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Television from the periphery – Slow television and national identity in Norway

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Abstract: Since 2009, the Norwegian public service broadcaster NRK has produced a number of slow TV shows. Some of the programmes have had a surprisingly big success in terms of public engagement and audience share even though the majority of the audience was from the oldest age groups. These programmes are not only slow, lasting a long time and lacking dramatic development and progress, they also engage in a particular, traditional version of national identity. The current article argues that, through slow TV, the Norwegian public service broadcaster has found a new way to reflect a particular version of Norwegian identity and to tap into the central values of Norwegian culture. Taken together, the shows cover all regions of the country—the coastal areas as well the inlands and mountains. In terms of representation, the programmes highlight nature and traditional Norwegian values such as closeness to nature, rural life, and "friluftsliv" (living the outdoor life). Urban areas and the non-white population are conspicuously absent.

Keywords: Slow TV, national identity, Norwegian culture, public service broadcasting

1 Introduction

The Norwegian public service broadcaster (NRK) has gained some measure of international fame for its slow TV broadcasts. On its English-language website the broadcaster advertises slow TV as one of its two most successful and internationally recognised programmes (NRK, 2019a). Its 2011 slow TV broadcast *Hurtigruten minute-by-minute*, a live show of 135 hours aired from on board the eponymous cruise ship as it sailed along the Norwegian coast from Bergen to the Russian border in Kirkenes, attracted considerable international attention (e.g., Heller, 2014; Merry, 2015), not only because of the broadcast's exceptional length, but also because of the relatively large numbers of viewers who tuned in.

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Slow television as a concept is hard to describe as the term stems from popular use and is not theoretical. It may be used to describe television broadcasts that have a slow editing pace where the content does not change quickly, leaving time for depth and contemplation, going against the grain of increasingly faster and more intense television programming appealing to strong emotions and reactions. The programmes use mainly diegetic sound and lack narration as well as dramatic climax. In slow TV the viewer is invited to watch the subtle changes of the landscape during a journey, or they may relax watching, for example, fishermen or people knitting.

The essence of these TV programmes seems to be slowness and relaxation, but, as Jeffery and Hawkes (2021) argue in their analysis of two Australian slow TV train journeys across the continent, the programmes also dealt with national identity as they "offer viewers a rare opportunity to engage with discussions about the country's past and present" (p. 75). Norwegian slow TV programmes also engage continually with national identity, and this analysis will consider the nature of this connection focusing on how the slow TV broadcasts produced by the NRK relate to Norwegian identity. It will look at what broadcasts have been produced, what national identity elements these programmes contain, what popular involvement they create, and how they were received by different parts of the Norwegian population.

2 Slow TV

The NRK has produced a number of programmes under the label of slow or "minute-by-minute" TV since 2009. These have been largely initiated by two individuals in the regional office in Bergen. The responsible project leader and the head of programming in Bergen have developed their own definition of the concept: "minute-by-minute" TV, the definition of which is more specific than that of slow TV. A minute-by-minute broadcast must last as long as the duration of what it depicts, have high production values, be made for television, and must have genuine content (see Urdal, 2017, pp. 22–23). These criteria are also accepted by other parts of the NRK, and we will use this delineation in this article when talking about slow TV.

Minute-by-minute programmes depict what can be called "unfolding time": They are continuous recordings of activities. In this concept, ellipses are not allowed, and preproduced reports are taboo as well (even though they may be shown picture-in-picture from time to time). The producers of these programmes demand that they are not only (mostly) live broadcasts of unfolding action, but also that they are produced as multi-camera productions of good quality, shown on regular television, and that they deal with interesting subjects. In this way they exclude less

professional internet streaming (e.g., webcams), arguing that the success of slow TV depends on taking the genre seriously and not hiding it on the fringes of the late-night schedule.

Many sports broadcasts (for example, coverage of the Tour de France), it could be argued, also show an unfolding event in real time, but sports broadcasts also have a dramatic denouement where someone wins, draws, or loses. Minute-to-minute television lacks this dramatic development, having more in common with the "cinema of attraction" in early film history, representing "less as a way of telling stories than as a way of presenting a series of views to an audience, fascinating because of their illusory power" (Gunning, 2006, p. 382).

3 National identity

National identity is a fuzzy concept: It can refer to a supposed common culture and values of a national population, as well as to how they are experienced by members of that population. National identity is both present and absent in many everyday situations, but other identities (being an employee, a parent, a spouse or neighbour, and so on) are more relevant, and national identity is latent. It is mostly through ceremonies (such as National Day, Royal ceremonies) and contact with other nationalities that one realises one's national affiliation. And it is in relation to specific "others" that national identity is made relevant, thematised, and formed. National identities are often connected to the nation-state, but have much in common with ethnic identities as national identities often build on the identities of the ethnic majority population while ethnic minorities are often on the border of otherness (Eriksen, 2015).

Members of a nation may identify with the nation in different ways: Some have a strong identification with national culture, while others identify less or with different elements. As several scholars have observed, even though there might exist some hegemonic version of national identity, this version is often contested, has to be actively maintained or may change (Morley and Robins, 1995; Castells, 1997). For example, some Norwegians identify strongly with Norwegian traditions, rural areas and nature, while others may identify with Norway as an egalitarian society (cf. Vike, Lidén, and Lien, 2001; Bendixsen, Bringslid, and Vike, 2018), a society with high rate of gender equality, a democratic and prosperous country.

As Anderson (2006) has argued, mass media play a major role in binding members of a nation together in a socially constructed community. The media generate a sense of togetherness and unite them in what Anderson called an "imagined community."

4 Media as identity builder

During the 20th century, monopoly public service broadcasting was established in Western Europe and played a major role in the life of the nation, generating shared cultural agendas, experiences, and memories. British scholars in particular have discussed the prominent role of the BBC in promoting national unity, taking a leading role in the vicissitudes of the nation, and providing a shared sense of time and community (Cardiff and Scannell, 1987; Scannell, 1989; Hajkowski, 2010). Similar processes were at work in other western European countries. Today, the proliferation of broadcasting channels makes it much more difficult to play this role, but public service broadcasters still try to fulfil this bardic function (Fiske and Hardley, 1978).

While national identity was seen as the cement of modernism, globalisation processes lessened its centrality as a framework for cultural articulation (Van den Bulck and Sinardet, 2006). Increasing economic global integration, migration, and the exchange of ideas through global media such as the internet all ensure that national identity plays a minor role in contemporary society (Barker, 1999). Post-modernity theories during the 1990s have further meant that traditionally fixed identities have become more open, fragmented, and fluid (Kellner, 1992, p. 145).

The pluralisation of television channels and the rise of the internet have increased global communication. Multinational media corporations, the television format industry, and online streaming foster the international flow of media content (Chalaby, 2005), enabling viewers to follow their own cultural interests and tastes across national boundaries. The internet and social media also contribute to uniting viewers in interests rather than national communities.

Despite these globalisation tendencies, several observers note that the national element is still firmly part of today's media picture. For example, international sports events such as the World Cup Football or the Olympics rely on national identification (Edensor, 2002; Tomlinson and Young, 2006). Van den Bulck and Sinardet (2006) find these national elements even in the Belgian edition of the format television series The Weakest Link. This is a form of banal nationalism (Billig, 1995), a kind of nationalistic reference that is present in everyday life and discourse.

5 Norway and national identity

The formation of a Norwegian national identity in the 19th century took place in a European national romantic context partly in opposition to Denmark and Sweden as "significant others" (Sørensen, 1998; Neuman, 2001). Eriksen describes this process in the following way:

> Early Norwegian nationalism mainly derived its support from the urban middle classes. Members of the city bourgeoisie travelled to remote valleys in search of 'authentic Norwegian culture', brought elements from it back to the city and presented them as the authentic expression of Norwegianness. (Eriksen, 1993, p. 13)

As a result, many rural elements, folklore, natural landscapes (fjords, mountains), and peasant life became important elements in Norwegian identity.

Norway is generally considered an egalitarian and decentralised country (Klausen, 1984; Vike et al., 2001), and the more peripheral regions are valued. Still the different regions had to be incorporated into a whole. May-Brith Ohman Nielsen describes how a perception of Norway as a community composed of different traditions emerged in the 1920s: "The local and the regional were the main pillars of the national [...] knowledge about the regions—as mutually different parts of Norway—were a prerequisite for the perception of the country as a geographically inclusive and thus unifying entity" (Nielsen, 1998, pp. 80–81, our translation). At the time the newspapers and (monopoly) radio played an important role in establishing the imagined community, but also person-to-person meetings resulted in shared experiences of this regional variation within the nation. Gradually, television has taken over this role of exposing different parts of the country.

Even today Norwegian identity is important: "Norway is a country where national identity is both a dominant theme of discussion and an essential part of the population's mental habitus" (Eriksen and Neuman, 2011, p. 414). They note that Norwegian identity is generally stable, even though important points of reference have changed.

The hegemonic version of Norwegian identity is connected to traditional society, the rural areas and nature. We can connect this to the pre-eminent position of friluftsliv [the outdoor life] and cottages in the countryside in Norwegian culture (there are some 445,000 cottages in a population of 5.4 million; SSB, 2022a; Rees, 2014). Several foreign anthropologists living in Norway are struck by the importance of nature and hiking for the population (Witoszek, 1998; Woon, 1992).

6 Changing identities

Even though national identities are present, identity discourses have changed during the last decades. Most Western European countries have become more multicultural. In Norway, for example, 19% of the population are either immigrants or their children (SSB, 2022b). The concentration of immigrants and their children from non-Nordic countries is highest in Oslo (30%). According to Eriksen and

Neuman (2011), Europe has lost its position as a "significant other", as immigrants and Islam have become the centre of identity discourse, especially after 9/11.

In particular in urban areas and cities a large variety of identities can be found. "The city, as a metaphor for change, is the natural location for the exploration of new identities, especially among young people, who shape and are being shaped by urban culture" (de Leeuw, 2006, p. 96). In Norway it is in the capital Oslo that this variety of identities is biggest: Not only is ethnic variation significant, but also identities connected to gender and sexual orientation vary and are more visible than in the rural areas.

The centre-periphery opposition has traditionally been significant in Norway (Rokkan, 1987). A 2010 study demonstrated that people in big cities have a clearly more modern value orientation than those who live in rural areas (Hellevik, 2010, p. 17). It is also in the most urbanised centre in Oslo that the national media that articulate these discourses are situated and are the spaces where the identity debates on integration and gender diversity take place primarily.

7 Audiences

In his ground-breaking study of how members of the audience interpret television programmes, Morley (1980) demonstrated that the same text will be read differently by different sections of the audience, depending on their sub-cultural position. One may assume that audiences also interpret slow TV in different ways. Even though audience studies consider the audience to be actively involved in reading the texts, members of the audience can be active in relation to slow TV programmes in other ways. From a participation perspective, Kjus (2009) describes three different ways in which ordinary people can be active in television programmes: as performers, as public, and as viewers taking part in feedback activity through the internet. Many slow TV programmes cover some human activity live, enabling spectators to show up during the recordings and participate in the activities—sometimes becoming the main attraction themselves. Many programmes had chats, hashtags, and Facebook posts connected, allowing active online engagement. Depending on their interests, people will use different ways to be involved so one might expect a self-reinforcing process that influences how people relate to these programmes.

In the following sections we will present empirical data in order to illuminate what issues and themes the NRK covered in its slow TV programmes, who watched them, and how they related to them in terms of national identity. We will begin by outlining the main methodology that was used in this research.

8 Methods

This article is the result of a multi-aspect study involving the "media industry/text/audience triangle" (Turner, 2001). It is based on different kinds of data: qualitative interviews (media industry), textual analysis (text), as well as quantitative survey results (audience). The main sources of data in this article are interviews with what Bruun (2016) calls "exclusive informants", i.e., people that are directly involved in the production processes. Eleven informants employed by the NRK, nine involved in the production of slow TV and two commissioning editors, were interviewed between 2012 and 2019. The project manager was interviewed twice in 2012 and 2017. These interviews had a double purpose: They provided information about the processes surrounding the production of the different programmes as well as information about the way different actors within the NRK thought about slow TV. In addition, six municipal organisers, engaged in planning local activities when the TV crew came to their area, were interviewed in 2016.

The analysis of the actual programmes looked at their main subject, geographical area, main production form, and length. As the total time of the slow TV shows inhibits in-depth analysis of all programmes, samples from each were analysed by looking at mise-en-scène, photography and editing, and the use of sound (see Puijk, 2021, chapter 3–5). More data was collected by counting and analysing samples of chat entries, while the NRK provided viewing figures.

Another source of data is a representative survey among 1,037 persons living in Norway (> 15 years) conducted by Kantar TNS in 2017. This survey contained questions about viewing behaviour as well as respondents' views about slow TV, in addition to background variables such as age, gender, income, and place of residence (see Puijk and Urdal, 2018; Puijk, 2021).

This qualitative and quantitative data was combined in the analysis that might be characterised as triangulation (Oppermann, 2000). In order to understand the context for the discussion of this material it is necessary to look briefly at the nature of the NRK and its relationship to slow TV in particular.

9 NRK and public service broadcasting

The slow TV programmes considered here are all produced by the NRK, the state-owned public service broadcaster. The remit from the Ministry, the Statement of Commitments (*NRK Plakaten*, NRK, 2019b) is the basis for the NRK's activities. One of the objectives is that "the NRK should help to strengthen Norwegian and Sami language, identity and culture. A large portion of its offering should be anchored in

and reflect Norwegian realities." The NRK is also obliged to cater to different parts of the population, and thus needs to have a varied output.

NRK television has since its start in 1960 played an important role in Norwegian society. It started out as a monopoly, but since about 1990 three commercially-financed national channels were established. After the digitisation of TV distribution in 2007–2009 each of these channels has established a number of sister-channels. As in other countries a whole range of channels are currently available to the Norwegian population. Despite this competition, the three NRK channels have maintained a strong position (40% market share in 2019). The main channel NRK1 (market share 32%) is an all-round public service channel with a varied programme of entertainment, drama and edutainment, as well as news and debate programmes. NRK2 (market share 5%) carries mostly factual programmes, documentaries and cultural and experimental programmes, while the combined channel NRK SUPER/NRK3 has a children/youth focus.

10 Norwegian slow TV: A contemporary concept

Although minute-to-minute television could be thought of as an old-fashioned concept, it is a recent phenomenon and, in its present form, dependent on recent developments in television. There are several reasons why slow television was less feasible earlier.

Television has traditionally heavily relied on sound as small screens had low resolution (Ellis, 1989), but slow TV is primarily visual. The focus is on attraction more than on action: Pictures of nature, different landscapes, but also people are pivotal to keeping the attention of viewers. In this regard it is not surprising that slow TV started in 2009 when digitisation of the Norwegian television distribution was completed. Digitisation implied that most viewers substituted their analogue television sets for modern 16:9 HD sets with much higher resolution, allowing for more detail, brighter colours, and even better sound.

A consequence of digitisation is also that NRK went from two television channels (since 1996) to three in 2007, with the consequence that more airtime is to be filled, but also the possibility that one of the channels could be used for experiment without significant loss of market share. In particular, NRK 2, the most "public service"-oriented channel (documentaries, factual programmes, and the like) does not have many viewers normally, so the risk of failure was not that great.

Another precondition for slow TV programmes is a willingness to innovate and cooperate. The commissioning editors explained that many of the slow television programmes made by the NRK are difficult to schedule, are logistically complex,

and often need new technological solutions to be realised. Outside-the-box thinking and risk-taking are part of this process. Probably the fact that most programmes were produced outside NRK headquarters in Oslo, is significant. According to the producers at the Bergen office, their marginal position forced them to be more inventive. But they also pointed out that the change from internal competition to an ethos of internal cooperation during the reign of the former director general was important for involving different departments and local offices during the production (see Puijk, 2015).

11 Minute-to-minute broadcasts in Norway

For the NRK, slow TV started in 2009 with a seven-hour broadcast of the train running between Bergen and Oslo. Produced by the regional NRK office in Bergen on the occasion of the centennial of the Bergen railway, the programme aired on November 27, exactly 100 years to the day after the track was inaugurated. It was a travel documentary in the style of the "phantom rides" that were popular in early cinema in Norway and elsewhere (Sørenssen, 2000).

In more recent times, German television, for example, had a tradition of showing uninterrupted train rides (*Bahn TV In Fahrt*). While the German programmes are normally shot with only one camera mounted on the front of the train and aired during the night, the Bergen show was broadcast in prime time. The latter's camera work was more elaborate, with three cameras in front of the train (enabling panning), while documentary material was added during the time the train passed through the many tunnels on the line. The show was relatively successful and inspired the next big project, *Hurtigruten*, 134 hours of continuous live television from a moving vessel.

Since then, during the last ten years minute-to-minute broadcasts have been developed in two main directions: travel-based programmes and thematic-based programmes (Table 1). The initial Bergen railway and *Hurtigruten* broadcasts were travel-based and inspired similar broadcasts from other railway lines (Nordlandsbanen, Flåmsbanen) and a canal boat (Telemarkskanalen).

The NRK developed what may be called a slow TV summer concept: a minute-to-minute broadcast during daytime moving from place to place with a duration of four to five hours. These broadcasts were shown (mostly) live on the main channel NRK 1. A half-hour summary was aired later in prime time, followed or preceded by a 30-minute entertainment show from the same locality with a combination of local history, cultural elements, and well-known artists from the locality/region performing. The minute-to-minute broadcast in the summer of 2018 was

Table 1: NRK's minute-by-minute TV broadcasts (2009–2021).

Norwegian title	Content	Duration (hours)	Year
Bergensbanen	Bergen-Oslo railway track	7	2009
Flåmsbanen	Finse-Flåm railway track	1	2010
Hurtiguten	Bergen-Kirkenes boat trip	134	2011
Lakselva	Start of the fishing season	21	2011
Telemarkskanalen	Telemark Canal boat trip	12	2012
Nordlandsbanen	Trondheim-Bodø railway track	10	2012
Nasjonal vedkveld	Firewood and fire burning	12	2013
Sommerbåten *	Boat trip along the Norwegian coast	379	2013
Nasjonal strikkekveld	Knitting, from sheep's back to jumper	14	2013
200 år på 200 minutter	Lecture, 200 years of Norwegian history	3	2014
1814 på 24 timer	Lectures on the Norwegian Constitution	24	2014
Salmeboka	Hymnal – singing cover to cover	60	2014
Krig på 200 minutter	Lecture, Second World War in Norway	3	2015
Sommerbåten *	Boat trip along Norwegian coast	219	2015
Saltstraumen	Footage from tidal currents in Saltstaumen	12	2016
227 år på 227 minutter	Lecture, history of US presidential elections	4	2016
Fuglefjellet	Island with bird colony	40	2016
Hele Norge bygger	Building Norway in Minecraft	12	2016
Skibladner *	Boat trip on Lake Mjøsa	25	2016
Reinflytting	Reindeer migration	172	2017
Beseggen	Walking in the mountains	9	2018
Sommertoget *	Train trip across Norway	130	2017
Grieg	Grieg's oeuvre cover to cover	30	2018
Fascismen på 200 minutter	Lecture on fascism	3	2018
Monsen*	Walking in the mountains	100	2018
Klokken	Digital clock changes digit every minute	24	2019
Svalbard	Boat trip around Svalbard	222	2020
Sommerbilen *	Norway lengthwise by car	57	2020
Sommerskuta *	Tall ship along Norwegian coast and Shetland	373	2021

Note: * Summer shows

built around a programme host, wilderness adventurer Lars Monsen, well known from television programmes covering his treks through Norwegian and Canadian nature and as a host of *Ingen Grenser* (2010–2012, the Norwegian version of *Beyond Boundaries*). During the minute-by-minute broadcast, he hiked in four mountain areas for a month with ordinary people invited to join in, which several hundred did. While walking Monsen also interviewed experts on nature, local experts, tourist hosts, and others. During the pandemic in 2020 the team travelled the country in a minivan for six weeks. Different pairs of hosts chatted while driving, visually combined with shots of the environments they passed through.

Occasionally, they stopped and talked with a group of people along the road waiting for them to pass by. The summer 2021 programme was recorded aboard the Norwegian tall ship Statsraad Lehmkuhl, again sailing along the Norwegian coast and Shetland. Entertainment elements, performed on deck, were included in the live broadcast.

The second direction in Norwegian slow TV is thematically-based shows. One concept consists of taking the time it takes to broadcast an oeuvre in its totality: the singing of all hymns in the Norwegian Hymnal (60 hours, 2014), or performing all music composed by Grieg (30 hours, 2018). Another is to feature a traditional Norwegian theme (salmon fishing, knitting, or a bonfire). These shows begin with the same structure as more traditional infotainment programmes—a host interviewing experts and stakeholders about the theme (sometimes on NRK1)—ending up on the second channel with long hours waiting for the fish to bite or watching the fire burning. Other examples are long broadcasts of continuous animal activity (bird or fish watching), as well as some long lectures which have been broadcast under the label of minute-to-minute (Svendsen and Nøkling, 2019).

12 Representing the periphery

The Norwegian slow TV shows have in common that they are national in content: They deal with Norwegian landscape/nature, Norwegian people, Norwegian places and Norwegian culture and values. The travel-based programmes of course stand out in that they linger on nature, show pictures of a variety of landscapes, and depict villages and towns throughout the country. The thematic programmes more often depict Norwegian culture and tradition.

Over time, it is possible to see how the travel slow TV shows have covered most of the country geographically, in this way not only recognizing the areas that people know, but also showing areas where the viewer might not have been but may have heard about and that thus are familiar in some way. The different programmes have done this in different ways: The first (not live but recorded) train programmes focused on the scenery and the train stations. During the 2017 summer train programme, as it criss-crossed the country for eight weeks, the train stopped at numerous stations where the hosts would talk to local representatives. The hiking programme showed four different mountain landscapes while the programme's host walked and talked to local people as well as representatives from the national level.

Hurtigruten and subsequent ship-based programmes covered the entire coastline of mainland Norway. In 2020 a minute-by-minute programme from Svalbard followed a cruise around the main island for 10 days. As technical conditions pro-

hibited live coverage, the programme was recorded during the summer of 2019 and showed the cruise ship's journey with views of the arctic environment and the voyagers' expeditions on shore. Of course, in this uninhabited region no local spectators greeted them waving flags as in the minute-by-minute broadcasts from the mainland.

From April 24 until May 3, 2017, NRK2 covered the moving of a reindeer herd from the North Norwegian mainland to their summer pasture on one of the islands. The live broadcast lasted 150 hours and was interrupted only by some actuality programmes and sports. It gave Norwegian viewers an insight into what is considered the most "typical" Sami occupation, even though few families continue this traditional way of life.

The range of these programmes shows that they are trying to represent the different regions, landscapes, and dialects and languages spoken in Norway (Norwegian and Sami). In this way they represent not the centre—in fact the centre is largely absent—but first and foremost the parts of the country that are not present so often in daily programming, as well as traditional Norwegian cultural items. Importantly, not only nature and landscapes are the focus but also their inhabitants.

Other programmes featured aspects of the country of which few Norwegians have first-hand experience but know exist: the Svalbard cruise, a broadcast from an island with a bird colony, as well as the journey of the reindeer herd from winter to summer pastures.

What is conspicuously missing is a presentation of the country's urban environments. Even though some of the broadcasts start from, end at, or pass by major cities such as Oslo, Bergen, and Trondheim, they only show these cities superficially so that the result is that the more urban phenomena, for example the more ethnic and racially diverse population, are hardly visible. As such the broadcasts affirm a stereotypical white image of Norwegian identity which excludes those with other skin colours.

13 Slow TV: Popular involvement and participation

In line with the recent trend of increasingly showing ordinary people on television (Enli, 2009; García-Avilés, 2012), the NRK's slow TV shows often invite viewers to participate physically as actors in the programmes, as well as virtually as contributors on social media.

Although some of the minute-to-minute programmes were prerecorded and involved little participation, the live travel broadcasts gain much of their popularity from the involvement of ordinary people. *Hurtigruten* set out with the idea that the television team would not prearrange much of the television content. There were a few hosts on board, but although they interviewed some passengers, crew and people gathered in the harbours, they played a minor role. After the first few days, when local people realised that the *Hurtigruten* would pass through their community, more and more gathered in the harbours when the ship docked, staging spontaneous performances (bands playing, chorus singing, dancing or dressing up) which proved to be popular content.

People also turned up to line the shore and waved their Norwegian flags and held placards, many carrying personal messages—often greetings to family members. People holding mobiles were a frequent sight, starting to wave when the picture showed them—they were obviously talking to family or friends watching the programme to inform them that they were "on" and enjoy their "15 seconds of fame" on national television. People participating in the programme realise that others are watching and try to connect to them. This shows the importance of liveness and connectivity in modern society (Van Dijck, 2013; Van Es, 2017) where television seems to become an extension of social media.

The subsequent slow TV summer programmes included the same form of engagement from local people who gathered along the route and at stops. During the paddle-steamer Skibladner's trip on Lake Mjøsa in the summer of 2017, when the steamer moored in three small towns, each with a population of around 30,000 inhabitants, 10,000 people flocked there on the first day, 15,000 the second, and 19,000 on the last. During the associated entertainment shows in the evening, locals would attend as performers and spectators. Not every broadcast had the same response, but over the years many thousands have participated in this kind of activity.

Viewers can also involve themselves through social media and chats connected to the programme. The NRK had not accommodated this kind of interactivity during the Bergen railway broadcast, but despite that, the programme was commented upon spontaneously on Facebook and Twitter (Furuly, 2009). For the *Hurtigruten* broadcast the NRK set up an official chat including tweets on #Hurtigruten. This chat had some 45,000 entries, and, interestingly, the NRK production team on board the *Hurtigruten* took an active part during the broadcast and engaged with comments and requests from viewers. In this way, interactivity between the production team enabled the chatters to influence the programme (asking for music or a special camera angle or commenting on the textual information given). For lurkers it provided an alternative platform to interact with the programme's content. As the NRK published the *Hurtigruten* programme under a Creative Commons licence

and made meta-data available, people could use it in their mash-up activities (see Hofseth, 2011).

During later shows, Facebook and Twitter were used parallel to the minute-by-minute broadcasts to allow people to upload their pictures and comments. This kind of activity allows people to become involved in the broadcasts on different levels. The viewer survey (see below) revealed that there is a range of engagement levels among the audience, from having slow TV on in the background with minimal involvement to watching the broadcasts intently, posting on Facebook or Twitter, uploading pictures, and showing up in the flesh when the television crew comes to their area. Like other cross-media concepts, it is up to the individual viewer to adjust their involvement.

14 Slow TV's representation of the national

As has been argued above, national identity is difficult to pinpoint as it is largely taken for granted and not problematised. We can gain more insight into how Norwegian identity was treated in the slow TV programmes by looking at the interrelation between the national and the local and how identity borders were handled.

As discussed above, the overall national picture is that the slow TV programmes showed mainly Norwegian natural landscapes, ordinary people in their ordinary environments, and cultural traditions. What was lacking was a representation of the urban sector of Norway. Even though most people live in towns, urban landscapes and their inhabitants were conspicuously absent. By focusing on the nature and the periphery, the images that were created were close to the traditional and hegemonic perception of Norwegian identity. This image is often used, for example, during the Olympic Winter Games of 1994 when nature and rural folk traditions were prioritised rather than those of a modern, urban, oil-producing country that would be equally realistic (Puijk, 1999).

The Monsen hiking programmes were probably the most idiomatic as they combined the two dominant themes of nature and friluftsliv (the Norwegian word for spending time out in nature). Norwegian identity, and how friluftsliv expressed it, was much talked about during these shows, however, it was also probably the case that these were the programmes which expressed the interests of the urban centre and the state the most. Hiking is more of an urban phenomenon—most members of the Norwegian Trekking Association (DNT) are city dwellers who hike in their spare time. In the mountains Monsen talked to many representatives of government and other organisations at national and state level. On August 4, 2018 he encountered the casually dressed Minister of Health and the upcoming new head of the DNT

sitting on a rock by a remote lake in Northern Norway. Their discussion of public health, exercising, healthy nutrition and the positive consequences of hiking on health was also the theme of a white paper (Ministry of Climate and Environment, 2015). The fact that these national/state symbols delivered their message about friluftsliv and Norwegian identity in one of the most peripheral spots in the country through the state-owned disseminator of the programme (the NRK) probably reinforced the message.

Yet we can problematise whether it was national identity that was the basis for the local engagement of those people who appeared along the shores and roads during the numerous slow TV broadcasts. Many waved a Norwegian flag, a symbol of the Norwegian state, as well as Norwegian identity, but when interviewed these participants often talked about being proud of their local identity, their village or small town. The impressive turnout in the small towns around Lake Mjøsa and the extensive local newspaper coverage also indicate that it was more a celebration of the local community than the nation, even though the presence of national TV cameras surely had its effects on the turnout. The local and the national clearly are aspects that relate to each other.

National identity is normally implicit but can become explicit when confronted with other nationalities or ethnicities. The Monsen programme from Northern Norway is especially interesting in this respect as it had borders and cultural encounters as a theme. Monsen met with a group of Sami reindeer owners, several wearing Sami dress, some speaking Norwegian, others Swedish. They talked about what it means to live in a border area, that they and their reindeer cross the borders frequently. Monsen includes himself in the Sami category by ancestry and he has registered himself in the Sami population register. He characterised the situation as "we all are one big herd (of people)". The sequence shows an effortless incorporation of Sami identity within the Norwegian as differences in ethnic background are recognised and acknowledged. The same can be said about the few non-Norwegians that were shown. The two young male Syrian refugees who were hiking for the first time that Monsen met also enjoyed "the Norwegian way of life" and the discourse between them turned on using hiking in the mountains as a good way to get into contact with Norwegians and promote integration.

There were a few urban representatives, "guests of the week" who hiked with Monsen for a few days, some of them second generation immigrants. All served as examples of Norwegians that struggled physically as they were novices in hiking, as examples of urban dwellers that appreciated friluftsliv after they had become accustomed to it.

The only time ethnic background was overtly discussed was when Monsen met a Kven woman (an ethnic minority of Finnish descent that migrated to this part of Norway in the 18th and 19th centuries) and in stark contrast her ethnic situation

was problematised as they discussed how she was stigmatised because of her background and her pride in her identity.

In summary, we can conclude that the slow TV programmes represent a stereotypical image of Norway that connects well to the hegemonic ideology of national Norwegian identity which focuses on the regions, the periphery. It includes the existence of other ethnicities, in particular the Sami people. While the Sami were only briefly encountered in the Monsen programme, Sami identity and culture was dealt with more extensively during the reindeer programme. These encounters happen without strain and conflict.

15 The reception of slow TV

Viewing figures provided by the NRK reveal that *Hurtigruten* was the most popular programme, attracting more than one million (out of five million) Norwegian viewers during peaks in prime time. In contemporary fragmented television times, these are figures rarely reached even by the most popular programmes. Other slow TV shows seldom have ratings over 6% of the population, so they are not that popular, even though the reach figures might be high, i.e., many people have seen at least some parts of the programmes.

Another characteristic of watching slow TV is that older people watch more than younger. There might be small variations as to whether men or women prefer certain slow TV shows, but age matters for all slow TV programmes.

A representative survey among the Norwegian population carried out in 2017 (see Puijk and Urdal, 2018; Puijk, 2021) confirms this. 61% of the over-60s watched slow TV "quite a lot" or "a lot", against 23.2% of respondents younger than 30 years. Half (48%) of the Norwegian population did not or hardly watched the slow TV programmes. The main reasons given for not watching were that the programmes were boring, too slow, or uninteresting. These answers relate to the point that the form (slowness of the programmes) and/or the content (nature, daily subject) was considered unattractive. It probably also implies that a large part of the population did not identify much with the image of Norway as it was depicted in these programmes.

The respondents that had watched (parts of) the programmes were asked to rate different reasons for watching. They could choose between "very important", "quite important", "somewhat important", "not important", and "don't know". Table 2 shows the average scores. The depiction of nature (h) scores highest, but the general statement that the programmes show national identity (c) scores high too. A factor analysis shows that items (a–g), (g–k) and (k–n) are connected in three factors. We can describe the underlying element of the first factor as "national

Table 2: Reasons for watching slow TV (N = 537).

	Average score
a) like the culture that is shown	2.5
b) learn to know the country	2.8
c) the programme shows national identity	2.7
d) drawn into the programme	1.9
e) it is a live broadcast	2.6
f) wanted to see whether I knew someone	1.6
g) have a bond with the places shown	2.2
h) like the pictures of nature	3.1
i) like the slow pace	2.1
j) like the folk life that is shown	2.1
k) much talked about in social media	1.7
l) many people talked about the programme	1.7
m) recognise the places I have been	2.6
n) much talked about in the media	1.5

involvement"—the virtual live presence of the nation—while the underlying element of the second factor seems to be more connected to the "slow", observing, contemplation. The third factor is more connected to curiosity. These data support the view that watching slow TV is connected to both a "slowness" as well as a "national" dimension.

16 Discussion

The NRK mission is to represent different parts of the country, to show different parts of Norwegian and Sami culture, and to reinforce Norwegian and Sami identity. The Sami population has its own TV programming (NRK Sàmpi) but is also represented in the general programming of the NRK. The different regions are represented in NRK programmes, both news (regional news programmes), actualities/documentaries (e.g., *Norge rundt*, 1976–present; *Der ingen skulle tro at nokon kunne bu*, 2002–present) and reality programmes (e.g., *113*, 2019–2020) depict people living outside the biggest cities. Also some drama series represent the regions and thematise regional issues (*Hellfjord*, 2012; *Lykkeland*, 2018, 2022; *Rådebank*, 2020–22), but in general most programmes are characterised by what one could call "banal Oslo-centrism".

The local and the national level relate to each other. Through participation the local and the national become connected—for local populations the live shows

became a local event where they could participate. At the same time this local event became national through the slow TV broadcasts. Local participation was a major factor in attracting viewers.

For the local population, the fact that their local region was shown on TV, implied that the different regions of Norway became visible as a continuation of the integration processes that Nielsen described for the 1920s. When we look at the slow TV programmes in this way, we see that they deal with visibility as much as with identity—being visible to the whole nation, being acknowledged as such. In this way Anderson's imagined community also becomes populated with concrete people one can relate to, not only abstract consumers of the same content.

What is absent in this representation of Norway are the urban centres and the "diversity" identities that mostly prevail there. Not that they are totally absent, as we saw. Still these identities were smoothly integrated into the Norwegian. The urban representatives and refugees were all shown to become familiar with and appreciating hiking in the mountains. There were a few LGBT participants: One of the hosts carried a rainbow flag in her rucksack, and the two men Monsen met in Northern Norway—the Minister of Health and upcoming head of DNT—were a married couple, but this was not commented on.

While slow TV presents a rather traditional and homogenous version of Norwegian identity, albeit based on regional differences including the Sami, the NRK does cater for representations of, and discourses on, more contemporary identities. As Eriksen and Neuman (2011) indicate, the "other" in the identity equation one compares with and is at the centre of discussion today has changed from Europeans to non-white immigrants and Islam. Immigration and Islam are not only heavily debated in discussion programmes, but dealt with in television drama as well. The well-known NRK youth series SKAM (2015–2017) represents an urban environment, including explicit identity issues connected to feminism, sexual orientation, and ethnic belonging (Sundet, 2019; Svendsen, Stubberud, and Djupedal, 2018). In the last decade the NRK has produced a number of drama series around themes of double identities of immigrants and their offspring in addition to SKAM. Most of them have a young audience as their target. A recent drama series, *Norskish* (2020), deals quite explicitly with ethnic identity through the problems of two Norwegian girls whose parents were born in Turkey and Iran. In many ways these drama series are the opposites of slow TV: Not only is their pace different (fast/short versus slow/long), but they are also set in different environments (urban versus rural), attract different audiences (young versus old), and convey different Norwegian identities. SKAM, it transpired, was easy to export, while slow TV, although foreign versions have been produced, is a different matter, seeming more bound to national culture.

17 Conclusion

Slow TV has become a well-known concept in Norway. People who watch pay attention to the pictures, nature and the people more than dramatic development. Nature, landscapes and national sentiments are important elements in the viewing experiences. Here the minute-to-minute programmes align with central Norwegian values:

> The wild and varied Norwegian scenery and clean environment comprise a source of pride to many of the country's citizens, and it may be the most important component in the standard image of Norway presented to foreigners. Instead of drawing on grand cultural traditions or a proud military history, Norwegian patriots (and surely, visiting foreigners) may talk of their beautiful mountains, clean lakes and breath-taking fjords. (Eriksen, 1993)

By showing a variety of landscapes, places, and people the broadcasts represent different parts of the country. One can look at slow TV as a way to transcend the imagined community. Through the television broadcasts and the viewers' involvement in the programmes, the national is experienced as an actual, experienced community with all its differences and variations. In this way the nation, with its local variations as an imagined community becomes more real in the minds of the viewers.

Slow TV might be associated with the slow movement—a reaction against increasingly higher speed in our daily lives, at work as well as in our leisure time. Increased efficiency, ceaseless activity, and constant interruptions by social media, mean that modern people seldom find quiet spaces. Slow TV can be such a space where nothing much happens, and people can wind down. Yet there are few mentions of slow food, slow journalism, or other slow movements when slow TV is discussed in Norway. Slowness there is rather connected with nature, spare time, hiking and living in cabins. Many Norwegians own a cabin either in a remote mountain area or on the coast. These cabins are the places where Norwegians find peace and quietness and recharge their batteries. Nature, outdoor life and cabins are closely connected to Norwegian identity. It is thus not surprising that slow TV reinforces this by making it a central motif.

National identity is presented not only as connected to the periphery—natural landscapes, the rural population—and to slowness and peacefulness, but also as unproblematically and easily accommodating other identities. The slow TV broadcasts represent a rather traditional version of Norwegian culture: Contemporary urban and multicultural society is not visible in these programmes. The presentation of national identity in the Norwegian slow TV programmes is quite opposite to that described by Jeffery and Hawkes (2021). In the Australian version nature and the periphery represent something unfamiliar and almost threatening, while

nature and the periphery in Norway are celebrated and treasured as the focus of national identity.

Slow TV programmes can be interpreted in different ways (e.g., focusing on slowness versus on national identity), but when we look at different identities in the Norwegian population at large, it is not so much a question of different interpretations, but differences in what they look at—older people watch slow TV on linear television, as they are more inclined to watch linear television in general, and are probably more inclined to embrace a more traditional Norwegian identity. The young are more active on online media and do not watch slow TV. But, and this is an accomplishment of the NRK, they watched SKAM and other programmes.

This study has its limitations in terms of discerning how slow TV is perceived and experienced in different strata of the Norwegian population. More research could be carried out here and would contribute to more insights into general identity processes within the nation. But the future of slow TV is uncertain. The 2021 series were not very successful, and in 2022 the NRK is not planning any slow TV broadcasts.

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