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## Media Literacy and the Public Sphere: Contexts for Public Media Literacy Promotion in Ireland

Brian O'Neill

*Technological University Dublin*, [brian.oneill@tudublin.ie](mailto:brian.oneill@tudublin.ie)

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## ***Media Literacy and the Public Sphere: Contexts for Public Media Literacy Promotion in Ireland***

Brian O'Neill, PhD, Faculty of Applied Arts, Dublin Institute of Technology,

Rathmines Road, Dublin 6, IRELAND

Email: [brian.oneill@dit.ie](mailto:brian.oneill@dit.ie)

Tel: +353-1-4023481

**Author Bio:** Brian O'Neill is based in the Faculty of Applied Arts, Dublin Institute of Technology. His research and teaching interests are in media literacy and policy on aspects of technology, new media, and information society issues. He is a member of the Digital Radio Cultures in Europe research group (COST Action A20) and Deputy Head of the IAMCR Audience and Reception Studies section.

## **Media Literacy and the Public Sphere: Contexts for Public Media Literacy Promotion in Ireland**

### **Abstract**

The concept of media literacy has undergone significant transformation in recent years from its origins in media education discourse to the current pivotal role it occupies in emerging European media policy formations. Its insertion within the Audiovisual Services Directive is an indicator of the significance attached to it at European Commission level. Media literacy, in addition to denoting critical media awareness, is increasingly viewed as essential to maintaining inclusivity in a rapidly changing environment for converged information and communication services. But what, in this context, does media literacy now mean and does it fit appropriately within the ‘moral agenda’ (Silverstone 2004) of current regulatory discourse?

These questions are framed against the background of proposed legislation for public media literacy promotion in Ireland. Internationally, Ofcom has provided the principal model for a public regulatory approach. This paper assesses this and other models and considers implications for the Irish situation in which the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) will be charged with a similar responsibility. In anticipation of this new policy, this paper examines the current legislative and regulatory framework for media literacy, the competing interests that ML policy attempts to contain and the recommendations for a successful implementation within the Irish media context.

Drawing on research commissioned by the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland, findings are intended to inform decision-making within a regulatory perspective and make recommendations for effective and socially responsive communications policy.

## ***Introduction: Situating Media Literacy***

The ability to read and write – or traditional literacy – is no longer sufficient in this day and age. People need a greater awareness of how to express themselves effectively, and how to interpret what others are saying, especially on blogs, via search engines or in advertising. Everyone (old and young) needs to get to grips with the new digital world in which we live. For this, continuous information and education is more important than regulation.

[Viviane Reding, Commissioner for Information Society and Media, European Commission]

Media literacy, for long a concern of educationalists and media researchers, is now a major focus of public policy. Following many years of success in curriculum development, though hampered by limited governmental support, the concept has more recently become a buzzword in thinking about forms of regulation in the emerging converged communications market. The European Commission, governments of individual member states, media regulators across the world, and the media industry as a whole are considering their responsibilities and obligations towards supporting a better understanding of the fast changing media environment in which we live.

Central to the claim made above is that media literacy is a pre-requisite for effective participation in technologically-advanced societies in which rapid change in information and communications services has become the norm. Technologies are now central to many communicative processes and media literacy means acquiring a broad range of competences in new and traditional media that allow us to play a full part in today's society. Failure to do so will mean an increasingly atomised society and a growing digital divide between those who are skilled and well-connected and those who fall behind. Conversely, a highly-media literate society is one in which social cohesion flourishes, and in which competitiveness in a knowledge economy is supported.

Within academic and educational circles, there has been much discussion and debate about the term 'media literacy', its imprecision, and the manner in which it has been transposed into this public policy context. There is some concern that the definitions adopted are too vague and do not provide sufficient scope for developing the skills of critical analysis which media educationalists seek. There is also some suspicion about the motives of governments adopting policies towards media literacy as 'passing the buck' (Bragg, Buckingham et al. 2006: 40). As a recent report for the Australian Communications and Media Authority puts it: 'when a government steps back from regulation, every consumer has to, in effect, become their own regulator' (Penman and Turnbull 2007: 40).

## ***An operational model for media literacy***

Discussion and debate on what media literacy actually means has a longstanding position within the literature on the subject and it is commonplace to begin a review of the subject acknowledging the fact that while we know it is a good thing, we are not entirely agreed on what it is.

Cecilia Von Feilitzen of the International Clearinghouse on Children Youth and Media, has argued that:

There exist many definitions of media literacy around the world. More and more often they include the ability 1) to access the media, 2) to understand/critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media contents, and 3) to create media contents/participate in the production process. It is not unusual that the definitions also include aspects of learning to use the media in order to participate in the process for social change, for development, towards increased democracy. (Commission Of The European Communities 2007: 6)

Definitions of media literacy now in circulation share a number of dimensions which constitute the starting point of an operational model for policy and programme development. These include:

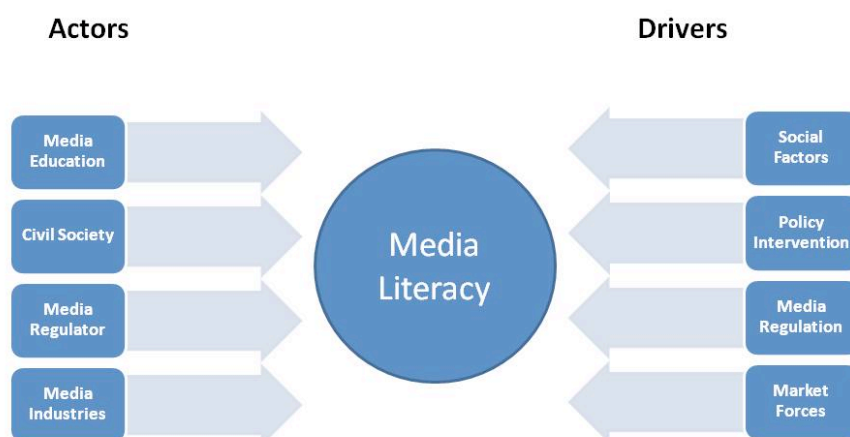
- Questions of *access* including issues of both physical access to the media and as well as enabling skills or competencies required to use and avail of media communication.
- Ability to *analyse* and *evaluate*, drawing on critical skills of reading and understanding as well critically appraising information and communications across print, graphic, and audiovisual forms.
- The ability to *create* communications, and utilise technical, communicative and creative skills in different media and using different technologies of communication.

Such competencies are at the same time communicative human rights and, in the formulation agreed at the 1999 UNESCO Vienna conference, *Educating for the Media and the Digital Age*, such rights are seen as ‘a basic entitlement of every citizen, in every country in the world’ and are ‘instrumental in building and sustaining democracy’ (UNESCO 1999). The follow-up UNESCO seminar in Seville in 2002 confirmed this approach and reasserted that media literacy has both *critical* and *creative* aspects, that media education takes place in both formal and informal settings, and that it should promote individual self-fulfilment and community and social responsibility (UNESCO 2002).

An operational model for media literacy is presented in Figure 1. This represents the distinct *actors* and *drivers* involved in media literacy. In addition to the media education community where media literacy has traditionally resided, there are now other providers and actors in the field including NGOs, advocacy groups, other civil society organisations, government interests, principally represented by the media regulator, and not least, media industries themselves. The relationships and partnerships between such actors are examined further in the next section.

There are also a number of distinct forces impacting on media literacy and driving particular goals. Presented here at a level of generality, such drivers include social dimensions such demographic and population profile factors such as age and social class. Policy interventions, particularly in the ICT arena, have played a significant role in shaping approaches to media literacy and focussed attention on issues of access to and understanding of the new information and communications environment. Media regulation, in this instance, may be seen as the instrument of public policy and a determinant of the media environment, as both actor and driver, within which media literacy policy operates. Finally, there are specific market forces impacting on the media landscape, bringing new services and platforms into the mix, shaping patterns of consumption, and creating new opportunities and challenges for media literacy.

**Figure 1 – An Operational Model of Media Literacy<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> This adapts a model presented by Ofcom at the International Media Literacy Research Forum, London, May 14-16, 2008. URL: <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/theforum>

Media literacy today has become a priority for debate and public action, involving a wide variety of stakeholders, responding to distinct social, political, regulatory and market forces. The specific context for media literacy in different countries may vary enormously and substantial research is required to properly assess and compare its position in different locations. However, while there remain large disparities in its status and development across the world, the differences between the fundamental goals being pursued are diminishing.

### ***Media literacy in the public sphere and policy context***

Reviewing definitions of media literacy, it is clear that there has always been a strong public dimension and democratic orientation underpinning media education. The first principle of media education, according to Len Masterman, is that: ‘At stake is the empowerment of majorities and the strengthening of society’s democratic structures’ (Masterman 1985).<sup>2</sup> Media education, advocates argue, is inextricably bound up with human rights of freedom of information and expression. The outcome of media education is the ability to make ‘one’s own judgment on the basis of the available information’ (Krucsay 2006). In fostering a sense of critical autonomy, the media literate person is empowered through a greater understanding of how the media *mediate* reality, rather than simply reflect it, and accordingly is better prepared to participate in society on more equal terms. Noting that only one in ten of American 18 year olds vote, media researcher Robert Kubey has argued strongly for the linking of media studies in schools with civics and social studies (Kubey 2004). He argues that ‘in a representative democracy, people must be educated in all forms of contemporary mediated expression and well beyond the print media’ (2004: 69). Up to relatively recently, however, the objective of media literacy education, whether related to language arts or civics, has been education of young people in full-time educational settings through curricula designed to foster greater critical awareness at an individual level.

Against the background of the celebration of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 2008, there is a growing consensus that concepts such as media literacy and information literacy are best conceived through the lens of human rights (Frau-Meigs 2008). The Council of Europe’s support for the public service value of the internet<sup>3</sup> focuses attention on strategies for realisation of the full democratic potential of the information society and the development of appropriate public spaces and information as a public good. For this, media literacy is an essential pre-requisite.

The fundamental basis for media literacy as a public policy concern derives from its origin in communication rights, in turn derived from basic human rights, as guaranteed by through such international declarations as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990). The contribution of organisations such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe in developing the public dimension of media literacy and its role in education has been a decisive one and hugely influential. UNESCO initiated the concept of media education in the 1970s and sought input from leading researchers to develop strategies for its incorporation into the education systems of all developed countries (Zgrabljić-Rotar 2006: 10). The Grünwald Declaration of 1982 originally argued the need for political and educational systems to promote citizens’ critical understanding of the phenomena of communication. Since then, UNESCO conferences in Toulouse

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/educational/teaching\\_backgrounders/media\\_literacy/18\\_principles.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/educational/teaching_backgrounders/media_literacy/18_principles.cfm)

<sup>3</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)16 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures to promote the public service value of the Internet. URL: <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1207291&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=FFBB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75>

(1990), Vienna (1998) and Seville (2000) have built an international case for promoting media and information literacy as an integral part of people's life-long learning.<sup>4</sup> UNESCO is also the official moderator within the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in priority Action Line C9 - Media, and promotes media education and information literacy as one of its sub-themes.<sup>5</sup> Research, influencing policy and setting international standards for best practice are also a crucial element of UNESCO's involvement in media literacy. Its 2001 report *Media Education a Global Strategy for Development* (Buckingham 2001) outlined broad guidelines to media education, an appraisal of its application around the world and proposed a strategy for its future development. The accompanying *Youth Media Education Survey* (Domaille and Buckingham 2001) documented the central facilitative role that UNESCO has played in the development of media education at various stages in its history.

The Council of Europe has also played an active role in the promotion of media literacy within the public sphere. Within its mandate of protecting human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law, the Council has emphasised citizens' interests in the media and developed recommendations on policies concerning human rights, democracy, and the right to information and freedom of expression. Its work in the area has developed a particular focus around the protection and promotion of human rights, linked to member State responsibilities to protect and promote human rights, especially for young people, under the European Convention on Human Rights. Its Recommendation on *Empowering Children in the New Information and Communications Environment* was adopted in 2006 and advocated 'a coherent information literacy and training strategy which is conducive to empowering children and their educators in order for them to make the best possible use of information and communication services and technologies'.<sup>6</sup> Member states accordingly are required to ensure that children are familiarised with, and skilled in, the new information and communications environment, have the necessary skills to create, produce and distribute content and communications, and that such skills should better enable them to deal with content that may be harmful in nature. A supporting *Internet Literacy Handbook*, published by the Council's Media Division, acts as a guide for parents, teachers and young people.<sup>7</sup>

The Committee of Ministers' 2007 recommendation to member states on promoting freedom of expression and information highlights transparency and reliability of information as a crucial element of human rights within the new information and communications environment.<sup>8</sup> Advocating a multi—stakeholder approach between governments, private sector and civil society organisations, the recommendation recognises that exercising rights and freedoms in the new environment requires affordable access to ICT infrastructure, access to information as a public service and common standards and strategies for reliable information, flexible content creation and transparency in the processing of information. Member states are encouraged to create a clear enabling legal framework and complementary regulatory systems, including new forms of co-regulation and self-regulation, that respond adequately to technological changes and are fully compatible with the respect for human rights and the rule of law.

### ***Media literacy provision in the regulatory domain***

Increasingly, it is in the regulatory domain that responsibility rests for the creation and maintenance of a democratic public sphere through implementation of policies such as the provision and promotion of media literacy. The European Commission's 2003 *Communication on the future of European regulatory audiovisual policy*, emphasised the role of regulatory policy in safeguarding public interests, such as cultural diversity, the right to information, media pluralism, the protection of minors,

<sup>4</sup> [http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=27056&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=27056&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.wsis-si.org/media.html>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/E/Human\\_Rights/Media/Links/Events/Forum2006YEREVAN\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/E/Human_Rights/Media/Links/Events/Forum2006YEREVAN_en.asp)

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/StandardSetting/InternetLiteracy/hbk\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/StandardSetting/InternetLiteracy/hbk_en.asp)

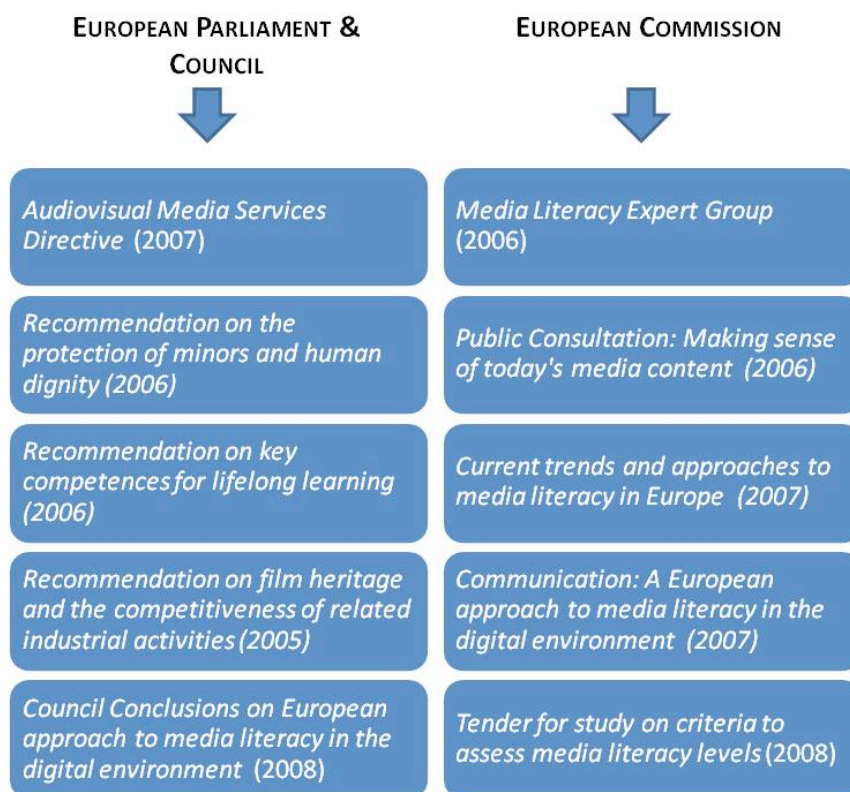
<sup>8</sup> <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1188541#RelatedDocuments>

consumer protection and the need to enhance public awareness and media literacy.<sup>9</sup> Media regulators in particular have a central role in the management of those public spaces where an information commons is created and maintained through a diverse and pluralist broadcasting landscape. Consequently, the ‘culture of independence’, acts as a crucial guarantor of democratic accountability and transparency in regulatory management of the media environment.<sup>10</sup>

Public service broadcasting, in particular, has been identified as a key instrument in promoting citizens’ democratic participation and access to public life (Banerjee and Seneviratne 2005: 12). Against a background of increasing marketisation and erosion of the public sphere through fragmentation, institutions such as public service broadcasting and the underpinning regulatory frameworks now play a central role in defining that public space in which rights for information, communication and expression are exercised and enjoyed. UNESCO has argued that optimal utilisation of the public space fundamentally relies on media literacy skills, and realising the full range of possibilities that media literacy offers. In a rapidly developing information and communications environment, therefore, regulatory bodies need to ensure a commitment to public access and utilise new and emerging platforms to enable participation and interaction, coverage of public events and major governance institutions and support for minorities and other interests who may require special measures to achieve full citizen-participation and information sharing.

There are now a number of important legislative and regulatory initiatives governing media literacy across different European institutions, including at European Commission and European Parliament level, summarised in Figure 2:

**Figure 2 – Overview of European Media Literacy Regulation**



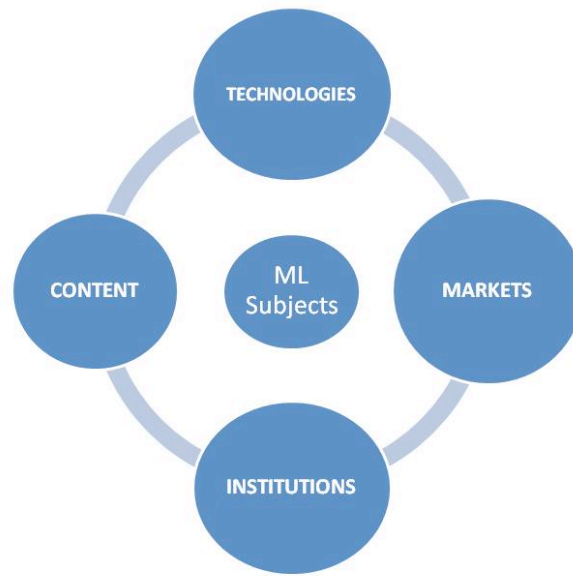
<sup>9</sup> *The Future of European Audiovisual Regulatory Policy*. URL: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2003:0784:FIN:EN:PDF>

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/E/Human\\_Rights/Media/4\\_Documentary\\_Resources/SpeechJSWarsaw15Apr08\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/E/Human_Rights/Media/4_Documentary_Resources/SpeechJSWarsaw15Apr08_en.asp)



This legislative and regulatory framework for the promotion of media literacy represents, I argue, an important discursive and political space within which interests of the public can be constituted, maintained and extended. The promotion and implementation of programmes of media literacy by regulatory agencies is still at an early stage of development. It would be misleading to suggest and indeed unusual if there were no inherent tensions or points of disagreement within this new configuration. Figure 3 presents four thematic nodal points summarising current debate and discussion.

**Figure 3 – Media Literacy within Regulatory Context**



These elements define the *subjects* or topics that a media literacy policy may contain. It also illustrates different modes of engagement for citizens and consumers as the *subjects* of media literacy policy, and the kinds of relationships envisaged with participants in the field. The challenge for governments and media regulators, accordingly, is to balance these sometimes opposing aims and needs: the market-driven goals of private industry with requirements for more expensive or unprofitable forms of content; communication rights of citizens with needs of industry and technology development.

## **Technologies**

### *Experiences of technological change*

The rapid pace of technological change has been a central driving force behind the emergence of media literacy as an issue for public policy. European Commission media literacy initiatives first emerged in response to political pressure from the European Parliament, particularly in relation to the transition from analogue to digital television. The European Charter for Media Literacy defines a media literate person as someone who is, in the first instance, able to ‘use media technologies effectively to access, store, retrieve and share content to meet their individual and community needs and interests’. The Communications Act 2003 requires Ofcom ‘to encourage the development and use of technologies and systems for regulating access to such material, and for facilitating control over what material is received, that are both effective and easy to use’ (Ofcom 2004: 18). The BBC Trust’s statement of purpose includes a commitment to promote understanding of the benefits of new technologies, particularly among the most vulnerable audiences.<sup>11</sup> AVMSD envisages that media

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/info/purpose/public\\_purposes/communication.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/info/purpose/public_purposes/communication.shtml)

literate people will be able to ‘take advantage of the full range of opportunities offered by new communications technologies’ (2007: recital 37) and the Commission communication proposes active use *inter alia* of ‘interactive television, use of Internet search engines or participation in virtual communities, and better exploiting the potential of media for entertainment, access to culture, intercultural dialogue, learning and daily-life applications (for instance, through libraries, podcasts)’ (2007: 4).

The massive changes in technological development, whether through mobile communications, digital radio and television, user generated internet content or the convergence of delivery platforms for media content, make enormous demands on users to keep pace with technological change, to invest in new technologies, and to learn how to control them and make the best use of new services.

From the user’s point of view, such rapid technological change is profoundly disruptive. While popular media attention frequently celebrates the apparently natural facility that the ‘new digital generation’ has for everything ‘new’ (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 1999), there is the converse position that new technologies present daunting, challenging and difficult experiences for people. Everette Dennis, writing about the ‘media literacy needs of grown ups’, argues that

...if there is a consistent argument for media literacy it is that of complexity. The media system is more complicated than ever and generates more content across various platforms, and is deemed more significant and powerful than any other time’. (Dennis 2004: 204)

Livingstone suggests that the question of the ‘legibility’ of the new communications and media environment, rather than the ‘literacy’ of its readers and users, is an issue of major public importance, and calls attention to the numerous ways in which information is not made available or that technologies do not lend themselves to transparent or user-friendly access (Livingstone 2008).

### *Questions of Access*

Within the context of European policy, media literacy is implicitly linked to the i2010 strategy, the EU policy framework for the information society and media, the objective of which is to promote the positive contribution that information and communication technologies (ICT) can make to the economy, society and personal quality of life. The i2010 strategy, bringing together all European Union policies, initiatives and actions, around the use of digital technologies, is a central part of the Lisbon strategy to make Europe a more competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy.<sup>12</sup> Enabling regulatory frameworks, supporting greater media literacy in support of an open and competitive digital economy are a key focus of the strategy (i2010 High Level Group 2007).

There is no shortage of utopian rhetoric about the potential of ICTs and new communications media to transform personal, social and political life (Rheingold 1993; Negroponte 1998), for instance, to name an obvious few. However, limitations of access, understood in all its dimensions, provides a reality check against such unrealistic assumptions. Papacharissi (2002) asks: ‘even if online information is available to all, how easy is it to access and manage vast volumes of information?’ (2002: 14). For this, in addition to just the access to the hardware and its infrastructure, technical skills to select, set up, operate and maintain a computer and its software are required as well as the skills of media literacy to assess, determine what is valuable and to evaluate results.

Access, therefore, is much more than simple availability or take-up of technology platforms. For Livingstone, access rests on a dynamic social process, and is not a one-off act of provision (Livingstone 2003: 7). Detailed research is required into the many modalities of media and technology use, including the domestic practices of media use, the complex social networks within

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<sup>12</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/eeurope/i2010/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/eeurope/i2010/index_en.htm)

which ICTs are now routinely deployed, and the ways in which beneficial access can be supported and negative aspects curtailed.

As Livingstone et al explain (2005), people may have access to a wide range of media and communication goods; however, they may never get beyond the most basic of applications. This is particularly true in relation to traditional media and communication such as the television and the mobile phone, both of which now offer advanced functions ranging from, respectively, interactivity and point of view selections to photography and internet connectivity. With these familiar forms, the original and primary use is retained by the majority, they ‘see through to the content’ or original function and may disregard other more creative uses. Change in this context is absorbed but not exploited to its full capacity (2005: 18).

### *ICT skills*

Central to the i2010 strategy of supporting better access to information and communication technologies is development of ICT skills, digital literacy or ‘e-competence’ and is a major priority for the European Commission. EU policy closely link digital literacy and ICT skills to media literacy in an unproblematic manner. Media literacy, it is claimed, helps to condition our confidence with technologies that are new to us - with obvious benefits for the workplace. Indeed, ICT skills are essential to handle the flood of information available across various electronic platforms and which the digitally competent, media literate citizen can easily access, sort and sift through.

The incorporation of technical, ICT-related skills within the concept of media literacy has the important effect extending and broadening our notion of media ‘use’ where this use now includes the ability to interact, to create and to engage in a more dynamic relationship with hitherto passive media content. Previous notions of media literacy have not always included the idea of content creation and placed greater emphasis instead on textual skills of analysis and evaluation. An ICT-orientation has shifted attention to a more active sense of media participation and highlighted creativity and literacies as competences that call for active participation (Sefton-Green 1999; Jenkins 2006; Brereton and O'Connor 2007).

The close linkage between media and digital literacy poses an important challenge for regulation. For media regulators, depending on their specific focus on broadcast and content regulation, or an enlarged converged model of media and communications regulation, the promotion and implementation of media literacy requires a high degree of awareness-raising for the public of the practical benefits of ICT.

Media literacy initiatives to address skills gaps have more often than not been targeted at young people in formal educational settings. Adults, as Dennis has claimed, are often ignored in this context, despite the fact that the vast bulk of media is made by adults, for adults, is about adults and is engaged with by adults (Dennis 2004: 202). A media literacy policy for all, therefore, foregrounds issues about inclusion and must ensure that more vulnerable groups such as those living in poverty, the elderly, minority groups and those with disabilities are not left out.

## **Markets**

### *Audience Fragmentation*

The introduction of media literacy as part of the AVMSD comes as part of a package of measures to ensure an effective European single market for audiovisual media services. Responding to technological developments and seeking to create a level-playing field in Europe for emerging audiovisual media services, the Directive provides for ‘less detailed and more flexible regulation and modernises rules on TV advertising to better finance audiovisual content’. With proliferating services

across television, cinema, video, websites, radio, video games and virtual communities, media literacy, in the Commission view, is required to make informed choices and to provide the critical, evaluative skills necessary to navigate a complex and crowded audiovisual space.

Liberalisation of the European audiovisual market has made its impact felt across nearly all domains of traditional media. Mass audiences are in steady decline, hastened by entrants into the marketplace who, enabled by the increase in bandwidth, have expanded their repertoire through the commodification of previously free-to-air public events (Murphy and White 2007: 253). The sale, for instance, of the broadcast rights for Ireland's national home soccer games to BSkyB highlights the increasingly complex relationship between sport, commercial, and public service media, and the state (Flynn 2004). The loss of such communal viewing experiences is linked also to declining audiences for public service broadcasting and, indeed, for all premium content including drama, comedy and film (Murphy and White 2007). The previous cultural unity of the mass audience has been displaced by specialised niche media catering for ever more specific interests, repositioning the viewer as an individual consumer with precise interests and preferences (Iosifidis 2007: 76).

At the same time, this fragmentation of national television monopolies and homogenous cultural reference points also represents a welcome diversification and a breaking down of dominant representations that marginalise minority views (see Livingstone, Couvering et al. 2005: 35). Experiences of new media platforms are also seen as a counter-tendency to the homogenisation of established media forms. While much further research is required about how they function, particularly in the lives of young people, it would appear that rather than fragmentation, new media forms are bringing more people together in a virtual sense than would be possible in the physical world. Just as television and radio have become more personalised experiences, new media platforms offer further opportunities for creating and sharing content. Connecting otherwise isolated and fragmented audience members, new internet platforms such as social networking sites, video and digital photo sharing, podcasting, and internet phone services, have radically altered the relationships and sense of distance that hitherto existed between media and its audience (Silverstone 2004: 444).

### *Citizenship, Democracy and the Consumer*

The competing interests of citizens and consumers is one of the central debates about public policy towards media literacy. At a European level, media literacy is consistently presented as serving both. Media literacy, it is said: '...empowers *citizens* with the critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills to make them judicious *consumers* and producers of content. Media literacy also supports freedom of expression and the right to information, helping to build and sustain democracy'.<sup>13</sup>

The trend towards adopting a consumer-oriented approach within audiovisual regulation is well established and goes back, for instance to the 1989 Peacock Commission's concept of 'consumer sovereignty'.

The creation of converged regulation for broadcasting, telecommunications and computing in the new communications technology environment is frequently characterised in the literature as a move towards deregulated, free market principles and the primacy of economic concerns over public interest (Silverstone 2004; Freedman 2006; O'Regan and Goldsmith 2006; Smith 2006; Iosifidis 2007). Commentators highlight concern for the maintenance of the public interest, as traditionally represented by public service broadcasting, for example, in the face of an overarching commercial imperative. Maintaining the balance between citizen and consumer interests, in this context, becomes more challenging when 'harder' economic logic is framed against 'looser', more abstract talk of the citizen interest and issues of social, cultural and democratic value that are harder to define (Livingstone, Lunt et al. 2007: 72). Freedman warns that media policy decisions may be increasingly driven by economics because the new, multiple stakeholders of converged regulatory regimes –policy makers, civil society interest groups, and industry representative, who may already be ideologically

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<sup>13</sup> <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/06/1326&f>

opposed to each other, – will find it very difficult to agree on values which are nebulous and open to endless interpretation (2006: 918).

The citizen-consumer dialectic is a critical question for media regulation as a whole, and particularly so for media literacy policy. Clarity about the purpose and meaning of media literacy is essential in this regard, before attempting to define what it should encompass and ultimately deliver. Media literacy can encompass the interests of citizens and the interests of the consumer. It can educate the public about the role media can play in a democratic society; it can inform people about opportunities for learning, communicating and self expression, and how to choose the best technology at the best price. These diverse functions highlight both the clear distinctions and the blurry crossovers between the citizen interest and the consumer interest (Livingstone, Lunt et al. 2007: 60). What is a concern for authors cited here is the lack of balance between the two.

### *Protection versus Promotion*

Reflecting on an age old debate within media education, and which continues to be present in the various tendencies within media literacy movements, David Buckingham has characterised the evident tensions that exists between groups with highly diverse motivations:

... ranging from commercial promotion to ‘counter-propaganda’. Some may see media education primarily as a matter of *protection* – as a means of weaning children off something that is deemed to be fundamentally bad for them; while others see it more in terms of *preparation* – as a means of enabling children to become more active users of media. (Buckingham 2001: 6).

As discussed above, intense mediatisation has led to a focussed debate on the importance of media literacy as a necessary response to the highly complex and expanding media environment that young people grow up in. Supporting critical competences among children and cultivating greater awareness among teachers, parents and professionals are deemed essential to cope not just with the enormous volume of new media experiences but also to deal with potential harmful content and negative effects. On the other hand, intense mediatisation has also revived debates about the need for greater controls and more regulation on a national and international level that might include ‘age limits, ratings/classifications, filtering, time schedules, watershed, warnings, labelling, codes of media conducts etc.’ (von Feilitzen and Carlsson 2003: 10). In practice, the question is never simply one of ‘*to promote or to protect?*’ as if the choice exists between media literacy or media regulation. Like the blurred lines between citizen and consumer discussed above, the distinction is best viewed as being somewhat porous in nature, and can be mapped onto debates about regulation and the media. That is to say, neither total deregulation, nor over-zealous censorship is desirable, rather it is a consideration of both elements which will inform a responsible media literacy policy within the broader regulatory framework. A purely protectionist stance is neither effective nor desirable in that, as Buckingham highlights, the benefits and the pleasures of media are sidelined in order to focus entirely on the perceived harm they are assumed to cause (Buckingham 2001: 9).

A crucial question for regulators in this context has been summarized by Noa Elefant Loffler, of Israel’s radio and television authority, where she argues that converged media environment has changed the aims and basis of traditional regulation. The rolling back of the regulatory protection paradigm places a public responsibility on the regulator to ensure that individual citizens are not left vulnerable:

The regulator’s abandonment of the user-protection mechanism without seeking a clear response to such questions and without taking responsibility for the empowerment of the users and promotion of their skills, may leave the user in a weakened state, specifically *due* to the onslaught of information against which they have no ability to strive. (Loffler 2008: 4)

Current European policy as expressed in AVMSD and in the Commission communication tends to an approach consisting of lighter regulation supported by media literacy: ‘Continuous information and education is more important than regulation’ according to Viviane Reding, Commissioner for Information Society and Media.<sup>14</sup> The protection of children as users of online technologies is of particular concern in this regard. Regulators have particular responsibilities in this area and Europe-wide legislation and standards exist for the protection of minors, electronic commerce, privacy and electronic communications and online distribution of child sexual abuse material.<sup>15</sup> Given the rapid changes taking place in the online environment, however, a co-regulatory approach between the authorities, industry, consumers and other parties concerned about child safety, is preferred however as more adaptable and effective. Self-regulation by industry players has been strongly encouraged by the Commission with examples such as the ICRA labelling system, the PEGI pan-European rating system for console games, and the PEGI Online project supported under the Safer Internet programme. Media literacy remains a crucial element of the strategy, though, and is clearly linked to goals of protection. Media literate people, according to the AVMSD ‘will be better able to protect themselves and their families from harmful, offensive or undesired content’ and will ultimately be the ones who choose what service they wish to engage with.

## **Media Institutions**

### *The Individual and Media Regulation*

At the heart of the AVMSD approach to media regulation is a new form of relationship between the individual (citizen and consumer) and the media as institution with far reaching implications for roles and responsibilities of viewer/users and regulators alike. The new ‘media-literate’ audience, is no longer a passive subject, consuming programmes and services that have been selected and approved on their behalf. The media-literate viewer is required or ‘challenged to make active choices in a commercialized and interactive programme landscape’ (Helberger 2008: 140). In an environment of on-demand services viewers, rather than consuming a pre-ordained media diet, subscribe through what is essentially a service contract for products and services. In the ideology of the AVMSD framework, all needs – civic, social and personal - are addressed through a market in which individuals exercise control through their purchasing power. Responsibility and the ethical dimensions of choice are shifted to the individual citizen and consumer, supported through media literacy.

For Silverstone (2004), the traditional understanding of how citizens relate to the media have also been eroded. As citizens, previously we were expected to take full responsibility for our media use and for that of our children. Familiar warnings such as the watershed or age limitations allowed us to control media in the home. The single television in the family living room is, however, no longer the sole access point for the majority (2004: 443). Lower prices mean accessibility to more technology and services. Technology, multi-platform delivery and individualisation of media consumption have rendered traditional protectionist regulation invalid. Rather than more powerful regulation or new forms of censorship, what is required, he argues, is ‘a literacy of mass-mediated electronic texts, literal and critical’ (p.447) and forms of critical thinking as alternatives to media regulation. A critically-aware citizenry do not need censorship or even regulation, he suggests. A responsible and accountable media culture, established through regulation, can only be sustained by a population who

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<sup>14</sup> Media literacy: do people really understand how to make the most of blogs, search engines or interactive TV? URL:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/1970&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.fosi.org/conference2007/reding/>



are critical with respect to, and literate in the way of, mass mediation and media representation (2006: 440).

A further requirement now for the media literate individual is engagement with the actual process of policy making itself. Greater accountability and transparency has been a feature of policy making processes in general in recent years. Media literacy in this instance seeks to promote a better public understanding of the systems by which the media are regulated. As Freedman notes, however, there is a broad public indifference to media policy as a topic, mirrored indeed by a lack of critical attention by media scholars to the policy formation process more generally (Freedman 2006: 907). The current availability of huge amounts of information available, through websites and public consultations, gives detail about key steps and parts of the media policy process. All that this means, Freedman avers, is that this policy process is better publicised. It does not mean that the general public have any more of a voice in the eventual decisions that are taken, simply that they are better 'consulted': 'A commitment to transparency does not, in itself, undermine the control of the policy agenda and may be more likely to legitimize the process in the eyes of the public' (2006: 915).

### *Public Service Media*

The 'development and preservation of independent, pluralistic and responsibly minded media', in the words of the Commission study (Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona 2007: 65), has traditionally been the combined responsibility of regulators and public service media. The changing role of users in audiovisual services means that this foundation has been shaken and government intervention in the audiovisual market place in the first instance is now being questioned (Helberger 2007). Public service media, it is recognised, have come under increasing pressure in the new digital communications environment. Historically, European public broadcasting has been heavily regulated, with extensive coverage and content obligations, but new technologies and new patterns of use and consumption place a query over the adequacy of this approach in the new environment (Betzler and Ward 2004). Asking how can public service media survive, particularly in small countries, in the face of competitive commercial digital broadcasting, Iosifidis observes that in many cases they have had to adopt more populist programming content, in some cases abandoning their traditional style of programming in order to keep audience share (Iosifidis 2007: 65). Commercially-funded services, by contrast, are freer to target niche audiences, rigorously tailoring and trimming content, advertising and technological developments to suit that audience, often to the deliberate exclusion of others.

Public service media, it has been recognised, have a vital role to play in media literacy (Banerjee and Seneviratne 2005). Indeed, there is a close inter-relationship between their respective functions and underlying philosophies. There is an inherent challenge within the media literacy agenda for public broadcasters to take on responsibilities beyond their own corporation's objectives (2005: 24). This is in turn related to additional challenges public service media face in defining their once traditional preserve of the 'national consensus'. As diversity in all forms – religious, racial, ethnic, social, familial, sexual and cultural – becomes a feature of modern societies, it is no longer feasible for public broadcasters to claim to serve a consensual national interest (2005: 112).

The BBC provides a prominent example of media literacy from the perspective of the public broadcaster. The UK Government White Paper 'A Public Service for All – the BBC in a digital age' (March 2006) states:

The BBC will also have a role to promote media literacy. It can help ensure viewers and listeners understand how the media works, how it influences our lives and how it can best be used. In this age, these are not peripheral skills, they are starting to match the importance of other forms of literacy to work and leisure and to the functioning of democracy. (Department for Culture Media and Sport 2006: 4)

The BBC's unique role in spearheading digital broadcast technologies and driving the uptake of new digital platforms constitutes another important dimension in its media literacy mission. Given its

‘trusted’ position as a television provider (Whittle 2004) and the fact that television remains the medium the British public are most familiar and comfortable with (Ofcom 2006: 17), the BBC role’s in the switchover to digital television has been critical (Smith 2007). Media Literacy is crucial in this context as television – the most familiar platform – undergoes dramatic changes in its nature, moving from a linear analogue service to on-demand and interactive digital services; from basic channel availability within national and nearby boundaries to multiple specialist interest channels from across the globe. Public service media have played a highly significant role in this process, encouraging consumer interest in digital services among all sections of the population, and making the target of analogue switch-off across Europe in 2012 seem achievable (Iosifidis 2007).

### *Partnerships with Media Industries*

One of the less commented on features of media literacy policy is that in addition to new roles for citizens and consumers who assume greater responsibility for their own choices, there is an equivalent requirement on media industries to promote better awareness of processes of media production and organisation. The policies of co-regulation and self-regulation, supported by the European Commission, carry an implicit obligation to provide leadership and to support awareness-raising media literacy initiatives. This emphasis has been particularly clear in the question of online content and protection of minors. AVMSD encourages all communications media to provide information on using the internet responsibly (AVMSD: recital 37). Speaking to the Internet Content Rating Association (ICRA), Commissioner Reding told a roundtable gathering that: ‘Industry has a great opportunity to show how it can provide parents with the necessary information and tools so that they can decide what content they do not wish their children to be confronted with. A good example is the PEGI classification system for videogames that has been put in place by the industry’.<sup>16</sup> In the online environment where the user decides what content to receive from what is available, and when, industry co- and self-regulation combined with targeted media literacy initiatives are viewed as the only effective means of balancing freedom of expression with required protections against harmful content.

A key function of the EU Media Literacy Expert Group is to identify good practice and to advise the Commission on ways in which effective partnerships between stakeholders might be facilitated. A quarter of the responses to the Commission Consultation on Media Literacy were from industry members - publishers, broadcasters, telecoms, advertisers and the music industry – a fact regarded as highly encouraging, as was the number who are currently active in media literacy promotion (Commission Of The European Communities 2007: 10). On the question of the financing of media literacy initiatives, 37% supported the notion of a public-private partnership, citing examples such as *"Newspaper in Education"* run by the European Newspaper Publishers' Association. The UK Media Literacy Talk Force in its submission argued that ‘media organisations not only can, but must, play a significant part in extending the creative and questioning use of media products and services as well as conveying useful or essential information, guidance or skills’.<sup>17</sup>

Ofcom has prioritised ‘Connecting, Partnering & Signposting’ as one of its three key strands of work, through which it works to put media literacy firmly on the agenda of all stakeholders (Ofcom 2004). Partnership in this context is based on the requirement in the Communications Act ‘to encourage others’ to promote media literacy and accordingly relationships with broadcasters, internet and mobile service providers, voluntary and commercial organisations, have been used to raise the profile of media literacy and to support research and implementation.<sup>18</sup> In the area of online, it has worked with

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<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/06/374&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

<sup>17</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media\\_literacy/docs/contributions/89\\_106\\_stuv/102\\_91\\_uk\\_mltf.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/docs/contributions/89_106_stuv/102_91_uk_mltf.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.aocmedialiteracy.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=40&Itemid=31](http://www.aocmedialiteracy.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=40&Itemid=31)



the industry to create a British Standard or kite mark for domestic filtering software and to support initiatives that encourage older users of the internet.<sup>19</sup>

Canada, whose leading role internationally in the field of media education has already been noted, also has a strong tradition of partnership between industry and education, a partnership that has grown up historically and has been supportive of the leading role that media literacy has played in the Canadian school system. The *Media Awareness Network*, based in Ottawa, provides a major example of cross media co-operation in support of media literacy.<sup>20</sup> Incorporated in 1996, the Media Awareness Network, or MNET, is an independent, not-for-profit organisation specialising in producing high quality media literacy learning resources for teachers, parents, professionals and children. The organisation is funded on a public-private basis and has support of such major broadcasting and telecoms groups including Bell Canada, CTVglobemedia, TELUS, Microsoft Canada, the National Film Board of Canada, and the media regulator the CRTC. One of its most successful initiatives is the annual National Media Education Week which raises the public profile of media literacy as an issue through events, media campaigns, media education activities and resource development.<sup>21</sup>

Such successful examples of partnership between media companies and media education, illustrate the potential for positive social contributions and the benefits of media literacy as part of good business strategy within media communication. However, without a social policy being mandated within a licensing process, such commitments become a matter of individual circumstances and vulnerable to cost cutting within a competitive marketplace.

## **Media Content**

### *Fostering critical autonomy*

Using the widely accepted definition of media literacy understood as ‘the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts’ (Ofcom 2004), the fostering of analytical and evaluative thinking skills of *understanding* remain a touchstone for what media literacy education aspires to. In Fedorov’s survey of media literacy experts, the central aim of developing the individual’s critical thinking, understanding and analysis of media texts were identified as among the field’s most important aims (Fedorov 2003: 12). Fostering critical autonomy is also a pre-eminent and enduring theme of media education.

For purposes of clarity and to aid a greater sharing of experience of this dimension of media literacy, support has been given to breaking the notion ‘understanding’ down into the distinct concepts of *analyse* and *evaluate*.<sup>22</sup> The skills of analysis of various kinds of media texts have long been a focus of the media education curriculum, requiring a knowledge of the concepts and analytical categories, e.g. agency, representation, technologies, audiences (Bazalgette 1989). There is, however, little point in analysis for its own sake without critical judgement and it is this critical dimension which, Livingstone suggests, poses some potential difficulties for policy (Livingstone 2003: 10). The basis and the legitimacy for taking a ‘critical’ position becomes quite a fraught issue with media literacy debate reflecting a range of diverse and sometimes contradictory political positions, from a liberal-pluralist one suggesting that such judgements can be politically neutral, to progressive positions on

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.silversurfersday.org/>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/index.cfm>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.mediaeducationweek.ca/>

<sup>22</sup> This was the approach proposed at the inaugural International Media Literacy Research Forum, hosted by Ofcom, May 2008. The Centre for Media Literacy in the United States now also uses this expanded definition.

See: [http://www.medialit.org/reading\\_room/rr2def.php](http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/rr2def.php)

support for social causes, to radical critiques of dominant ideology, and conservative positions of reaction against modernising trends.

### *Partnerships with media education*

The debate around the critical context of media literacy is one that regulators would probably prefer not to enter who feel it is more appropriately the domain of media educators. The European Commission approach to media literacy, for instance, is one that defers competence in education matters to member state level and to the relevant education authorities. Likewise, regulators and industry involvement in media literacy initiatives have normally sought to partner with educators and specialists in media pedagogy. As Divina Frau-Meigs argues, there must be, in other words, a media literacy continuum within which parents, educators, media content providers, and regulators play a role (Frau-Meigs 2003). Ofcom's partnering and signposting strategy, likewise, operates on the basis of supporting and enabling those active in the field to achieve specific objectives within a broader based agenda of promoting media literacy among all stakeholders. Notwithstanding the importance of partnership and the involvement of diverse interests in the promotion of media literacy, there remains much work to be done in defining what we mean by the analytical and evaluative skills, and the fostering of critical autonomy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For policy to be effective, further specification and detail of the appropriate decision-making skills expected of the media-literate citizen are required and given the early stage of development of media literacy in the public sphere, significant challenges remain in this area.

A further concern expressed in relation to the partnership of media literacy policy and media education as more formally established, concerns whether giving media literacy a higher profile in the public domain becomes a substitute for the essential work of education. Cary Bazalgette has argued with reference to the United Kingdom:

Now that responsibility for fostering media literacy has been enshrined in the Communications Act (2003) as a responsibility of Ofcom, the new regulatory body for electronic media, there seems every possibility that the concept could conveniently shrink to a small and well-defined set of skills. Media literate "consumer-citizens", as Ofcom likes to call us, will be able to launch a browser, do their tax returns online, announce family events by mobile phone, put their children to bed before the watershed and register complaints about bad language in *EastEnders*. Market forces, rather than expensive curricular initiatives, will ensure that they acquire these skills, so that schools can continue to concentrate on "the basics", which are, presumably, those skills that the marketplace won't deliver (Bazalgette 2003).

Media education development is a time-consuming and expensive process. Progress in media education, in Ireland and internationally, has been slow and despite the many declarations of its importance and its relevance for the modern age, media's place in the curriculum is not assured (Barnes, Flanagan et al. 2007). For policy makers and for the different context within which public media regulation operates, such a slow pace of development is not sustainable. As a result, on-going negotiation between the distinct domains of interest between media education and public media literacy will need to be carefully nurtured and maintained.

### ***Conclusion: Irish Context for Media Literacy Regulation***

The publication of the Broadcasting Bill 2008 provides the principal basis for a new role for public media literacy promotion in Ireland. The Bill provides for the establishment of a single content regulator, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, which will assume the roles currently held by the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI) and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission (BCC), as

well as a range of new functions, primarily relating to the oversight of public service broadcasters. According to the Minister, “the Bill aims to level the playing field of the broadcasting market in Ireland and place greater emphasis on the needs of viewers and listeners”.<sup>23</sup> Among the measures supporting public needs is provision for the establishment by RTÉ and TG4 of Audience Councils to represent the views of listeners and viewers, and a ‘right of reply’ mechanism whereby individuals who feel their reputations have been damaged may have this corrected in a further broadcast. The Bill proposes some new approaches in relation to codes and rules for broadcasting in Ireland, in particular relating to food advertising aimed at children.

Echoing equivalent responsibilities defined in the United Kingdom’s Communications Act of 2003, the Bill defines promotion of media literacy among the functions of the Authority. One of its ancillary functions will be:

**26 (g)** to undertake, encourage and foster research, measures and activities which are directed towards the promotion of media literacy, including co-operation with broadcasters, educationalists and other relevant persons.

where media literacy is defined as follows:

“media literacy” means to bring about a better public understanding of:

**5 (a)** the nature and characteristics of material published by means of broadcast and related electronic media,

**(b)** the processes by which such material is selected, or made available, for publication by broadcast and related electronic media, or

**(c)** the available systems by which access to material published by means of broadcast and related electronic media is or can be regulated; (Broadcasting Bill 2008)<sup>24</sup>

This places the proposed BAI in a good position to comply with AVMSD reporting requirements and to develop proactive and progressive strategies and policies towards media literacy promotion. The proposal suggests distinct research, promotional and intervention activities that can be carried out in a number of different ways:

- a) Research regarding media literacy carried out by the Authority or in co-operation with other partners;
- b) Public information and promotional activities carried out by the Authority regarding the systems and processes for media content production and regulation;
- c) Initiatives to support media literacy, with regard to achieving a better public understanding of media content;
- d) Partnerships with other organisations, including broadcasters and educational authorities in support of media literacy.

The combination of research, information promotion and targeted initiatives coincides with similar opportunities and challenges being considered by other regulatory authorities discussed earlier, and are located within an unfolding agenda for media literacy in the digital environment. A crucial influence on this will be further specification at European level of the criteria of measurement for media literacy, incorporated as part of the Commission’s AVMSD reporting function, further development of which is expected by the middle of 2009.

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<sup>23</sup> [http://www.greenparty.ie/en/news/latest\\_news/ryan\\_publishes\\_broadcasting\\_bill\\_2008](http://www.greenparty.ie/en/news/latest_news/ryan_publishes_broadcasting_bill_2008)

<sup>24</sup> Available at <http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills28/bills/2008/2908/b2908s.pdf>

The pace of development within the last year in relation to media literacy in the public sphere has been significant: on one level, the degree of attention media literacy is currently receiving augurs extremely well and must delight media literacy advocates who have laboured tirelessly over the years to gain the attention of politicians and policy makers. The policy field that media literacy now represents brings together the very constituencies who in the past the media education community has lobbied for greater recognition and support for the subject. There is, accordingly, within the current conjuncture a heady mix of political influence, of government interest, media industries, regulators, cultural institutions, educators and civil society groups. The potential for exciting, innovative and progressive media literacy initiatives is as never before, based on multi-stakeholder partnerships and the backing of powerful institutions.

However, there is also a sense and a danger that the potential may be overstated, and the optimism misplaced. As reviewed in this paper, there is concern, from within the academic community and from some civil society groups, that media literacy's 'moment in the sun' may come at a cost. The revolutionary nature of the changes underway in the media and communications environment is such that its implications are far reaching but ultimately unknown. The blurring of distinctions between old and new media, the unravelling of traditional approaches to media content provision and regulation, the withering away of older, trusted institutions, and the rise of new, less certain ones, creates an environment that is at once mesmerising, yet deeply unsettling. AVMSD, as the primary vehicle of European media policy, is fully committed to realising the potential of the new communications environment and has instituted media literacy as one of the measures to support that. The question will remain for many though whether media literacy as currently defined has sufficient teeth to guarantee the public interest and to withstand the disruptive and destructive forces that may be unleashed.

It is, however, too soon to tell. There are few indications of what effective public media literacy programmes might look like. Hence, the emphasis that has been placed at international level on exchange of information and sharing of best practice. Practices in media literacy will necessarily vary widely and each has to respond to the particular cultural and social contexts involved. For this reason also, research has been identified as one of the very important requirements for effective policy implementation. There is, for instance, very little data available on how Irish people are adapting to the new media and communications environment. Research is currently service-led and provides communications market information on degrees of connectivity to new communications technologies. We know very little though about the issues involved in the take-up of these technologies, about the needs of those are connected, and the reasons why some are not. Qualitative research in the form of focus groups carried for this research provided some tantalising glimpses into the kinds of issues emerging for Irish citizens and consumers. But in order to develop and implement meaningful and effective policies, ongoing systematic longitudinal research, of both a quantitative and qualitative nature, is needed.

Arising from the above discussion, the following recommendations are made with specific reference to the developing public policy scenario for media literacy in Ireland.

1. **Research:** The research function of the proposed Broadcasting Authority of Ireland is clearly signalled in the Broadcasting Bill 2008. In addition to media literacy provision, the research function includes gathering information on the broadcasting sector, monitoring international developments, determining skills requirements. The recommendation arising here is that *a media literacy dimension be identified within each of these research functions and that media literacy should act as an overarching framework for gathering information on the emerging communications landscape.*
2. **Industry support:** Among the examples of best international practice in media literacy promotion were those instances of effective media literacy support from media organisations. It was noted, however, that many such partnerships arise on the basis of individual circumstances and goodwill rather than being systematic in nature. *In order to mainstream media literacy as an essential component of participation in the communications market place, mechanisms should be identified to require media organisations to support media literacy initiatives.* The Canadian case

of defining a social benefit percentage in sales of communications concerns is one of many international examples. Others include levies on distribution, licensing obligations, charter renewal etc.

3. **Information exchange:** A key element in developing effective media literacy strategies is information sharing both at a national and international level. To this end, media literacy agencies in this country should participate in organisations such as the *International Media Literacy Research Forum*.
4. **Expert group:** As part of the process of determining good practice and exchanging information, consideration should be given to *the formation of an Irish media literacy expert group to advise on definitions, strategies, and new developments. Such a group should comprise national experts and key stakeholders within the media literacy field.*
5. **Partnership support:** It is clear that successful implementation of media literacy promotion involves partnership with a diverse range of interests. Central to this are partnerships with providers of media literacy education both within formal education settings and in a host of adult learning environments. *The means of support for such civil society/cultural and educational organisations and groups needs to be considered in order to place media literacy provision on a sustainable footing. Given the centrality of media literacy as outlined in this report to the future health of the audiovisual sector, dedicated support from funds as, for example, defined in Broadcasting (Funding) Act, 2003 should be considered.*

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