

Future of Media: Re-imagining Journalism.

Summary.

This paper proposes that the Future of Media Commission should:

Acknowledge that journalism faces a technological crisis, a financial crisis and a crisis of trust.

Accept that media mergers while protecting viability, reduce plurality.

Allow that news plurality mainly refers to media *ownership and content*.

Accept that a plurality of media and information-sharing can play a vital role in the development of a democratic culture and an active civil society.

Appreciate that the knowledge society has tremendous democratic potential, especially for young people and their interaction with online media.

Recognise that new information technologies present an opportunity to re-imagine journalism.

Seek to combine quality journalism with the UNESCO definition of Media and Information Literacy. (MIL)

Endorse Media and Information Literacy as an important component of future journalism training.
(nb. Craol are devising QQI: MIL training for professional and community journalists)

Devise policies and principles that guide strategic funding and development of media and journalism.

Find ways to preserve existing media while also widening and promoting the traditional public service functions of journalism to encourage new media outlets.

Propose legislation to support not-for-profit and non-traditional media to become important sources of local journalism across all platforms.

Recognise that a network of community news services will be more resistant to external takeover, and less vulnerable to pluralistic diminution.

Support the creation of hubs of journalistic activity and other information-sharing for local communities.

Foster hyperlocal news content that includes trained journalists, community activists and concerned citizens.

Support links with other information providers such as libraries and universities to better deliver a plural news and information service.

Develop metrics to determine whether information flow within a particular community is improving or degrading in terms of social benefit activity.

Can we re-imagine Journalism?

We were witnessing the future of news. Currently, digital technologies are disrupting the traditional business model for mainstream media news, this is leading to a new ecology of journalism in which reporters and their publics intermix in re-imagined ways. The technologies are making reporting more interactive while inviting the public into communication.

In envisaging media utility into the future, we acknowledge that how information is communicated has always played a central role in shaping human societies, such as affecting economic growth, social development, cultural enrichment, political empowerment, and the consolidation of democratic systems.

A plurality of media and information-sharing across platforms can play a vital role in the creation and development of a democratic culture and an active civil society. The mainstream news media have traditionally performed a central function in the working of democracies through the creation of a 'public sphere' where issues of importance are discussed and debated, and where information essential to citizen participation in public life is exchanged. This is now under threat, any future strategies must include a deepening and extending of these democratic influences.

There are massive technological and societal changes in train, the Internet and digital communication technologies are rapidly altering what is possible, information is moving from scarcity to confusing over-abundance; distribution from expensive and scarce to cheaply available, and news consumption from passive to interactive. People can create and widely share their own stories, they now have unprecedented ability to be their own reporters, editors and distributors of information. We're in uncharted territory, what is the Commission going to do about it?

What about Trust in Media?

Where does this leave traditional media? According to the *Edelman's 2021 Trust Barometer*, citizens across the world continue to lose trust in their government and their media. We can look at some findings, (with questions posed and % response)

I worry technology will make it impossible to know if what people are seeing or hearing is real (66%)

Government does not understand emerging technologies enough to regulate them effectively. (61%)

The media I use are contaminated with untrustworthy information. (57%)

(I have) Trust in people in my local community. (69%)

(I have) Trust in Journalists.(50%)

Ireland: distrust in media. (37%)

(I need) Information for good decisions.(44%)

Let people be heard .(43%)

Media seen as lacking honesty.(43% up from 38%)

Media seen as lacking a vision and purpose. (37% down from 41%)

(Trust in) Journalists. (36% down 1%) 1.

Distrust of media and journalists is probably because journalists are trained to believe that ‘bad news’ is ‘good journalism.’ Steven Pinker writing in the Guardian noted:

The data scientist Kalev Leetaru, senior fellow at The George Washington University, applied a technique called *sentiment mining* to every article published in the New York Times between 1945 and 2005, and to an archive of translated articles and broadcasts from 130 countries between 1979 and 2010. *Sentiment mining* assesses the emotional tone of a text by tallying the number and contexts of words with positive and negative connotations, like *good, nice, terrible, and horrific*. Putting aside the wiggles and waves that reflect the crises of the day, we see that the impression that the news has become more negative over time *is real*. The consequences of negative news are themselves negative. Far from being better informed, heavy news-watchers can become mis-calibrated, for example, they worry more about crime, even when rates are falling. (*Italics ours*) 2.

And people are resisting this type of news at a time when working journalists need public support as their industry is convulsed.

How to legislatively respond to these trends? Community media believe that it is possible to have reliable reporting without social polarisation as a result. Can a shift in information emphasis affect attitudes? A small experiment in a US city would seem to indicate that it can. The study by a trio of US university researchers, which they’ve published as: [Home Style Opinion: How Local Newspapers Can Slow Polarization](#). The report told of a local newspaper in California which dropped national politics from its opinion page, the resulting space filled with local writers and issues. In a short time politically engaged people did not feel as far apart from those they normally opposed, compared to people in a similar community whose newspaper did not change.

For 31 days, the *Desert Sun* ran opinion pages focused entirely on local issues, no national columnists. And they found that there was plenty to discuss:

How about homelessness in the Coachella Valley? The state of our schools? Our unfunded pension liabilities? Of course, it doesn’t have to be all about problems..... The subject matter moved to traffic, development, downtown revitalization, schools, and other local issues.....The op-ed pages are also a forum for highlighting the good in our midst..... Some topics moved from also-rans to mainstays; local arts moved from 4 percent to 28 percent of published letters to the editor. 3.

The researchers focused specifically on *affective polarisation* which is not easy to change, and large shifts in this metric are unlikely with one small newspaper. However, it was noticed that affective and social polarisation rose less in the treated Palm Springs community than in neighbouring areas. This dynamic demonstrates that local newspapers can slow polarisation by adjusting the focus of their opinion page. Their news pages would probably have had an even greater impact. The authors concluded:

Local newspapers are uniquely positioned to unite communities around shared local identities, cultivated and emphasized through a distinctive home style, and provide a civil and regulated forum for debating solutions to local problems. 4

This is not a ‘good news’ response, but a call for the Irish State to enable contextualised, robust information platforms that provides citizens *with their bearings*, that provide local solutions, that then encourage more confident engagement with wider issues.

Can we improve Plurality?

The World Press Freedom Index. [2020 edition of the Index](#), which evaluates the situation for journalists each year in 180 countries and territories, suggests that the next ten years will be pivotal for press freedom because of converging crises affecting the future of journalism: a geopolitical crisis (due to the aggressiveness of authoritarian regimes); a technological crisis (due to a lack of democratic guarantees); a democratic crisis (due to polarisation and repressive policies); a crisis of trust (due to suspicion and even hatred of the media); and an economic crisis (impoverishing quality journalism). The Index saw Ireland slip two places due to continuing concentrations of ownership. The Index states: ‘*The highly concentrated nature of media ownership remained the largest threat to press freedom in Ireland.*’ ⁵. (See Annex 1)

Currently, media cross-ownership in Ireland has resulted in many popular media being owned by groups headquartered outside the state. As these groups consolidate Irish media it leads to less plurality of both ownership and content. Without a legislative response Ireland could follow the path of other countries and witness what is described as an ‘*Information Desert.*’

To effectively respond we need to promote a plurality of media in terms of *ownership and content*. Current trends may be pulling against these plurality ideals. Recall the financial recession and the declining budgets and staff numbers in education and healthcare. Something similar is now happening to newsrooms across the State. We can avoid a news wasteland by embracing the idea that *citizens’ information health* is as important as good education and adequate healthcare, and work to protect Irish journalism from the new threat to public and private media which now looms in the form of the power of online media to soak up an increasing share of revenue.

Core Media Group in its review: 2021, had this to say:

Media play a pivotal role in building a sense of community..... These goals can only be achieved, in full, through a pluralistic media market, which includes well-resourced indigenous media that are focussed on servicing the needs of the Irish public. ⁶

Why is this happening? Core Media say:

It is unquestionably the case that the BAI’s adoption of a new “lighter touch” code on media ownership in 2001 (supported by the Competition Authority) was followed by a marked increase in the degree of concentration in Irish media markets. However, the BAI have argued that pluralism is better served by ensuring the existence of the greatest possible number of media outlets, even if this is only possible by permitting ownership consolidation. More recent practice, however, on the part of successive Ministers for Communication points to a de facto policy of supporting viability through economies of scale. ⁷

This in turn had led to networked news sharing, which has further reduced the numbers of journalists involved. This tension between viability and plurality can be resolved by enabling non-market media (ie. community journalism) to spread across the State. We could devise a wide

network of community news services that will be more resistant to external takeover, less vulnerable to commercial activities and more able to preserve news plurality.

Can we strengthen Diversity.

Even as traditional journalism is declining, criticisms were growing that traditionally the model was already exclusive.

Although there are no legal impediments towards becoming a journalist in Ireland (e.g., no state licencing system), the scarcity of some groups within the profession - working classes, ethnic minorities and the disabled – points to the existence of less tangible barriers. 8.

Community media has a better track record of being accessible to demographics and minorities sharing their experiences. These situations will raise operational questions for the Commission, for instance, would a diversity of journalistic staff produce more diverse news? Or, does the ownership of a news outlet influence the daily editorial decisions that override any such diversity?

The Commission could seize the opportunities presented by new information technologies to provide fresh thinking and new approaches to the gathering and sharing of news and information, because trustworthy media and reliable information are increasingly needed for civic activity, lifelong learning, community development, economic productivity, environmental protection, and all aspects of social life.

The Commission could raise questions around the current role of journalism in the distribution of communicative power and voice in the public sphere, and how pluralistic media content, or how pluralistic media, should operate within democratic societies, and move to provide access to the widest possible range of voices.

Pluralism in media could best be understood to be more about addressing power relations and less about counting the number of content options or outlets. We contend that the fundamental concern that remains at the core of the future of media is with how to evaluate the distribution of such communicative power in the public sphere, how this currently sits and how any deficiencies might be addressed.

We could shift the pluralism debate from questions of market structure, media ownership and competition, to question whether diversity should instead refer to the information that is potentially available, and which citizens could beneficially access and use to promote rational public debate and the formation of a reasoned public opinion.

How are the Commission to balance competing tasks for journalism such as: preserving the role of legacy journalism which reflects the prevailing approach to news gathering as neutral transmitters, while exploring novel forms of involved, community journalism which might begin to question, advocate and campaign for beneficial change in society?

Community media, in developing these community media Hubs are already inching into this remodelled information space. The Commission should see value in this aware engagement with new information technologies and offer support.

It is no longer feasible, to seek to retain existing media outlets through concentrations, this will not alter the fact that some actors and groups have more communicative power and political, economic or symbolic resources to get their voices heard over others. The challenge facing the Commission is therefore to elaborate a conception of pluralism, *ownerships and practices*, that help us to make media more accessible to a diversity of opinions and voices.

Seeing value in Media and Information Literacy.

Many current problems can be met by introducing robust, Media and Information Literacy (MIL) into journalism. How would such MIL Journalism manifest itself? We paraphrase McQuail who has distinguished between four normative frameworks associated with diversity:

- 1) *reflection*, which means that journalism should reflect proportionately the existing political, cultural and other social variations in society in a balanced way;
- 2) *equality*, which means that journalism should strive to give equal access to any different points of view or any groups in society, regardless of their popularity;
- 3) *choice*, which equals diversity with the range of available choices (between outlets, programmes, etc.) for individuals and groups; and
- 4) *openness*, which places emphasis on innovation and difference, valuing new ideas and voices for their own sake. ⁹

Why should the Commission endorse such developments? The concept of media and information literacy is based on universal human rights and is considered a fundamental condition for individuals, communities and whole nations to enjoy the right to freedom of expression and the right to freely access information.

We could then, usefully combine quality journalism with Media and Information Literacy which seeks to do two things: 1) re-educate journalists about their information role in society, and 2) educate citizens about how to find their place in this new media environment.

We should seek to retain journalism's ethical base while incorporating novel new elements that would include MIL and the relationship of traditional journalism with citizen journalism, of a widening plurality of opinions, of greater media accessibility and participation in news construction. Community journalism is already learning to live with these new realities.

Other principles of MIL are:

1. It must cover both the fields of media and information.
2. It must be centred on human rights.
3. It must regard critical thinking as its core competency.
4. It must take intercultural dialogue into consideration.
5. It must be imparted to people of all gender identities and at all ages.
6. It must be disseminated in both online and offline spaces. ¹⁰

This approach sees being Media Literate as a pre-requisite for useful journalism. The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) observes that:

Media literacy is the key to empowering people to understand and critically evaluate broadcast, digital and other media content and services, in order to make informed choices and best manage media use. And to create and participate, via media, in a responsible, ethical and effective manner, in the creative, cultural and democratic aspects of society. 11.

In short, Media and Information Literacy is an essential part of the individual, community, organisational, social and economic development process. MIL empowers individuals and communities, opening opportunities for greater local dialogue and decision making. It is a critical element of news consumption and creation.

Such journalistic experience is necessary because currently, much of this citizens' social media creation is happening haphazardly which can be a breeding ground for disinformation and an increasingly dysfunctional democracy. This is a challenge for our polity, government, media and citizens and new media taxation policies will have to be created to fund these necessary response developments.

In this new context, journalism must be reinvented to become a reliable reference for citizens and a guarantor of trustworthy information, finding journalistic ways to give voice to citizens so that they can become journalists in their own right, encouraging them to participate equally in the public conversation, and engage in the creation of credible, shared information. Consequently, the State should:

- Re-invent journalism education for the networked world to include MIL training. (nb. Craol are devising QQI: MIL training for professional and community journalists)
- Ensure that not-for-profit and non-traditional media can be important sources of local journalism.
- Create Hubs of journalistic activity and other information-sharing for local communities
- Learn to use powerful emerging technologies and MIL techniques to deliver social benefit to communities.
- Assist communities to assess the quality of their local information ecologies.
- Develop metrics to determining whether information flow within a particular community is improving or degrading in terms of social benefit activity.
- Encourage links with other information providers such as libraries and universities to better deliver a community news and information service.

These to enable better democratic decision making and stimulate greater investment in community journalism.

To achieve these changes, regulation and resources need to focus on MIL practices among all journalists, media organisations and the public, to enable a range of media generated social benefits to emerge

Can we utilise Local News?

The more local, the more relevant. Community journalists live the same lives as their listeners/viewers, experience the same concerns, want broadly similar outcomes. This model of community news and information is predicated on ideas of ‘advocacy journalism,’ such an approach is generally rejected by legacy journalists, unless it’s an editorial-board crusade, mainstream journalists assert that the public would be sceptical of reporters who are also advocates. However, we contend that all journalism is in a sense, advocacy journalism, no matter how it's presented, every report by every reporter, advances someone's point of view. Re-imagined news and current affairs could take the approach adopted by advocacy groups where they seek, through dialogue, to build a base of citizens that support a particular communally beneficial outcome. Journalist could be trained in such MIL techniques and also in ‘Solutions Journalism.’ See [Solutions Journalism Network,](#)”

Clearly local news still remains an important aspect of society. Digital News Report offered:

As this survey shows, 87 per cent of those questioned in Ireland expressed an interest in local news. The UK figure was 79 per cent, with 85 per cent for the EU in general and 81 per cent for the US. ¹²

People sense that local information is always important, the UK Centre for Community Journalism, offered:

- The most common topic covered by hyperlocal media is community activities e.g. festivals, clubs and societies, local councils and the services they provide.
- 72 per cent of hyperlocal publishers have joined in or supported a local campaign in the last two years. 42 per cent have started their own campaigns.
- Investigative reporting, which has helped uncover controversial new information about local civic issues or events, has been produced by almost half of the UK’s online hyperlocal publishers in the last two years.
- Hyperlocal publishers contribute to media plurality by providing secondary - and sometimes - the only voice in the reporting of local issues.
- Sites contribute to active communities and the creation of social capital. Their content has civic as well as news and democratic value. ¹³

The report went on to say that producers of hyperlocal content include trained journalists, community activists and concerned citizens. Quoting the site:

‘They do not necessarily describe their work as journalism. Seven out of ten producers identify their work as a form of active community participation; more than half define it as local journalism, and more than half see it as an expression of active citizenship.’¹⁴

There are clearly overlapping perspectives that the Commission may need to use to define new forms of journalism. The site provides information on people’s impressions: “*things I need to know to help me live in my local area*” and “*things I want to know to feel like I belong in my local area.*” Such attitudes can grow into local agency.

As part of a re-imagined media space *the Commission should recognise such process of active information gathering and dissemination are all forms of journalism.* It should recommend that the State facilitate new media ownership and collaboration models to allow this low-cost model of information dissemination, exploring new models for non-profit or hybrid organisations that can continue to provide citizens with

reliable local journalism whatever the economic climate. Government at all levels should be encouraged to support policies that create an environment for sustainable, quality local journalism as an aid to a stronger national democracy and more sustainable communities, where citizens continue to be served by media working towards broad social benefit rather than narrow personal gain.

Policy Development.

We will need to devise policies and principles that guide strategic development of media and journalism that is underpinned by an iterative process of implementation, evaluation and revision which can proceed to interrogate traditional and community journalism to see if they are meeting these critical needs. For instance:

1. Are communities aware of local activities that can impact on larger environments?
2. Are individuals in the community, especially minorities and those marginalised, growing in confidence and creativity?
3. Are individuals aware of what is happening around their community?
4. Is the community sense of identity and cohesiveness enhanced?
5. Do various stakeholders share a vision and work collaboratively to achieve it through sharing knowledge and resources?
6. Are programmes aimed at empowering citizens with MIL competencies receiving the support of libraries, universities and local councils who are recognising the developmental power of MIL and are identifying ways in which community institutions can create journalistic activities?
7. Are citizens increasingly drawn to MIL programmes which provide specific education and training to develop individuals' media and information competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) and create knowledge of and expertise in a broad range of media and information sources? ¹⁵.

As part of a re-imagined media space *the Commission should recognise such processes of information gathering and dissemination as forms of journalism*. It should recommend that the State facilitate new media ownership and collaboration models to allow this low-cost type of information sharing, to enable non-profit or hybrid organisations which could provide citizens with reliable local journalism whatever the economic climate. Government at all levels should be encouraged to support policies that create an environment for sustainable, quality local journalism as an aid to a stronger national democracy and more sustainable communities, where citizens continue to be served by media working towards broad social benefit rather than narrow personal gain.

Conclusions.

If the Commission is seeking to achieve 'A vibrant, diverse and independent media (that) is essential to our democracy and cultural development,'¹⁶ then re-imagined news and journalism must be at the heart of it.

We must develop ways and means to support journalists and editors to constantly improve their skills in working on verification of information, using proven and new effective fact-checking methods, as well as tools for identifying misinformation and disinformation, to further encourage media to empower citizens with MIL competencies.

If the State objective is development, good governance, democracy and lifelong learning of the body politic, then citizens are the spinal cord and should be placed at the centre of media policies and strategies, where they will need appropriate and properly resourced forms of journalism and media organisation to respond to the new media opportunities.

The Irish State will need to apply different ownership and content measures to achieve its media policy objectives. An example is the Norwegian one where subsidising media is clearly defined as *a cultural policy measure*.

The State will need media partners in these revamping efforts, however, the parlous state of professional journalism at this time will inhibit these actions. The real danger is that with the weakening of traditional journalism, we will witness a media environment that is increasingly incapable of supporting an effective public sphere, where younger citizens no longer have the experience of earlier traditional journalism to be able to differentiate truth from fiction. The Commission must have a view on this.

The Commission could conclude that the crisis in journalism seems to be mainly one visited on traditional business models for print and broadcast journalism by changing technologies. Since people can now choose to get the information they want from multiple sources, many of which are free, in consequence in Ireland, paying for news has not increased over the past year remaining at 12 per cent.

While finding ways to preserve existing media, it is now also possible to widen and promote the traditional public service functions of journalism, to encourage new media outlets, and to advance quality, skilled journalism that contributes to healthy information ecologies in local communities, where with the spread of low-cost media projects the entire nation could enjoy the right to freedom of expression and the right to access information.

Everything about journalism should be re-examined in light of what is becoming possible. Policies, structure and practices should be explored to transform traditional news delivery, to promote the creation of a new journalism in non-traditional ways. Citizens are already engaging with these emerging information technologies in haphazard ways. Legislation must follow the technology and civic involvement.

Information plurality is critical to a healthy democracy. Legislation must permit not-for-profit and non-traditional media to become important sources of local journalism across all platforms. Digital technology can enable many new forms of local media, but as yet there is no clear development pathway or ways for them to be financially sustainable, this has to be addressed.

We appreciate that other actors proffering advice to the Future of Media Commission will have differing goals. While accommodating these, we ask that the Commission should include a space for media in the Irish landscape that has no pecuniary or professional impulse.

We urge the Future of Media Commission to explore these potentials in their final deliberations and highlight it in their report.

[Craol: Community Radio Ireland.](#)

[CTA; Community Television Association.](#)

[April: 2021.](#)

Annex 1.

| Company | Headquarters | What they own |
|-------------------|------------------|---|
| DMG Media | London. UK | Newspapers and online: Irish Daily Mail (and Sunday) Evoke.ie. Extra.ie |
| Bauer Media Group | Hamburg. Germany | Radio: Dublin's 98 fm. Spin 1038. Spin Southwest. Today fm |
| Irish Times | Dublin. Ireland | Newspapers: Irish Times.Irish Examiner. Plus 7 regional papers. Radio: Beat 102-103. WLR fm (radio) |
| Liberty Global | London. UK | TV. Virgin Media One, Two, Three. Virgin Media Sport. |
| MediaForce Group. | London. Uk | 23 local newspaper titles, including Kilkenny People and Limerick Leader. |
| Mediahuis Group. | Antwerp. Belgium | Newspapers: Irish Independent. Sunday Independent. Sunday World. Belfast Telegraph. and 13 regional newspaper titles. |
| NewsCorp | New York. USA | Newspaper: Sunday Times. The Times. Irish Sun. Radio: 7 local radio stations including FM 104. and Cork's 96fm. |
| Reach plc | London. UK | Newspapers: Irish Daily Star. Irish Daily Mirror. (and Sunday) Corkbeo.ie. Dublin live.ie |
| RTE | Dublin. Ireland | Radio and TV; RTE 1. RTE 2 .RTE jr (television) 9 radio stations including Radio 1 and 2. |

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Why Community Media Hubs are crucial to the Future of Media in Ireland.

1. The Challenges we face

The challenges facing media in Ireland are those facing media the world over, and how we deal with them is critically important to the kind of society we want to live in. They include:

- The growth of social media platforms as the main source of, and pathway to, news and current affairs and, for many, their understanding of the world around them and of their role in it;
- Linked to this, the perilous state of many independent media outlets due to the loss of advertising to social media giants;
- A new type of deliberate destabilisation, at a cultural level, of the very idea of truth in all forms of news and journalism, for narrow political gain and to the benefit of a few media corporations;
- Growing challenges to public service media, and a failure to redefine its vital remit in a way that resonates with all sections of the public and especially young people.

Despite shortcomings, Irish people over the last few decades could rely on public service media for a bedrock of balanced reporting; on a relatively free press that avoids the extremes of private media elsewhere; and on an emerging community media sector to complete that 'last media mile' that enables people and communities to recognise themselves and participate in the media. Combined, these played a decisive role in cohesion and stability in Irish society, steering us through the radical changes of recent decades.

There is now a real risk that the next generation of Irish people – in formal terms, the most educated ever - will be ill-prepared to navigate a media environment that is less and less capable of sustaining an effective public sphere; that fails to clearly differentiate truth from fiction; and that cannot nourish the shared understanding and world view essential to a cohesive and respectful culture, society and polity.

It is conceivable that future generations will never experience a shared and vibrant media space, forced to retreat into a fragmented world of self-reinforcing social media 'bubbles', shaped and driven by consumerism and the profit-motive, and distorted by mis-information and dis-information propagated by narrow interests.

Big problems need big solutions. They demand imagination and resources, and there is no time to waste. The Future of Media Commission has an opportunity to point to ways forward.

2. Searching for Solutions

Some communities in Ireland are already working on a solution. It works from the bottom up, and reaches people of all ages, but attracts especially the younger generation. It offers hands on, learning-by-doing education about a range of media from radio to television, blogging and social media; it nurtures innovation and creativity and offers the means to create media products of all kinds, and to disseminate these around the community and around the world.

This idea is the **Community Media Hub**, owned and run by communities themselves. The concept is not new, and is already a reality in a number of communities (see Annex 1) but the potential is for these to expand throughout the country. This can be done by building on the most innovative and vibrant of existing community radio, television and digital initiatives to become a network of Community Media Hubs. These can be enabled without any interference with more traditional public, private and communal media.

A key asset of the Community Media Hub in tackling the challenges of the new media environment is that it both dispels the mystique around mainstream media and offers concrete opportunities to engage directly with media production and platforms in creative and innovative ways. Owned and managed by communities themselves, Hubs are open and welcoming centres for their immediate communities, but they also reach out to surrounding more remote and marginalised areas through harnessing the very technologies that are driving the media themselves.

This submission argues that these hubs have the potential to ensure that a significant cohort of future generations will be equipped with a critical understanding of how the media environment operates and the role media play in society. These people will be able to engage creatively and constructively, as critical consumers and as creative content producers, many later bringing their skills to bear across all mainstream and digital media organisations: *Their experiences in the Hubs will enable them to revitalise the media sector from the ground up.*

With the right regulatory and institutional support, these hubs will renew Ireland's public sphere and enrich the media environment with the values and skills essential to diverse and cohesive communities and society.

3. Key Characteristics of a Community Media Hub

Several, at least partial, Community Media Hubs already exist in Ireland, for instance in Dublin and Cork, and others are potentially emerging organically from community media activities around the country. These will inspire new ones to join them in a national network.

Supported by their national associations, CRAOL and CTA, they are already building creative partnerships with national organisations, such as Aontas, Education and Training Boards, National Youth Council, Libraries, Third Level Institutions, and the Department of Education. As well as the media production and dissemination activities, they jointly develop media literacy material and courses, and at local level offer educational activities to the community, collaborating with libraries, NGOs, youth groups, credit union, schools and education centres. Many surveys show that people generally trust local voices and views. A regional Hub could counter the sometimes misleading content of many online sites.

Grants: These media services are already attracting funding from philanthropic bodies such as Community Foundation for Ireland and in partnership have run media training and production of content for broadcast by Senior Citizens, LGBT groups and those in Direct Provision. There is considerable experience within the sector to access EU funding, such as running anti-racism and anti-hate speech campaigns. With the subsidised support of the State, these series of Hubs, with a national reach, can build on such funding partnerships to increase resources for socially beneficial content.

Unique features of the sector are emerging. A goal for the community media sector now is to identify the key core characteristic of these Hubs, that will enable the further development of the concept and attract more support.

A Community Media Hub has a number of elements.

Ownership and governance

Begin a **not-for-profit organisation**, owned and managed by the community itself, is a core value of all Hubs. All community members, without discrimination, are entitled and encouraged to participate in it. The ethos is participative, decentralising and open, enabling replication, synergies and resource-sharing throughout the community and beyond.

A Centre

A **physical space**: for multi-use media studio facilities combined with a Centre of Excellence for training and learning are essential. This could begin with - or later extend to - a **virtual space** to enable interactive engagement with the community at its peripheries, including actual and virtual learning.

Content and Activities

A Hub will gradually expand into numerous media activities, but the presence of facilities for media production, training and dissemination, and support for media literacy, are essential.

- A **radio Hub** that could be an online radio service drawing content from any community radio within the range of the Hub and from similar interested groups in the NGO and community voluntary sectors (perhaps podcasting); and/or a Hub might also itself be a broadcaster for instance by negotiating weekend FM 'community of interest' licences, to mark special events in their area. These would be micro in duration as well as micro in area.
- An audio-visual or **television Hub** that would draw on community television within its area and on community produced videos, and/or itself be a licensed community television broadcaster.
- **Training and capacity-building expertise** in a centre of excellence that would provide learning in many different media, hands-on in the studio and training facilities, and externally and virtually throughout the area covered.
- **Media literacy** as a core of Hub activities, in the widest sense; built into its technical training but also working with local and national bodies and education institutions to extend it deeply into communities, for all ages.
- A **multi-media library service** to lease or loan audio-visual equipment to community groups for short or longer term use, and offering support as needed.
- An **Archive** for community developed multi-media content that would be made available on open licenses and shared across all Hubs.
- Support for **Multi-lingual engagement**, including for the **Irish language**.

Distribution of Hubs

Ultimately, based on experience, a network of Hubs could be phased in across the country. Based on geography and population these could be roughly as follows

- North Dublin (city and county)
- South Dublin (city and county)
- North Leinster
- South Leinster
- North Munster
- South Munster
- North Connaught
- South Connaught
- West Ulster (Donegal)
- South Ulster (Cavan/Monaghan)

The two in Ulster could extend to communities in much of the North of Ireland, building on the already existing close relationships with community media there, while strengthening cross community relations.

4. Conclusion

Further work is needed to fully elaborate the concept and reality of Community Media Hubs. Yet existing examples and the experience of the community media sector more widely offer strong evidence of the benefits of adopting a people and community-driven approach to rebuilding the media environment in Ireland.

These Hubs offer an opportunity of reaching Irish people everywhere, of all ages and from all backgrounds; of providing them with direct media experience and with a profound understanding of how media work, and of the risks, creative potential and responsibilities associated with the media environment.

These Hubs, being mainly virtual, can be speedily established across the State, and can assist the State ensure that there is adequate support for community media in a cost effective manner.

We urge the Future of Media Commission to explore this potential in their final deliberations and highlight it in their report.

[CTA: Community Television Association.](#)

[Craol: Community Radio Ireland.](#)

[April 2021.](#)

Annex 1: Examples of existing Community Media Hubs.

Dublin: Near Media Co-op, a Community Media Hub in action

History: Near Media Co-operative received its first community radio licence in 1995 and from the outset it understood that its role was as a multi-media centre and community development service as well as a medium beyond radio. By the late 90s Near was experimenting with making television and online, becoming a founder member in the group which eventually became Dublin Community Television in 2004.

Innovation: Near FM was the first radio station in Ireland to use **podcast** technology. By the early 2000s Near was using WLAN technology to bring broadband to community centres, and visit with laptops to teach 'introduction to the www'. And in 2003 Near Media Co-op opened one of the first Internet Cafés in the Dublin north-east area, giving training and support to people who came to use the Café.

Plurality: Near FM has always acted as a **Hub** for other groups interested in setting up their own community radio service. Training groups interested in establishing community radio in their area, and then broadcasting some of their material to give them a sense of the excitement of the broadcast. These groups include, those from areas such as Lucan, Ballyfermot, Ringsend, Drimnagh/Crumlin, Tallaght and other areas much further afield such as North Wicklow, South Wexford and Tramore.

Diversity. Apart from geographical groups, Near FM has been a supporter of interest groups, such as migrant, traveller and NGO groups. We launched **Refugee Radio** in 1998, where for a week, the station schedule was selected and run by refugees, who were trained and supported by Near FM.

Culture: Near FM continuously supports festival type weekends such as Africa Festival and Filipino Festival, with outside broadcasting events from a range of venues. Other cultural events have also taken over the schedule for weekends with Near FM being the hub for these citywide events. For example, covering music and cultural festivals such as 'Culture Night', and the Hugh Lane's 'Sunday at noon' concerts.

Development: From its inception Near has always been a community development resource, it continues to offer training and support to a wide variety of groups in the C&V and NGO sector, and works widely with music and cultural entities. **Near TV** has been as active as Near radio. There have been almost a million online views of Near TV material, and Near TV continues to be a stalwart supporter of the licensed **Dublin Community Television** broadcaster.

Archiving. Near FM completed the first formal community radio **archives** in Ireland in 2017. It is one of only two community radios to have received funding from the BAI's Archive Scheme. Near FM worked with the Irish Digital Repository, and the Dublin City Council's archives to develop this archive. The Near FM archive is a unique collection of voices from the community from the north-side of Dublin. This experience and expertise is regularly shared with others working in similar fields.

Local and Global: The Near Media Co-op is committed to **community media on a global scale**, and already, three members of the Co-op have become presidents of European Community Media organisations, AMARC and CMFE. Near has taken part in over 50 European projects from best practise in Adult Ed training to anti-racism projects. Acting as a **Hub** many people and organisations have been able to avail of this experience, both at events in Ireland and across Europe and the world.

Near Media Co-op is establishing itself as a **centre of excellence** with regard to training, capacity-building and production and has received many prestigious awards for its work, including a Celtic Media award for best drama, a New York Radio award for documentary making and a Prix d'europa for its music programming.

Media literacy is a core activity for Near which is built into its technical and production training. Since the late 1990's the centre has been experimenting with effective ways to deliver media literacy both within the project but also out to the wider community. Working with QQI, Near, has devised media literacy training modules to suit its aims, the needs of its community, and also national bodies and education institutions.

On-line activities: *OnNear FM* has been streaming its FM service since 2004, and has a dedicated online listenership, many from the diaspora. On Online Training & Education began many years ago with cooperation from schools and adult education centres. The project now has TV and Radio programmes with lesson plans and notes for teachers. These were worked up with educationalists and teachers. More recently we developed self-directed online training, which needs no teacher.

Near Media Co-op is also a **multi-media library service** to lease or loan audio-visual equipment to community groups for short or longer term use, and offering creative support as needed.

Support for **Multi-lingual engagement**, including for the **Irish language**, has also been an important part of the work at Near FM.

Cork: A Community Media Hub in action.

Cork Community Media Hub (CCMH) is a newly-established, not-for-profit social enterprise formed to amalgamate, over time, the work of three organisations: Frameworks Films, Cork Community Television and Frameworks Media & Archive Centre.

Frameworks Films was founded in 1999 and since then has worked with numerous groups in the community and voluntary sector to produce collaborative films and videos. It has provided access to production equipment, training and resources to many groups including people with disabilities, older people, members of the Travelling community, youth groups, migrant communities and local historical, arts and cultural groups. It has also produced a variety of programmes funded under the Sound & Vision Scheme and provided access for many groups to engage in Community Television production. It provides training in media literacy and has produced two television series on media literacy with younger and older people.

Cork Community Television was established in 2007 and began broadcasting in 2008 when it was granted a Community Content contract from the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland. It has been broadcasting community-based programming since then on Channel 803 on Virgin Media's digital cable package and has also been simultaneously live-streaming for a number of years, in order to reach other parts of the city and county not covered by cable. Cork Community Television broadcasts content produced by its members and by other Community Television stations, nationally and internationally. It has also provided training for its members in production and broadcasting skills.

Frameworks Media and Archive Centre was established in 2016 to commence the work of archiving the huge amount of community generated content, which is not archived anywhere else and which is of significant value in terms of the cultural, historical and social history of the city and county.

In 2020 the decision was taken to amalgamate all of these activities under the one roof and hence Cork Community Media Hub CLG was founded in October 2020. Over time it is planned that this will bring together the work of these three organisations outlined above, including production, broadcasting, streaming, training, media literacy and archiving.

The characteristics of Cork Community Media Hub are similar to those outlined in the body of this document – not-for-profit and with an ethos of providing opportunities for all to engage with media production and a civic space for debate and discussion. We will continue to build on partnerships already forged with the local authorities, libraries, cultural and educational institutions and a wide variety of sectors locally, nationally and internationally.