

35th EPRA meeting
 Portorož, 31 May – 1 June 2012

**Working group 2:
 Local and Community media Workgroup EPRA 2012**

Bernard Dubuisson, CSA (BE)

- *Echoing some topics addressed by working groups that took place in Barcelona (2010 and 2001) and Stockholm (2004), the group would promote the exchange of best practices with regard to licensing local, non-profit and community media (covering TV and radio), assessing/monitoring content requirements, analysing necessary prerequisites for a sustainable sector, not to forget issues raised by digital transition.*

Local and community media are sometimes overlooked by media and regulatory frameworks primarily designed to treat with big, corporate media outlets. Nevertheless, local and community media are generally recognized as essential to pluralism and diversity. But how deeply are their specificities adequately addressed by regulatory policies?

Through this working group, we propose to discuss and exchange best practices around the regulation of local and community media. The WG work will allow every participant to get a clear view of where they are in terms of regulating local and community media, get informed and exchange on best practices and general stakes associated with local and community media.

Methodology

The proposal is to treat both local and community media questions in parallel. Though they are clearly distinct concepts, they often share similarities when it comes to regulation. Besides, treating them as completely separate topics would end up in two separate sub working groups, which is not the purpose.

The WG will rely on two complementary tools, an online working group and the meeting sessions.

The online working group

<http://www.epra.org/forum/topics/working-group-2-on-local-and-community-media>

The main channel of participation to the working group will be online communication. If possible, through the new tools available on the EPRA website (forum and survey functionalities). The creation of the working group will need special care in order to involve every participant in an online discussion.

The online discussion will be the base and central tool for the works and output of the WG. From the information, opinions and explanations given by the participants, reports on the situation and guides on best practices will be produced by the WG coordinators with the eventual help of particularly active members.

The working group sessions in Portorož and Jerusalem

The sessions will be the place for discussing and adopting final versions of the output documents produced through the online WG. Prior to the meetings, participants will receive draft documents that will be corrected and fine-tuned with meeting participants.

It is also proposed that the meetings hold a keynote speech by a stakeholder in relation with the topic discussed.

Proposed keynote speeches:

- *Portorož*: an Amarc¹ Europe representative (Mrs Sally Galiana and Mr Francesco Diasio). Amarc Europe is currently conducting a transnational survey on community media from the perspective of its members.
- *Jerusalem*: To be defined. It would be interesting to have an expert on local advertising market and the way local media can be taken into account in audience research studies.

Content

Discussion will be organized around three main topics. Chronologically, the two first topics, addressing basic questions, will be treated at the Portorož meeting. The third topic, addressing prospective questions, will be treated in Jerusalem.

1. Goals and definitions

By local and community media, we mean:

- **Local**: any media that aims at a fragment of the national territory, whether commercial local or community media. It will be interesting to compare what all participants consider "local" as opposed to "national".
- **Community**: any non State-owned media that has non-profit goals, has a democratic ownership and offers social value to its community, whether local or national. It will be interesting to compare what participants consider "community", "democratic ownership" or "social value".
- **Media**: by media, we mean radio and television primarily. It will be interesting to compare how participants integrate AVMS in the local and community media concepts. Does local still make sense in IP-based broadcasting such as web TV, webradio or podcasting? Does community media make sense on the internet where user-generated contents can easily disseminate? How can the internet help tie communities together with their media?

Proposed methodology for this target: online discussion and exchange (using the survey forms and forum on the EPRA website), production of a synthesis paper, discussion of the paper in the Portorož meeting.

2. Regulating local and community media

Different stages of regulation policy:

1. **Categorization**: does the regulatory framework recognize local or community media as a specific types of media?
2. **Licensing** and granting broadcast capacities, range of broadcasting: do local and community licenses and/or frequency allocation reflect the specificities of those media? Do they have "special" licenses or special licensing processes?
3. **Requirements**, control and monitoring: do local and community media have special or distinct requirements? Is regulation looser than for the bigger media outlets?
4. **Sanctions**: how are sanctions applied to "smaller" actors? Are the traditional sanctions such as fines appropriate when it comes to non-profit media?
5. **Interaction** and contacts with small actors: do regulatory authorities make special accommodations to avoid discrimination of numerous, small-size, remote and sometimes volunteer-run service providers? Do they setup specific relationship management tools to keep track of all actors? Do they sometimes setup meetings out of office hours? Do they have remote local offices? How do they monitor local media?

For all these stages, the WG will gather as many information on regulatory schemes as possible from participants through online exchanges. It will focus on experience and examples of regulating local and community media to remain practical. A synthesis will be produced and discussed in the Portorož meeting.

3. Towards sustainable local and community media

In this topic, broader questions will make room for more general discussions about the future of local and community media in a changing landscape.

¹ <http://europe.amarc.org>

3.1. Local advertising market:

1. How to ensure proper integration of local commercial media within a globalized advertising market?
2. How can local media be taken into account by audience research studies?
3. How can the local advertising market be "reserved" to local broadcasters?

3.2. Going digital, DTR, DTT

1. How are local and community media taken into account in the DTT/DTR transition plans? EG in multiplex architecture and coverage design, in contribution to the multiplex funding, etc.
2. Do local and/or community media see digital planning as a threat or as an opportunity, when consulted?

3.3. EPG Prominence

1. How is equity towards EPG dealt with across regulatory frameworks?
2. How to ensure non-discriminatory access to adequate visibility for smaller services compared to national channels?

3.4. Support and funding

For smaller media, regulation sometimes means active support, or even funding.

1. Do regulatory frameworks have provisions for active support (training, equipment or general budget funding)?
2. If yes, how is it organized? What are the conditions to meet? Are these measures considered effective? What assessment or evaluation procedures exist?

These questions will also be treated within the online working group. As they are more prospective and open, we would keep them for discussion when WG participants have some experience with exchanging on "easier" topics above. The Jerusalem meeting would be focused on those questions.

Outcome

The effective results of the working group may be hard to set at this stage, as they heavily depend on participants' involvement. Possible deliverables have so far been identified as follows. Obviously, this is very ambitious and it is likely that choices will have to be made.

- ⌘ The development of an informal network of experts and peer regulatory officers in charge of local and community media across EPRA members ;
- ⌘ A comparative paper on how regulatory frameworks deal with local and community media ;
- ⌘ A practical guide on best practices regarding local and community media ;
- ⌘ An assessment test on how to evaluate a regulatory policy towards local and community media ;
- ⌘ A statement/position paper from EPRA about the value and importance of adequate regulation of local and community media.