

**Tim Lees, Sue Ralph, Jo Langham Brown (eds.):
Is Regulation Still an Option in a Digital Universe?**

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The conference sessions and papers in *Is Regulation Still an Option in a Digital Universe?* are collected during the 30th University of Manchester International Broadcasting Symposium (1999). The theme of this 2-day Symposium was regulation and focused on economical, legal and technological aspects. Due to digitalization, globalization and proliferation of new(er) media such as the Internet and their seemingly low level of regulations, questions were raised about the nature, functionality and range of regulations. Major speakers and contributors stem from international broadcasting and academic worlds who discussed the present and future of regulatory systems.

The keynote address of the Symposium posed a rather familiar question: does digitalization mean the end of television as we know it? The structure of the television business is changing rapidly from a linear to a non-linear one meaning that programs as opposed to channels, are consumed. Besides technological developments, economical and global perspectives challenge traditional regulations as well. Therefore, as debated during the Symposium, regulatory systems should be revised, changed, widened or weakened as well the question arises whether the present regulatory system is able to cope with these changes, leading to many discussions that varied from consumer protection to digital radio.

The come about of new communication technologies and digitalization do not only raise questions about regulatory systems but questions arise about meaning, availability and use of these media technologies for the creation of our daily life experiences. These technologies have become, especially for young people, co-constructors of meanings and practices (research topics include ownership, usage, interaction, everyday leisure context and [in]equalities in accessibility). Youth forms the new market for communication technologies. Technologies are already used, and will be increasingly so in the future, as a form of education but they will also be increasingly and continuously used in daily lives as a form of leisure, entertainment and information. Youth therefore is the consumer of the future

while media technologies are associated with a particular consumption style (i.e. hedonistic, self-expression, individualism). Thus, from a marketing perspective, technology is seen as a way of being youthful. A tendency that will only continue in the future.

During various sessions at the Symposium, it was debated whether regulation is needed or whether responsibility can function as an alternative to regulation which raised the question how responsibility can be fitted in communication processes. Also, instead of a formal system of regulations, some people opted for self-regulation since in this way the communications market can serve the public interest best. This means that market-based solutions and competition law should be emphasized instead of traditional broadcasting law and regulation. The latter is nowadays increasingly seen as a barrier to economic innovation and full exploitation of communication technologies. Self-regulation therefore stimulates economic growth, but does it mean that broadcasting no longer requires a minimum of regulation? Liberalization of broadcasting regulation however is a rather complex process, related to issues such as cross media ownership and scarcity of frequencies. A positive word that works for a liberalization of regulations that center on media concentration and the expansion of private multimedia conglomerates is that they, in the end, work to retain strong public-service broadcasters that function as a counterbalance to the fast-emerging private sector giants of the communications industry. Thus, restrictive legislation regarding broadcasting ownership may be outdated but not regarding public-service broadcasting. Nevertheless, many conditions have to be created before laws can be adjusted and restrictions to vanish among others are roles played by regulatory authorities, issues regarding the functioning and working of open markets, and rights policies. Finally, other difficulties will arise related to the internationalization of markets and regulations when legal institutions are mainly national or European. Changing or adapting new laws regarding digitalization will turn out to be a rather complex and time-consuming activity, but very much needed indeed.

The papers in the book then deal with a wide variety of topics regarding digitalization activities such as investigative journalism, digital pay television, national broadcasting, "Internetphilia", policy making as object of study, health promotion and European Union policies.

Regulations regarding broadcasting work fruitfully for the preservation of small(er) and local communities that otherwise are overridden by globalization policies. Basically, no regulation means abandonment of social and cultural interests. Some other countries are dealing with regulations for (recently emerged) television which, in combination with technological advances and a complex political situation, is not an easy task: before even being able to weaken or change any system of regulation, it is mere about how to create a system and what (not) to include.

The internationalization of media policy and the changing structure of both technology and markets have influenced the development and use of broadcast, cable and satellite systems all over the world. As a result they have challenges to governments to create (inter)national policies for media and telecommunications technologies and services. Keywords for the regulation policy of the European Union (EU) are digitalization and convergence by focusing on the dynamics of change which is seen as threat and opportunity and as unavoidable (technological determinism). So far, EU policy makers have mainly grasped the EU as a single market and as therefore the emphasis was to develop internal co-operation and integration in order to enable the EU to become a serious competitor in world markets. It does not look like that values (cultural representation) of different Member States in relation to European broadcasting content will be prioritized.

The analysis of international media ownership shows, according to classical economics, that regulation is still needed in order to create a balance between public and private broadcasting to ensure diversity of opinion, culture and democracy. This is not only the opinion of economists, various speakers and contributors at the International Broadcasting Symposium agree with this perspective. However, the opinions differ when looked at to what extent regulations are still needed for more traditional forms of broadcasting. Do regulations need to be less restrictive, weakened? Or, do regulations need to be adjusted in relation to more commercially-driven broadcasters and new communication technologies? If so, how? What about the examination of cross-interests, power systems, internationalization processes? And, what do regulations mean when companies who own materials that can be made available by communication technologies, are afraid to do so? Perhaps that during this Symposium more questions have been raised than answered, nevertheless this collection of conference sessions and papers give the interested reader a good insight in what is going on in the world of digitalization in general and of broadcasting in particular. From various economical, political, sociological, legal and theoretical perspectives varying from broadcasters to marketing experts and academic studies, a rather fruitful area is sketched that need to be watered and explored further in order to come to a convergence of perspectives about digitalization in the present and future.

Shenja van der Graaf (Utrecht)