

Public Spaces Incubator unveils innovative concepts for better online public conversations and increased civic engagement

The public broadcasters of Canada, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland join forces to meet the challenge of creating healthy digital conversational spaces.

May 7, 2024

Following the [launch](#) of the Public Spaces Incubator initiative last year, public broadcasters CBC/Radio-Canada, RTBF (Belgium), SRG SSR (Switzerland) and ZDF (Germany), in collaboration with the nonprofit organization New_ Public, [today unveiled](#) test concepts of possible solutions to transform how their websites, apps and other digital platforms are used for public connection and conversation. By encouraging open and diverse conversations, public broadcasters aim to play a crucial role in stimulating informed public debate that is essential to democracy.

Over the course of the past year, more than 100 prototypes were developed and feedback sought from more than 200 stakeholders in Belgium, Canada, Germany and Switzerland. The research gauged users' expectations and desire for new kinds of digital conversational spaces.

“It’s both possible and necessary to create more constructive public conversations online — public service media are perfectly positioned to play a key role. These prototypes are basic representations of our ideas, made to inspire new possibilities and to prompt feedback from audiences and stakeholders.”

—Eli Pariser, Co-Director, New_ Public

“CBC/Radio-Canada, as the national public broadcaster, has a duty to ensure that our online conversations are respectful, constructive and well-informed so that all Canadians can participate. This is the unique and innovative role of public service media — to advance media experiences for our audiences in ways that support democratic discourse. So, we are delighted to share today some of the incredible ideas that the Public Spaces Incubator has developed over the past year in a truly groundbreaking collaboration between our teams at CBC/Radio-Canada, ZDF, RTBF and SRG SSR.”

—Catherine Tait, President and CEO, CBC/Radio-Canada

Some [test concepts include](#):

- **Comments Slider** — In this prototype, users can submit a response (with a written comment or not) to a question along a spectrum. This “slider” interaction encourages users to see and share more nuanced opinions, beyond the typical binary of Upvote/Downvote or Like/Dislike, and to find common ground with others across differences in opinion.
- **Representing Perspectives** — This prototype visualizes perspectives based on social roles claimed by users when writing a comment. (For a story about a strike at a

university, for example, such roles could include tenured professors and adjunct faculty, administrators, unionized staff, students, and parents.) Journalists can also highlight perspectives not yet represented that are relevant to the discussion to encourage broader participation.

- **Public Square View** — This prototype explores new ways to interact with others during and after a livestream, encouraging people to participate in lightweight, fun, and ephemeral ways.

Work on these and other prototypes is ongoing, with a final selection to be made for further development and production.

On May 27, 2024, a panel discussion on the progress and potential impact of the Public Spaces Incubator will be held at the [re:publica 2024 Berlin](#). Moderator Eli Pariser, Co-Director, New Public will be joined by Catherine Tait, President and CEO, CBC/Radio-Canada; Norbert Himmler, Director General, ZDF; and Jean-Paul Philippot, Administrator General, RTBF.

About CBC/Radio-Canada

CBC/Radio-Canada is Canada's national public broadcaster. Through our mandate to inform, enlighten and entertain, we play a central role in strengthening Canadian culture. As Canada's trusted news source, we offer a uniquely Canadian perspective on news, current affairs and world affairs. Our distinctively homegrown entertainment programming draws audiences from across the country. Deeply rooted in communities, CBC/Radio-Canada offers diverse content in English, French and eight Indigenous languages. We also deliver content in Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Punjabi and Tagalog, as well as both official languages, through Radio Canada International (RCI). We are leading the transformation to meet the needs of Canadians in a digital world.

About RTBF

The RTBF is a public enterprise of a cultural nature. It is the public service media of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. It produces, publishes and distributes content on all platforms: TV, radio, web, social networks and its Auvio streaming platform. Audiences are at the heart of its productions and creations, while respecting their diversity. The RTBF group aims to create social ties with them and between them. To convey the values of public service in an increasingly digital society, it fulfills the following missions: to guarantee pluralistic and independent information, to promote culture, to ensure the enhancement of heritage and talent and to work for memory, but also to entertain, educate and contribute to the development of local economies.

About SRG SSR

SRG SSR is made up of five Enterprise Units (RSI, RTR, RTS, SRF, SWI [swissinfo.ch](#)) and its General Management (Group Head Office). The SRG SSR Group also includes two subsidiaries. With a total of 6,900 employees, equating to 5,500 full-time posts, an annual turnover of 1.53 billion francs, 17 radio stations, 7 television channels and a wide range of complementary websites and teletext services, SRG SSR is Switzerland's biggest electronic media company. Its radio stations lead their respective markets in all four language regions – as do the television channels at prime time. SRG SSR services successfully hold their own against a variety of competing foreign broadcasters with greater financial muscle. SRG SSR media inform, entertain, and also have an educational function. They distribute their services round the clock on the same terms to everyone in Switzerland, no matter where they are, via radio, television, the Internet, HbbTV, teletext and mobile technologies.

About ZDF

ZDF (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen) is Germany's national public television broadcaster. It is run as an independent non-profit corporation under the authority of the Länder, the sixteen states that constitute the Federal Republic of Germany.

The nationwide channel ZDF has been broadcasting since 1st April 1963 and remains one of the country's leading sources of information. Today, ZDF also operates the two thematic channels [ZDFneo](#) and [ZDFinfo](#). In partnership with other public broadcasters, ZDF jointly operates the internet-only content network [funk](#) and the channels [PHOENIX](#) and [KiKA](#), and the European channels [3sat](#) and [ARTE](#).

About New_Public

New_Public works with communities, researchers, engineers, and designers to envision, architect, and scale healthy digital public spaces. We bring together a growing field committed to creating digital community-building platforms that serve as infrastructure to strengthen democracy.

With their foundational work on Civic Signals, co-founders Eli Pariser and Talia Stroud developed a framework to inform the design of existing digital platforms, and inspire and shape the platforms that will emerge in the years to come. Today, led by Eli and co-director Deepti Doshi, New_Public's team of designers, technologists, futurists, and community-builders develop and champion design patterns for helping people feel Welcome, Understand one another, Connect, and Act as well as govern, care for, and maintain social technologies.

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