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Palgrave Macmillan
2019-01

Moring , T A 2019 , Minority Language Media : Issues of Power, Finance and Organization .
pöyry G Hogan-Brun & B O Rourke (eds) , The Palgrave Handbook of Minority Languages and Communities . Palgrave Studies in Minority Languages and Communities , Palgrave
Macmillan , UK , pp. 433-450 . <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54066-9>

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/337374>

<https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54066-9>

unspecified

acceptedVersion

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Please cite the original version.

Minority language media – Issues of power, finance and organization

Tom Moring

This chapter examines current challenges to minority language media arising from the irresistible growth of online media. The question of how the daily life of minority language users is supported in multicultural contexts is discussed with a particular focus on national minorities in Europe and the development invoked by a changing media environment. Particular attention is paid to the fundamental change in public and private life due to the growing proportion of services and their consumption that is carried out on digital platforms; and to recent developments toward individualized forms of media use in an open market. An emerging paradox is detected, between individually rewarding multilingual behaviour of language-savvy minority language speakers and its aggregated negative effects on the minority media supply. Against this background the chapter also takes issue with existing forms of financing and organization of media services for, of and on, minority language communities.

Introduction

This chapter is written in the midst of a perfect storm. The key concepts to be addressed here: minority language, media, journalism, policy, political power, finance, and social organization have never been stable and are all in flux. They evolve in a dance where it is often unclear who leads and who follows. Today, however, a great game changer is altering the environment, the role of the dancers, the tune; in fact, the entire nature of the performance is different.

The concept of *media* has broadened and taken on new functions as people carry out more and more of their daily lives through digitized services. Social connectivity has been

complemented or even dominated by today's media habits. Journalism is trying to re-define itself in the surge toward consumption of content created through social media networks.

Policies are lagging far behind these fast developments. International organizations have been slow to define enhancement and promotion of linguistic minorities in a situation where the free market sets the scene. The centre of *power* has changed with multinational commercial enterprises running global networks forming the most influential powerbrokers in the media sector today.

Linguistic minority as a concept is challenged, not only by expansion and re-organization of media as part of the public space, but also by tensions that arise from various re-configurations of people whose objective situation through migration, or subjective sense of belonging and status in a new public environment is all but clear.

The concept of *minority language media* escapes any essential definition. In the literature, different notions such as *indigenous*, *ethnic*, *national* or *autochthonous* vs. *migrant* or *diasporic* minorities are used and evoke different understandings.

A basic definition of what we may mean by a *minority*, still used today, has been offered in 1977 by Francesco Capotorti, Special Rapporteur to the United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. This defines a minority as “a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members - being nationals of the State - possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language”.¹ The discussion in this chapter primarily reflects this definition, with references also to other explanations of minorities as an element to language and media policies.

Furthermore, in this turbulence, the *finance* and *organization* of traditional media is challenged as their traditional business and audience models are rapidly being eroded. Conventional regimes of maintaining media and journalism for minority languages are under threat. New forms of financing and organizing media are developing at a rapid pace, and often outside the realms of traditional media outlets. As yet, minority language media have not found their proper place in the new environment, whereas the global media actors are seizing their opportunity to capture more and more of the audience attention that guarantees advertising revenues.

This chapter starts with a brief overview of relevant concepts and earlier research. The focus is on perspectives of minority language media and their position as vehicles in support of participation in public life. The challenges that emerge through digitalisation are discussed against the background of eroding regulatory regimes and the partial financial and organizational breakdown of many of the fundamentals that have underpinned policy models in the past.

Minority Language Media in Research

The study of minority language media has emerged relatively recently. Browne and Uribe-Jongbloed (2013, p. 11) see the emergence of a broader interest in this field of research in the last decades of the twentieth century. Then, as now, work tended to focus more on community and ethnic media, leaving aspects of language aside as many ethnic minorities are defined only partly (if at all) by a common language.

Minority language media study has gone through the typical development for new research areas (Cormack and Hourigan, 2007; Jones and Uribe-Jongbloed, 2013). Starting from particular case descriptions (e.g., Riggins, ed., 1992; Browne, 1996; Wilson et al., 2008), efforts were then made to arrive at a research agenda allowing for more comparative

and theoretically oriented work. Following a seminal article by Cormack (1998), work began to respond to a call for more systematic knowledge of the conditions under which minority language media may thrive, engaging also with the nature of interactions between minority languages and media supply in these languages.

Cormack (2007, p. 66) found that “the role that media can play in the more direct forms of language maintenance (that is, actually encouraging people to use a language) should not be overestimated. It is, in many respects, an unusual task to give to the media”. He suggests that the media’s effect on stimulating language use is part of a larger package. According to this view, media alone are not the solution for language maintenance or vitalization; media take effect in combination with participative activities to build community and identity.

The relative neglect of media research among sociolinguists follows from a scepticism regarding the potential impact of media on language (Fishman 2001). Priority has been given to home and community, education and language use at work (Fishman, 1991; Cormack, 2007). According to established understandings, media is more likely to interfere with minority language intergenerational transmission than support it. The greater quantity of media output in the dominant, majority language and various Lingua Francas tend to take over in the media market. This has led to warnings against ‘mass-media fetishism’ in expectations about how corporate media can support minority language (Fishman, 2001).

Cormack (2007, p. 58) presents two statements that he finds (at best) unproven: “A greater amount of media content in a minority language must help the survival of that language”, and: “A wider range of media in a minority language must help language survival”. Both these arguments are prone to ecological fallacy. Media supply is not identical with use. Or, as noted in the same volume (Moring, 2007, p. 18), an institutionally rich (or

‘complete’) media environment is a “necessary but not sufficient” condition for the normalization (‘functionally complete’) use of media in a minority language.

Cormack’s earlier attempts (in 1998) to identify conditions under which autochthonous minority language media can survive was subsequently extended by Uribe-Jongbloed (2014). This elaborated approach applied a set of factors to a broader geography: *density of users* (instead of Cormack’s *number* of users); *political campaigning*; *leadership and organization* of the minority language community; *political culture* of the state; *political weakness* of the central government, *symbolic status* of the language; and *international trends*. Here the international perspective was expanded to include not only European policy benchmarks such as the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECMRL), but also those of other international or regional covenants, declarations and also benchmarks by example (Cormack, 1998; Uribe-Jongbloed, 2014, pp. 38; 44-48).

From a policy perspective (as outlined in the 2003 Guidelines on Use of Minority Languages in the Broadcast Media), minority protection and giving minorities a voice is an important part of conflict prevention. Quoting Guyot (2007, p. 42) the integrative function of minority language media is important as “media can participate in the social integration of individuals belonging to a minority. Their presence in the media also [enhances] public visibility and consequently contributes to full citizenship.”

In addition to the interest in availability of, and access to media in minority languages, recent research has focused on the media–language relation in terms of its contingency on broader societal relations and in interaction with social change (Coupland 2014). Here, according to Androutsopoulos (2014, p. 247), research must draw from a variety of languages and contexts. Furthermore, the all too general media concept must be opened towards “an inclusive approach that encompasses institutions, technologies and practices of mediation as elements of the sociolinguistic condition of late-modern societies.”

Recent research has also responded to this by focusing on discursive aspects of minority languages in contexts where languages are “mixed and moulded”. (Pietikäinen, 2014, p. 515). Comparing media genres in, what she sees as “heterogenic communities of indigenous language speakers”, Pietikäinen discusses how discursive reflexivity is manifested in “careful and strategic use of genres, for example in enhancing the status of Sámi language as informative resources (news genre) or using genre to create an alternative, counter space of Sámi media representations (TV comedy show).” (Pietikäinen, 2014, p. 535.) Moriarty (2014, p. 481) discusses how new media formats in Ireland (the Irish language television channel TG4; or a rap artist) “...alleviate the stigmatized out-dated image of the Irish language.” She argues that the changes to the Irish-language mediascape “have helped to confer on new legitimacy on the language for these students as it becomes associated with positive and desirable role models.”

In the same vein, visual images that represent indigenous minorities to themselves has been discussed from the perspective of “visual sovereignty”, where traditional portrayals of young indigenous people are challenged and moulded to respond to an updated self-representation of identity (Porsanger, 2017).

Identity issues have also been discussed against the digitalization of the media world and the increasing use of social media, particularly among the young (Vince and Joyce, 2018). In light of these findings, the concept of bilingualism becomes challenged as a descriptive of linguistic minorities in small states, as their internet use tends to cover three languages. In this context, identities are moulded in novel ways. The authors conclude that “...the Internet is perhaps a more powerful component of the social context than past researchers have given it credit for being.” They add that “...the process of linguistic identification is not only one of acculturation, but also one of global citizenship and multilingualism.” (Vincze and Joyce, p. 96-97.)

Benchmarks and Selected International Instruments

With regard to national minority languages and their presence in the media, the following documents stand out as key formulators of principles that particularly concern minority languages and media: the ECRML (1992), the Guidelines on Use of Minority Languages in the Broadcast Media (2003), The Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations (2008) and The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies (2012). Principles of more general scope, such as those in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Council of Europe's European Convention on Human Rights, or the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, have their particular bearings also on minority languages and have, by and large, been incorporated in these more specific documents above.

In its article 11 of ECRML, a set of alternatives is established that states may choose to support minority language media. These choices are, however, dependent on explicit ratification by the state party that has to define each one for every particular regional or minority language. State parties who ratify the ECRML can choose whether to apply all, parts or none of their tasks in support of media supply. Provisions range from full service in the form of a newspaper, a radio station and a television channel to single newspaper articles and/or programmes on radio and television.

The ECRML is constructed to stimulate a varied offering of media services. It may also, in terms of daily language use, be important to maintain a generic variety in the media supply in minority languages, e.g., in the form of services targeted at different audience segments such as age groups. However, the ECRML (in its article 11, paragraph 1) expressly uses the word *newspaper* and *newspaper articles* (see Dunbar and Moring, 2012, p. 378). Accordingly, one must require from newspapers or newspaper articles – including

broadcasting services and content on Internet in minority languages – that they do not only cover cultural events and entertainment, but also issues relevant to polity and power.

An example of the problems that may arise in this regard is given by Hettema (2016, p. 69) in his study of Frisian broadcasting. He notes that “The services of Omrop Fryslân have more to do with the representation of the Frisian identity and language than with journalism. In general, journalism is not the main subject of interest, since the three key outlets of Fryslân are concerned with surviving in a rapidly commercializing and digitalizing media environment. The lack of journalism and decision to focus on ‘fun’ items to connect with or attract new audiences, could lead to a folkloristic imagining of the Frisian identity.” Hettema notes that Frisian society is changing and that new ways have to be discovered to make the Frisian identity useful in daily practice. To fulfil this goal, serious journalism that offers a common platform where identity can be expressed and common matters can be discussed is required.

Since the ECRML was set up before the Internet had penetrated the media field and therefore it leaves digital developments uncovered. However, the various undertakings regarding media in the ECRML are so prominent that Internet media should be included and monitored on the same grounds as other types of media services (Dunbar and Moring 2012).

The Guidelines on Use of Minority Languages in the Broadcast Media (OSCE 2003) were developed at a time when the relations between and within states were challenged to respond to a new global constellation after the collapse of the Soviet Union. One of its objectives was to reinforce principles of respect for the flow of information over borders with populations speaking the same language in neighbour states. Another concern had to do with undue regulations of broadcasting, to prevent requirements of minimum quota for the state language with the purpose of legitimizing a decrease in minority language broadcasting.

The ethos of the guidelines, formulated in the introduction, is based on fundamental human rights principles such as freedom from discrimination and the full and free development of individual human personality in conditions of equality. Accordingly, “[...] civil society should be open and fluid and, therefore, integrate all persons, including those belonging to national minorities. Moreover, insofar as the objective of good and democratic governance is to serve the needs and interests of the whole population, it was presumed that all governments seek to ensure the maximum opportunities for all those within their jurisdiction, including persons belonging to national minorities, to access the media and impart and receive information including in their own language. This follows, *inter alia*, from the principles of pluralism, tolerance and broadmindedness and from the special role of independent and pluralistic media which is a basic condition for free, open and democratic societies.” (Guidelines on Use of Minority Languages in the Broadcast Media, 2003, p. 4)

According to these guidelines, these challenges can be met through public service media or, in a changing media environment with private resources. In any case, the obligation is on the state; or as it is formulated in the second part (on policy, paragraph 8), “State policy should facilitate the establishment and maintenance by persons belonging to national minorities of broadcast media in their own language.”

The Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on national minorities in inter-state relations were issued in 2008. At that time social media had already begun to affect the media environment. The impact of these changes is also reflected in the Recommendations. Its main focus is on how states may support minorities residing in other countries. According to its Article 14, “The free reception of trans-frontier broadcasts, whether direct or by means of retransmission or rebroadcasting, may not be prohibited on the basis of ethnicity, culture, language or religion. Limitations are restricted to broadcasts that use hate speech or incite violence, racism or discrimination.”

The 2012 Ljubljana Guidelines clearly reflect a need to react to the changing media environment, although the focus is predominantly on how states could react to the content-related problems when Internet is used for derogative purposes. According to these guidelines, state policies should promote intercultural exchange in the media and challenge negative stereotypes and intolerance: "... media policies, self-regulatory frameworks and licensing regimes should aim to create an enabling environment for an independent and pluralistic media conducive to the communication of ideas and information that reflects and is responsive to the needs of different communities."

The Ljubljana guidelines specify some important principles. They warn against disproportionately curtailing the right to use a minority language as an effect of measures to promote the State or official language (article 49). They also require that the potential of new technologies to facilitate the reception of programming in minority languages that have been produced in neighbouring countries should be recognized and encouraged. However, they "...should not substitute locally produced programmes in minority languages." (Paragraph 13, moment 2). This principle, also included in the Guidelines on use of Minority Languages in Broadcasting, is of vital importance. It is directly related to questions of the functionality of the language in the public domain, as it concerns the inclusion of minorities in the polity where they live.

Further Efforts Required to Address New Media Developments

Potential problems related to new media developments were already anticipated in the late 1990s when this field's instruments were developed by the Council of Europe. There is farsightedness in the way media is approached in the explanatory report of the ECRML: "The time and space which regional or minority languages can secure in the media is vital for their safeguard. Today no language can keep its influence unless it has access to the new forms of

mass communications. The development of these throughout the world and the progress of technology are leading to the weakening of the cultural influence of less widely-spoken languages.” (ECRML, Explanatory report, paragraph 107.)

Today we see that the predictions that were made in the 1990s have materialised. However, the nature and scope of the emerging issues were less easy to foresee. Among the main challenges are the emergence of a new type of social media that allows for racist discourse and hate speech that is often directed at cultural and linguistic minorities, and the lack of measures to reconstitute lost minority language domains that follow from the digital shift. Whilst policy-makers (as tabled in the above OSCE documents) have begun to address racist and aggressive content that has emerged on different social media sites, they are still looking for a starting point to enhance the use of Internet with its social media outlets in minority languages (McGonagle and Moring, 2012). The final part of this chapter looks at initiatives required to address this latter problem area, and its consequences for the use of minority languages as functional languages in the public domain and for self-determination of the users of minority languages.

The Challenge of Media Development

Time spent on media mostly means time spent with language. And time used with media has increased due to internet browsing and social media, particularly among the young. In the Nordic countries, average daily media use ranges between five and half an hour to eight hours (Nordicom 2015). According to a report by British Ofcom (the UK’s regulatory and competition authority), the average daily media use in the whole British population is eight to nine hours. According to this report, “Among the adult population, it’s the 16-24s who spend the most time on media and communications. They’re cramming over 14 hours of media and communications activity into 9 hours 8 minutes each day by multi-tasking, using different

media and devices at the same time.” (Ofcom 2014.) The way this time is shared between media use in different languages is important, and for minority languages it is important to defend their share of language use through media also in the new digital environment.

This is particularly important as the use of legacy media is eroding, particularly among young people. According to a report published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism in 2016 (including 19 European countries and Australia, Brazil, Canada, Japan, South Korea, Turkey and USA), “Across our 26 countries, we see a common picture of job losses, cost-cutting, and missed targets as falling print revenues combine with the brutal economics of digital in a perfect storm. Almost everywhere we see the further adoption of online platforms and devices for news – mostly supplementing broadcast but often at the expense of print.” (Newman, 2016, p. 7.) Where minority language media are maintained mainly by public service broadcasters - as is the case for example in most European countries - the job losses may have been less. But the audience surge towards the global digital content industry is a reality everywhere where access and mobile devices are in place.

This development creates several problems. Firstly, the measures to promote minority language media have mostly – as pointed out in the Broadcasting Guidelines of OSCE cited above – required economic support in order to secure content in minority languages that does not emerge under pure market conditions. The content flows on the Internet, however, are characterized by free market mechanisms. In many cases, media content in minority languages on the Internet has been dependent on the public service broadcaster’s willingness to expand into this sector in this direction. As earlier research has shown, minority language media outlets have not been frontrunners in this field. Based on data from 2009 on the development of online media in 10 European minority languages², Zabaleta et al. (2013, p. 1655) note that minority languages are under-represented: “(I)t was quite surprising to see

that a relatively high percentage of public institutions that owned and/or controlled media outlets had let those news organizations lag behind in terms of online accessibility”.

In addition to these media sector developments we can observe significant contextual changes. Internet-driven social media and different global services such as search engines, music-, cinema-, and game providers change the use patterns dramatically. What was earlier possible to regulate nationally has now increasingly become international. New outlets with specific target audiences form communities of interest. Earlier ways to support minority languages by enhancing their presence in press, radio and television fall short in much of the younger audience that is served by big actors in a global market. At the same time, in some cases, traditional media has become more restricted because of geo-blocking (see also Cunliffe, on geo-tagging, this volume) of digital signals carrying radio and television programmes that could earlier in an analogue age freely flow over national borders. Also, as noted at the outset of this chapter, much of public and private life is today carried out through media applications that substitute what earlier was carried out through personal contact.

With this development, the efforts to identify conditions under which minority language media can thrive and develop a relevant linguistic space for the related languages tend to become increasingly challenging. And, as many analysts have already pointed out (c.f., Cormack, 2007; 2013; Hourigan, 2007; McGonagle and Moring, 2012), earlier policy schemes in this area tend to fall short in reacting sufficiently to these changes.

A Media Policy for Minority Languages

Cormack notes in the edited volume on social media and minority languages (Jones and Uribe-Jongbloed, 2013, p. 255-265) that the question of media impact on audiences has to be reconsidered. The new environment that is emerging requires heightened attentions. At the same time, as mentioned above, legacy media that offer services in minority languages still

remain central to many of the users of these languages and to the development of their community and culture. However, legacy media are in decline, and minority media tend to lag behind in the digital development.

Established principles of fairness (as specified in the international instruments of soft law described above) can offer a benchmark for policy measures in the digital media realm. In their wording many of these principles are, however, limited to legacy media. New digital media tend to predominantly develop on the market, at the same time depriving the legacy media of their traditional resources (Moring, 2016). In the last two decades, much has happened in the media sector, to which policy development has only started to react. Consequentially, the position of minority languages in the public domain is affected. The sustainability of a public sphere where a minority language can thrive is intrinsically linked to the level of success in the organization of service provision. The ultimate requirement would be that digital services in minority languages are offered in quantity and quality such that they can keep a minority language community intact.

Many researchers are preoccupied about the current position of minority languages in the media (see Jones and Uribe-Jongbloed, ed., 2013; Cormack, ed., 2007), but there are also optimistic voices (c.f., Williams, 2007; also Hourigan, 2007; Ní Bhroin, 2014). The latter point to the possibility for minority language communities to gain from the development through pro-active initiatives in a market where services are relatively cheap to run. Unfortunately, until now, success in this field is limited, leading to stronger predictions in the opposite direction. For example, Kornai (2013), estimates that “Of the 7,000 languages still alive, perhaps 2,500 will survive, in the classical sense, for another century. With only 250 digital survivors, all others must inevitably drift towards digital heritage status (Nynorsk) or digital extinction (Mandinka).” This projection is based on empirical observations of the slow development of digital services in minority languages.

Individual Versus Community Interest

Minority communities and the conditions under which minority languages exist tend to be case specific. But there are also common features and some lessons can be learned. In recent studies, carried out in Finland, Norway, and Scotland (see Vincze and Moring, 2013; Vincze and Moring, 2017; Graffman and Moring, 2016), certain features that affect social media use among adolescents speaking minority languages were evident. A first observation is that many young speakers of autochthonous minority languages are at least bilingual. Where the minority language is their first language, usually the state language is at least almost as familiar and convenient in daily use. Speakers of autochthonous minority languages in smaller countries often use at least three languages (their first language, the state language, and a lingua franca such as English).

According to studies of language use among adolescents in Finland and Romania, the minority language tended to be reserved traditionally for intimate contexts among family and friends. Young speakers of these minority languages used several languages when they were browsing and seeking information. For example, Swedish speakers in Finland and Hungarian speakers in Romania used three different languages (their own mother tongue, English and the national majority language). When they were writing, more often they used their mother tongue, but also here a linguistic spread was found (Vincze and Moring, 2017, pp. 115-116). In contrast,, majority language mother tongue speakers appear to predominantly use the national majority language (Vincze and Moring, 2013, p. 52).

So there is an asymmetry between majority and minority language use. On an individual level the young minority language speakers have an advantage. They are more or less fluent in three languages, which means that there is a richer menu of media at their disposal and so use a wider spectrum of internet sources. Thus, they are well equipped to

move around in linguistic and cultural contexts where their majority language mother tongue speaking compatriots would find themselves less familiar or even excluded.

However, this individually beneficial multi-language competence among minority language speakers forms a threat to the language community. The market for minority language media suffers. The use of this language on the web decreases. In the market-driven environment that is typical in the social media sphere, this appears to lead to a decline in the use of minority languages. The tendency of the minority language to develop towards an isolated “home language” would in such a case tend to become even more pronounced, as its use in the public domain – including media – would decline.

Naturally, some of the examples given here represent situations where media supply is available to the minority language speakers from other states where the minority language has a stronger position. This dramatically increases the content available in the minority language. On the web, Swedish speakers in Finland can avail themselves of media content in Swedish, and Hungarian speakers in Romania content from Hungary. An eventual demise of the minority language in such a situation would mean the loss of the related minority culture, but not a language death that would concern the entire use of the language.

The picture changes dramatically when we look at isolated languages such as Scottish Gaelic or Sámi (Ní Bhroin, 2014; Graffman and Moring, 2016). The tendency, in these contexts, to switch from the minority language on social media, causes worries for the future of the languages concerned. Evidently the supply factor plays a role for the further use of these languages over social media. Other important components for success are related to the status factor, and to technical factors such as the availability of language support and keyboard solutions on computers and mobile devices that support the language.

As noted in the outset of this chapter, there are several aspects that can define a minority. Here, the language aspect has been in focus; that the minority is identified through

a language that is different from the language spoken by the majority. The threat towards this particular component of the minority culture becomes even more obvious when main providers of media content for minority language communities turn from services *in* the languages towards offering services *on* and *about* the language and its related culture – but offered in the majority language. These tendencies have been observed for example in how the Swedish public service media (Sveriges Radio and Sveriges Television) have argued for their service provisions to Finnish, Tornedalian Finnish and Sámi communities in Sweden (Moring, 2017).

Also services for other language communities are today re-organized because of the changing role of previous public service broadcasters. These broadcasters tend to seek a broader role as public service media with a strengthened focus on content provisions on the Internet. For example, in spring 2017 the Swedish language television services by the Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yle) were mainstreamed to shared channels with Finnish language broadcasting while more focus was given to develop services on the web (Honka, 2015). Media services in Frisian are under threat as the Dutch public service system is reorganized while no statutory guarantees are in place to secure the future of the services in Frisian language by the main media service provider, Omrop Fryslân (Hetteema, 2016, p. 44).

The changes in the public service broadcasting sector may, however, also lead to positive effects for linguistic minorities in the emerging new media environment. According to the IWA Wales Media Audit, broadcasting in Welsh has suffered due to cuts in the funding of the Welsh television service S4C. However, investments in Welsh language services on-line (content, and availability through, e.g., apps) have had positive effects on Welsh language use on the web (IWA Wales Media Audit, 2015, pp. 65-68; 103-104). As noted in a research report commissioned by BBC Cymru Wales, S4C and the Welsh Government, “Although use of Facebook and Twitter is lower in Welsh than in English, there is less of a

difference between the languages than with other channels and media.” (Beaufort Research, 2013, pp. 85-86). This would point to potential benefits in terms of increased use of minority languages through developments of services in this contested media sector by relevant provisions in minority languages. However, for such services to emerge in minority languages in the professional media domain, public financing is required (Moring, 2016). In a European context, these examples show developments that would encourage a more holistic view on the media sector.

Conclusions: Policy and its Justification in a Minority Language Context

This exposé of minority language media policy at the international and national levels, and examples of its execution, shows that changes in the media sector are manifold and complex. Media functions expand to new areas of daily life. To keep the minority language community vivid and alive requires that this is recognized by policy makers who can affect communicative processes. These processes include support for minority language use in the family and the existence of child care in the language, minority language options in schools, and a vital position of the language in the public domain. Minority language media are an essential part in securing a functional presence of the minority language on all these stages.

The usability of minority languages in the public domain will, in many cases, be severely reduced if these languages are not actively supported in the transition to the digital age. In autochthonous minority language communities, benefits of multilingual skills at an individual level may lead to cultural erosion at an aggregate level. As social media move more and more into a free market realm, the media environment offers possibilities but also severe threats for minority language communities and their public sphere. If minority languages are going to survive this process, minority language service provisions, based on

traditional legacy media outlets, are still important. Equally important are their extension into the digital realm, and their expansion to sectors that are becoming media-driven.

The most urgent challenge, however, appears to be how to counter a losing grip particularly of the younger section of the population. The global media environment offers many new and interesting opportunities to linguistically competent young people.

Competition for audiences has led to public service broadcasters reducing their services in minority languages or beginning to offer such services in forms that are more attractive to a broader audience (Moring, 2017). This process of power broking in society affects the position of minority language media and of minority language journalism.

The literature in this field has shown that the task to support media for national minorities has mainly been catered for by publicly funded media – that is public service or state broadcasting – with a lesser role for press subsidies. Today, the border between the publicly funded and the commercial system is eroding, particularly when it comes to digital media. This calls for new initiatives to install policies of public support to enhance and develop a whole new set of media services in minority languages that respond to the new situation.

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¹ For an in-depth discussion of understandings of minority-related concepts see the contribution by de Varennes and Kuzborska, this volume.

² Basque, Catalan, Galician, Corsican, Breton, Frisian, Irish, Welsh, Scottish-Gaelic, and Sámi.