarily concerning funding and publishing rights (interview, 1 February 2024; interview, 5 February 2024). As Barra and Scaglioni (2020) suggest, in this increasingly complex production environment, the commissioner plays a crucial role in weaving together various elements. The commissioner coordinates diverse expectations, facilitates international dialogue, and enables access to new markets, experiences, and audiences (Barra and Scaglioni, 2020: 26). For production companies, the involvement of a public service broadcaster as the principal commissioner can be a decisive factor in securing international financing (Grundström et al., 2020).

Transnational co-productions have also brought about new measures of success. Previously, a programme's success was evaluated primarily based on audience metrics. Recently, however, international sales have emerged as an equally important performance indicator. By 2024, drama series were typically designed to span three seasons, but if initial objectives were not met, projects were cancelled. For international co-productions, this decision did not rest solely with Finnish stakeholders – if the series failed to perform in the co-producing partner's territory, it could be discontinued even if it attracted strong viewership in Finland.

Nevertheless, according to interviewees, this did not result in excessive risk aversion. One interviewee emphasised that it is Yle's duty to take creative risks and experiment in order to support the development of the Finnish screen industry and to offer opportunities for both established and emerging creators. She cited the Finnish–Spanish co-production *Paratísi* (*The Paradise*, 2020–2024) as an example of a bold yet successful initiative. The crime drama featured a 60-year-old female criminal investigator, embodying a commitment to diversity, innovation, and the public service ethos. Half of the production budget came from public service funding, while the rest was covered by the Finnish production incentive, the Spanish production company Mediapro, and the Nordic N12 collaboration. The series fulfilled its goals in both Finland and Spain and was

subsequently renewed for a second and third season (interview, 1 February 2024; interview, 5 February 2024).

### Content development

Pay-TV channels and streaming services have driven a transformation in which platforms and commissioners no longer merely host content but actively participate in its development. Commissioners now oversee the entire lifecycle of a series – from concept to airing and windowing – leveraging their global networks to facilitate financing and distribution (Barra and Scaglioni, 2020: 26; Grundström et al., 2020; Idiz, 2024: 2136).

At the time of the interviews, Yle had also adopted this model: it no longer greenlit only completed scripts but became involved in concept development alongside screenwriters and production companies, even before actual writing commenced. The aim was to build a shared understanding of the project early on, thereby smoothing the writing process (interview, 1 February 2024). Script development included multiple stages, beginning with a first concept – a brief outline of the topic, main storyline, characters, and themes – followed by a second concept package with more detailed descriptions of characters, locations, and development plans. This was then developed into a third concept, detailed treatments, and season arcs for the main characters. Only after these stages did Yle decide whether to commission the script (TV- ja videodraamatuotantojen kehitys- ja käsikirjoitusbudjetti 2018, file ‘Yle Draama 2018 käsitys ja kehitys TV’, Yle Drama Archive, Yleisradio Archives, Helsinki).

SVOD services do not prioritise long-running series or multiple seasons, as the current media economy does not reward longevity in the same way as the linear, advertisement-funded model (Lotz, 2022: 65–66). In line with international trends, Yle shortened the length of drama series seasons to 6–8 episodes during the 2020s. The expected lifespan of a series rarely exceeded three seasons, after which resources were reallocated to new productions. This shift contributed to the perception of drama series as artistic creations rather than mass-produced entertainment. However, miniseries with fewer than four episodes largely disappeared (interviews, 18 January 2024; 1 February 2024; 15 November 2023; 2 December 2024). Although a producer-centric model would ideally let the story dictate the number of episodes (Lotz, 2022: 66), in reality, the production culture associated with streaming services increasingly overrode individual creative preferences.

New co-production models have also encouraged collaboration between public service broadcasters and commercial platforms. Yle has worked with both domestic and international SVOD services. In the 2010s, platforms such as Netflix typically acquired exclusive publishing rights for up to 5 years. Thus, the crime series *Ivalo* (*Arctic Circle*, 2018–2023), co-commissioned by Yle and the Finnish streaming service Elisa Viihde, was an early exception. Post-pandemic, the terms for acquiring publishing rights have become more flexible. By 2024, Netflix was purchasing exclusive rights for only one or two years – paying less, but leaving the secondary window open for another broadcaster or streaming service to acquire (interview, 5 February 2024; see also Idiz, 2024: 2138).

In the early 2020s, Netflix increasingly sought collaborations in smaller markets while maintaining its stronghold in larger ones. Although its partner portfolio became more diverse, public service broadcasters remained its primary collaborators (lordache et al., 2022: 246–247). The first Finnish-language Netflix Original, *Dance Brothers* (2023), was produced with Netflix as the lead commissioner and Yle as the secondary commissioner. The hierarchical structure was evident: although Yle’s producer participated in the development process, Netflix representatives dominated the decision-making, leaving little room for Yle to influence the content (interview, 5 February

2024). Recent research highlights various cultural challenges in co-productions commissioned by Netflix (Idiz, 2024: 2137). Although these were not directly addressed in the interviews, tensions between American corporate culture and European public service values – such as differences in work-hour expectations – may present difficulties.

New platforms have also created opportunities for experimentation. *Goals* (2019), an in-house Instagram drama, exemplified this potential. While the format had been pioneered by the earlier series *Karma* (2017), *Goals* represented a more ambitious and professional production. Created by a Yle producer, the series was released as Instagram Stories over a 10-week period. The characters appeared to be filming and sharing their own lives in real time, although the content was fully scripted. Instagram functioned not just as a distribution channel but as an integral storytelling platform: the full narrative was only accessible to viewers who followed all characters' accounts. The series was shot entirely on iPhones and edited on a MacBook, independent of Yle's traditional production infrastructure. It was not published on Yle Areena, as the platform did not support vertical video. *Goals* succeeded in reaching its target audience and generated strong viewership numbers – attributed in part to the high volume of videos released. The series also received international recognition, winning the Prix Italia's top prize in the Web Entertainment category. Nevertheless, within Yle, it was not considered a success, as it was not published on Yle's own platform and thus was excluded from standard audience metrics (interview, 18 January 2024; Yle, 2019).

## Marketing

As the emergence of streaming services has increased both the number and availability of drama series, gaining visibility – even for high-quality content – has become increasingly difficult. Public service broadcasters, including Norway's NRK, have experimented with new ways of generating hype around their series, thus further blurring the boundary between content and marketing (Schanke Sundet, 2021: 42–43). Meanwhile, Netflix has strengthened its transnational brand and diluted the distinctiveness of public service content by applying the marketing label 'Netflix Original' to all new programmes it adds to its library, including external acquisitions (Edgerton, 2023: 134; see also Afilipoaie et al., 2021; D'Arma et al., 2021: 4).

Yle's introduction of the 'Yle Alkuperäissarja/Yle Original Series' label exemplifies how a public service broadcaster has directly adopted a strategy from the SVOD playbook. The label was developed during the production of *Sorjonen* (*Bordertown*, 2016–2020), at a time when Netflix had shown interest in the series and was known for applying its Netflix Original tag to all content it distributes. In response, Yle had to devise a method to assert its role as the original commissioner. Through trial and error, Yle Drama personnel discovered that the only way to ensure the label remained visible was to embed it into moving images, preventing its removal during re-editing (interviews, 5 February 2024; 22 November 2023). The creation of the Yle Original Series concept thus demonstrates both the adoption of streaming production culture and Yle's efforts to assert its identity and visibility in the competitive global content market.

The introduction of the key image offers another example of the merging of content and marketing practices. Traditionally, promotional images for drama series were taken by on-set photographers or derived from screenshots intended to capture the essence of the series. The concept of the key image (or key art) was introduced at Yle in the 2010s during the production of *Tellus*. A key image refers to a carefully constructed singular visual that defines the overall aesthetic of the series and is consistently reproduced across media. Rather than relying on incidental stills, key images were planned collaboratively in marketing meetings involving producers, scriptwriters,

graphic designers, and photographers. These images were assigned specific goals and characteristics, and their performance was tracked and evaluated (private communications, 23 April 2024; 24 April 2024). While key images have long been a feature of film marketing, it was the rise of streaming services that brought them into television production, especially as SVOD interfaces favour thumbnails over introductory text (see [Eklund, 2022](#)).

## **Conclusions: From a producer to a facilitator**

The entry of transnational streaming services into the national media landscape, along with broader shifts in the television industry, compelled Yle to replace its traditional public service production culture with streaming production culture. By embracing this new approach, Yle evolved from a national public service drama producer and broadcaster into a commissioner and streamer of transnational drama series. This article has introduced streaming production culture as an analytical concept encompassing two interrelated developments: platformisation and transnationalisation. The adoption of streaming production culture has transformed how Yle publishes, budgets, finances, co-produces, develops, and markets its drama series.

As a result, Yle's producers have transitioned from creators of in-house drama to facilitators of drama productions commissioned from external production companies. This shift has brought new opportunities for learning and professional growth, but also frustration, as producers have lost control over much of the creative dimension of their work. While the international success of Finnish drama series and their transnational co-productions has often been celebrated in public discourse, the effects of platformisation and transnationalisation on the everyday work of drama producers have received insufficient attention in both industry and academic discussions. The emergence of streaming services has not only transformed viewing habits but has also brought about profound structural changes in national creative industries.

The changes observed in Yle's drama production can be interpreted by applying the five strategic responses identified by [D'Arma et al. \(2021\)](#), which describe how public service media organisations have reacted to the rise of SVODs. These responses include: complacency (ignoring the threats posed by streaming services), resistance (attempting to preserve the status quo), differentiation (adjusting content to stand out from competitors), mimicry (expanding operations to new platforms), and strategic collaboration (partnering with SVOD services). As this article has shown, Yle has primarily responded to the global transformations in television by mimicking SVOD strategies and engaging in strategic collaborations with streaming platforms.

This trajectory raises concerns about the platformisation of culture. While the adoption of a streaming production culture at Yle can be justified as an adaptive strategy to ensure the existence of Finland's public service broadcaster, it also challenges the traditional role of public service broadcasters as national cultural institutions. As Yle's funding and role in the digital media environment continue to be debated, there is a pressing need for a broader public discussion on the future of public service broadcasting and its place in Finnish cultural life.

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## Consent to participate

All interviewees provided written informed consent.

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