

The Audience and other elements of the Maltese mediascape: An introduction

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Introduction.

- This paper looks at a limited number of characteristics of the Maltese TV landscape
- in the light of some of the provisions of the Audio Visual Media Services Directive.
- Other important elements e.g. the possibilities of digital and non linear media are not discussed.

Four aspects discussed

- the audiences and their empowerment through media literacy
- the independent producers and local productions
- the public service broadcaster
- regulation, self and co-regulation of the sector



First Aspect



The audiences and their
empowerment through media
literacy

The audiences

- Generally the sender is discussed first
- I am inverting this order for two reasons.
 - Firstly I want to make a political and an ethical statement
 - Secondly I want to highlight the radical approach taken by the Directive about media literacy

The Directive on ML

- Media literacy refers to skills, knowledge and understanding that allow consumers to use media effectively and safely.
- Media-literate people will be able to:
 - exercise informed choices,
 - understand the nature of content and services
 - and take advantage of the full range of opportunities offered by new communications technologies.

The Directive on ML

- They will be better able to protect themselves and their families from harmful or offensive material.
- Therefore the development of media literacy in all sections of society should be promoted and progress followed closely.

Comment: Radical innovation

- We now move from a situation where things are being done for users
- to a situation where users will be given the tools to do things themselves.

Situation in Malta

- Malta is in an advantaged position.
- *Report on the Results of the Public Consultation on Media Literacy (2007):*
 - Malta is one of the 7 European countries where “media literacy has for many years been an important component of the school curriculum”

Situation in Malta

- Media education was formally introduced in Malta through a programme initiated by Church schools in 1981
 - About 80% of Church schools teach it
 - Books written and produced in Malta.

Situation in Malta

- An important step was taken by the publication of the National Minimum Curriculum – 1999
 - Government schools – as part of some subjects.
 - Limited approach
- The Commission will now monitor the situation

No blotting papers

- Audiences are not blotting paper but oscillate between being
 - oasis seekers and
 - wily contestants.

Strategy of resistance

- generally the most popular programmes on the political stations are not the political programmes but other genres e.g. drama which can emigrate from one station to another.
- The most popular news bulletin is the one on TVM and not the bulletins on the political stations.

Strategies of resistance

- Out of all Europeans the Maltese are among the most who mistrust the media.
- They empower the producers they like.
- Dr Carmen Sammut's book about journalism in Malta explains the seeds of rebellion present among Maltese audiences.
- Let the institutions beware!



Second aspect



**The independent producers
and local productions**

The EU Dimension

- AVMS Directive like the *TWF Directive* (Articles 5 and 6):
 - European works by independent productions should make up at least 10% of their transmission time, excluding the time appointed to news, sports events, games, advertising, teletext services and teleshopping; or at least 10% of their programming budget.

The local dimension

- 1991. *National Broadcasting Plan*.
 - PBS Ltd can consider the farming out of any of its programmes on an *ad hoc* or contractual basis
- Mid and late 1990s TV pluralism.
 - The industry had a lot of scope for developing.
- 2004 *The National Broadcasting Policy*
 - “an aggressive policy” for outsourcing of programmes for PBS Ltd.

Questions and comments

- 1. Quota of 10% greatly exceeded. Are our TV stations become air time providers more than programme producers? EBU statute:
 - “The broadcaster must, moreover, produce, as a continual part of its schedule and with its own facilities or under its direct control, magazine programmes which deal in depth with news and current affairs development.” (para. 5)
 - Article 3§3 (c) “produce and/or commission at their own cost and under their own editorial control a substantial proportion of the programmes broadcast.”

Questions and comments

- 2. Selling of air time.
 - Doesn't this model privilege a commercial mentality over a public service mentality?
 - TV company and the independent producer compete for adverts?
 - Pressure on the small organisations.
 - Danger of mishmash of editorial and commercial content

Questions and comments

- Alliances between newspapers and television stations.
- Danger: moving from a pluralized TV sector to a monopolised independent producers sector?
- Limited budgets. Limited creativity. Formats and dubbing.

New challenges

- The development of codes of conduct regarding advertising of junk food
- Services are gradually made accessible to people with a visual or hearing disability.
- to include an adequate share of co-produced European works or of European works of non-domestic origin.



Third aspect



Public service broadcasting

EU and PSBs

- Directive
 - The co-existence of private and public audiovisual media service providers is a feature which distinguishes the European audiovisual media market.
 - basic public services, such as audiovisual services, to be excluded from liberalization under the GATS negotiations

EU and PSBs

- the fulfillment of the mission of public service broadcasting requires that it continue to benefit from technological progress.
- Can be given state aid to fulfill its mission
- No definition on a European level but general guidelines

Definition

- “A broadcaster that is largely non-commercially funded and has certain programming requirements placed on it as a consequence.” (p15)
 - Graham and Associates Ltd in their study commissioned by EU Commission. May 2005
- McKinsey (1999) shows that the more a PSB is commercially funded the less it fulfills its mission

Greater importance

- Greater importance in Maltese setting:
 - market failure and
 - presence of political parties.
- PBS: largely commercial funded.
- It is a station which according to Chairman Fenech Conti is neither purely commercial nor a purely public service one.

Proposed study

- Three years after the restructuring of PBS shouldn't there be a study assessing:
 - the effects on content of the new financing methods;
 - The efficacy or otherwise of the structures set up;
 - Whether it is now giving more or less public service?

Fourth aspect



**Regulation,
self and co-regulation
of the sector**

Directive

- An obligation on Member States to encourage co- and/or self regulatory regimes to the extent permitted by their legal systems.
 - Be broadly accepted by the main stakeholders in the Member States concerned and
 - provide for effective enforcement.
- These are set up besides the competent regulatory authorities

Situation in Malta

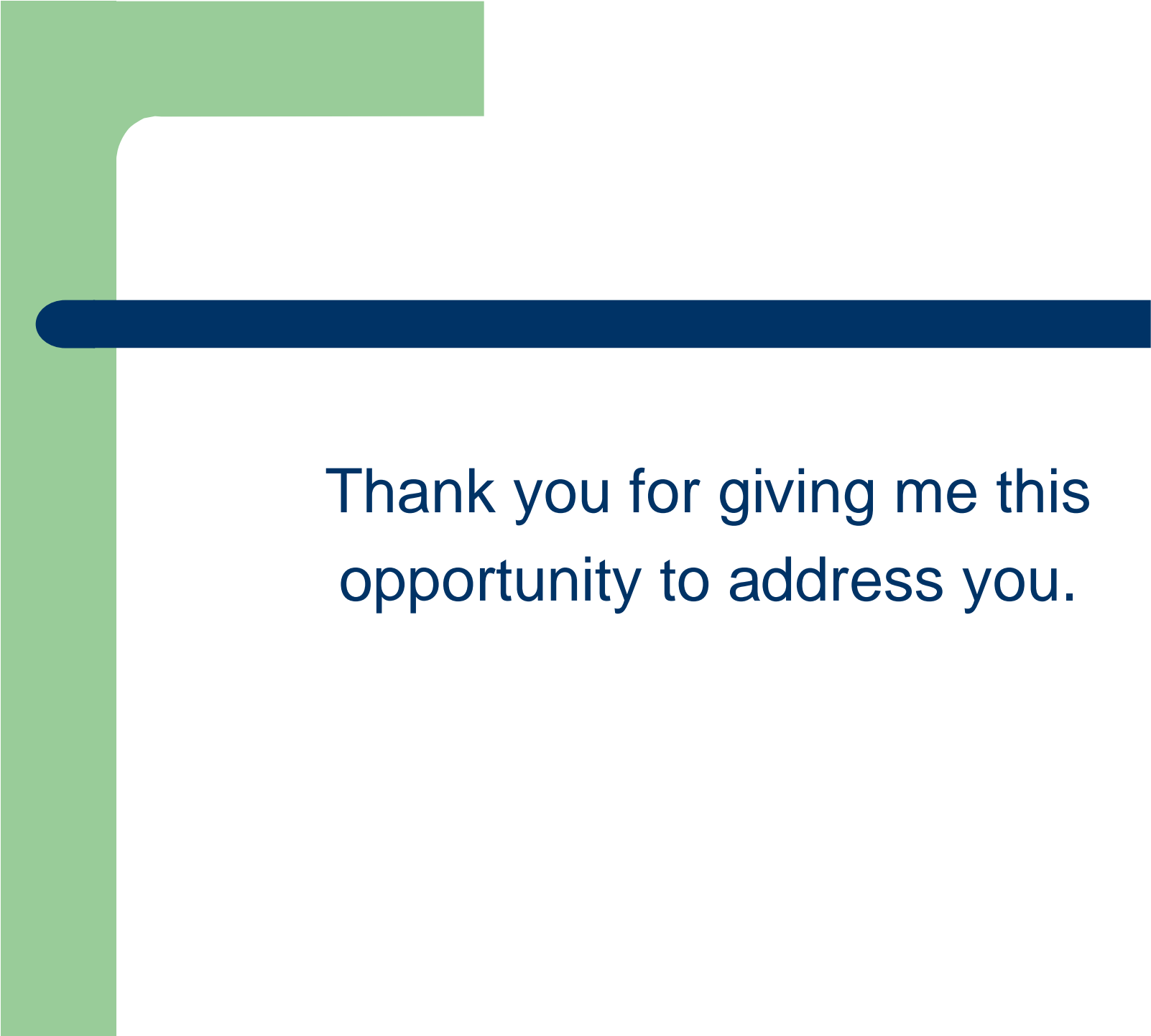
- Two regulatory bodies
 - Broadcasting Authority
 - Malta Communications Authority
- One self regulatory body (journalism)
 - Malta Institute of Journalists
- No co-regulatory body



Conclusion

Change after researched study

- The pros and cons of the Maltese model of broadcasting as developed after pluralism;
- The effectiveness or otherwise of the restructuring of PBS;
- The possibilities of digital and broadband and potential effects of our mediascape;
- The development of the sector of the non linear media
- Greater empowerment for audiences.



Thank you for giving me this
opportunity to address you.