NEWS DESERTS IN EUROPE:

Assessing risks for local and community media in the 27 EU Member States

Preliminary report - Literature review and methodology

July 2023

#LOCALMEDIA4DEMOCRACY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction

This preliminary report anticipates a wider study that will be published in January 2024 in the context of the project "Local Media for Democracy" (LM4D). It consists of a literature review of the existing research on EU countries regarding the state of local and community media, with the final aim of identifying the relevant theoretical and practical dimensions for understanding the phenomenon of "news deserts" in a European context, while informing the selected jury of the LM4D Media Funding Scheme.

Methodological approaches to study the news deserts' phenomenon in local contexts have been particularly developed in the US since late 2000's, laying the foundation for addressing the issue on a "multi-level analytical framework" (Friedland et al, 2012). However, no comprehensive attempt to do so has been developed for the European Union so far, a region that is composed of a great variety of socio-political contexts, languages, and media systems. As it will be demonstrated in the following sections, the definitions of local and community media are highly contested, characterised by a "lack of consensus on the meaning of key terms, which are often taken for granted or defined only implicitly" (Gulyas & Baines, 2020, p. 2). Moreover, definitions need to be looked through the prism of the various national media systems, since their meaning can be quite specific (Gulyas & Baines, 2020; Nielsen, 2015). These differences relate, for example, to the size and demographics of a country and/or the number of minorities or marginalised communities; the size and characteristics of the media market, the guarantees entrusted to local journalists in terms of working and physical safety; the independence from political and economic pressures; the professionalism of local journalists; investments on innovation.

Therefore, taking into account the European specificities, this study will build a preliminary holistic investigation on the local media landscape in Europe, in the view of providing a solid theoretical ground to identify the presence, or the potentiality, of a desertification process, while identifying areas in dire need of financial and technical support as well as case studies and best practices on successful local, regional or community news media.

This will ultimately lead to raising awareness on the importance of a healthy and vibrant local and community media landscape among the public and offer a sound and comprehensive assessment relevant for stakeholders in the field.

2. Local media: who are they, and why they are socially relevant

No agreement on a common definition exists for local media, neither from a legal, nor from an academic perspective. As suggested by Gulyas (upcoming), this term is subject to several interpretations and could indeed represent print media with an audience of millions of individuals in large capitals, but also digital editions that target several hundreds in rural areas of a country.

The difficulty in defining what a local media is, stems from several factors: first, the **relevance a particular news might have in a specific context.** For example, an outlet that can be considered local in geographical coverage terms, might produce news that are also significant for a national audience. In light of the digital evolution and the process of digitization of the local print outlets, this is something that might happen more easily, and that can contribute to enrich the informative possibilities of the public; however, as evidenced by Napoli (2019a), the consequences of rapid technological developments may provide the means to deceive and obfuscate what qualifies as genuinely 'local'.

The outsourcing of local news coverage to other countries is a paradigmatic case in point (Napoli, 2019a).

A second factor contributing to this problematic process of defining local media is the **extension of a particular territory**: in some small size countries such as Malta, Cyprus, or Luxembourg, the differentiation between local and national can be extremely complex.

Furthermore, in addition to spatial or demographic considerations, one has also to consider the socio-political dimension of local media, their relations with the communities they serve, and the role of these outlets in the wider media environment (Gulyas & Baines, 2020). The definition is, therefore, also related to how local media relate to society at large: **local**, in this sense, **"is a concept that connects geography and place with a sense of belonging"** (Hess & Waller, 2017, p. 6) and local media, with their reporting, are essential in providing "social cohesion", **connecting members of the community and developing a sense of communal "solidarity"** (The Future of Media Commission, 2022). Local media that are successfully connected to their public are doing this through various forms of engagements, such as giving them a more proactive role in the process of news making (through asking them for comments, analysing the topic of their interest) as well as enabling them to comment or question the final news story product, a so called "virtuous circle of engagement" (Park, 2022).

Another concept to consider, in this context, is the one of **"hyperlocal" media.** Despite its frequent use in literature, as in the case of "local" and "community" media, there is no agreement on a common definition (Harte et al., 2018). Hyperlocal media can be considered as stand-alone entities which are unrelated to large corporate media companies or conglomerates (Barnett & Townend, 2015) as well as "a special brand of alternative local news businesses: local online initiatives that aim to produce news gathered in, and focused on, a designated local area" (van Kerkhoven, 2020, p. 250). Jangdal (2021) has argued that this term is primarily used to describe new (often online) independent approaches to providing local news. Nonetheless, other researchers have proposed not to provide a too strict and ultimate definition of this type of media due to rapid changes in the hyperlocal sphere (Lindén et al., 2022).

Research on hyperlocals is particularly developed in Northern Europe: in some countries, like Sweden (Jangdal, 2021), the presence of "hyperlocals'' is increasing: for many residents, they are key e.g., for understanding their neighbourhood and encouraging civic engagement, outside corporate or mainstream media (Turner, 2015; European Federation of Journalists, 2021). Studies in Sweden prove that these hyperlocals facilitate forum for debates and politics as an issue when other media do not (Jangdal, 2019 and 2020).

In Finland, they "can be characterised as 'in-between media': media situated between personal and professional modes of communication." (Downman & Murray, 2020, p. 270). Hyperlocal media have a close connection with the community, and they are sometimes seen to be either replacing traditional local media, criticised for not exhaustively covering some news or for offering, often, negative perspective; in other cases, they are present side by side with their local counterpart (Nygren, 2020). In the Netherlands, for example, the latter is more often the case, as "[h]yperlocal media services do not specifically emerge in areas where other media have a small footprint" (Cook et al., 2016, p. 19). In the UK, similarly, different issues are affecting the existence of hyperlocal media and it is not directly connected to the presence and the number of traditional media in a particular place (Gulyas, 2021).

While there is no common definition on what local media is, it can be reasonably argued that local media are "primarily oriented towards covering more circumscribed geographic areas than national and international media" (Nielsen, 2015, p. 53). Moreover, there is a general agreement on the social relevance of the existence of local media (Franklin, 2006; Hess & Waller, 2017; Park, 2022): local media are important in today's society as "such media can offer important opportunities for fostering participatory deliberative democracy at the regional or local level and for the development of regional or local identities, including those of national minorities." (OSCE (HCNM), 2019, p. 53).

Based on the above considerations and building on the definition provided by Dimitrakopoulou (2015) and Nielsen (2015), we define local media as outlets operating across various sectors (print, audiovisual, radio, and digital) at different sub-national levels, and catering to local and more geographically circumscribed audiences.

In order to adapt the concept to the different peculiarities of European reality, the project will take into account suburban, urban and rural areas.

3. Community media : a contested definition

Community media represent one more type of subnational media where their focus on serving a particular community is key for understanding their role in the media system (Gulyas, upcoming). However, in the same way as for local media, there is no common definition of "community media" across the EU. On the one hand, the difficulty arises from the fast-changing media environment and the subsequent reconsideration of what media is and could be (e.g. are social media platforms to be included?) [1]. On the other hand, the term "community" is a contested concept, as well.

Available literature on community media proposed several theoretical inputs. Some studies suggested reaching a definition inductively: "Any effort to define community media should start with how those who produce such media content define themselves" (Bellardi et al., 2018, p. 8). Furthermore, they should be looked at from the perspective of how the audience perceives and understands them as well (Gulyas et al., 2019). Other scholars highlighted how community media work for the sake of a society (Buckley, 2011) and are focused on citizens that are part of that society (Robinson, 2015). Howley (2005, p. 2) argues that they are "dedicated to the principles of free expression and participatory democracy and committed to enhancing community relations and promoting community solidarity". According to Hens (2013), **the appropriate lens to redefine what community media are, is a geo-social one.**

The Council of Europe views this type of media to work for, about and by the community, thus considering the term community more generally, as a geographically set one or as a community with common "identity or experience", therefore sharing some traits with local media outlets but also having certain unique attributes (Gulyas, upcoming).

---

[1] In this regard, related to the definition of media in the digital environment, see the Study on media plurality and diversity online, p. 3 onwards https://cmpf.eui.eu/media-pluralism-online-project/

For example, some shared traits of community media in Europe, according to Council of Europe standards, are that they tend to be **independent** from commercial, religious, and political influences, are **non-for-profit oriented** (but they could be commercial outlets too), they are accountable to the community they serve; on certain occasions volunteers, members of the civil society, take part in their work; the goals of these media are focused towards being beneficial to the members of a particular societal group and they are also characterised by **respect for principles of inclusiveness and interculturality** (Council of Europe, 2023).

Considering that community media are crucially important in a media system characterised by pluralism and diversity (Buckley, 2011), the Council of Europe and the European Parliament pointed out that **states should legally recognize these media and ensure their financial sustainability** (Council of Europe, 2022; European Parliament 2020; Council of Europe, 2018; Council of Europe, 2009; European Parliament, 2008). In such a way "[c]ommunity media [which] can strengthen local identity and interest in local affairs through the production of broadcast and online programmes that are closer to its listeners, viewers and users" (Bellardi et al., 2018, p. 13).

Furthermore, it has been observed that **community media are particularly beneficial for specific minority or marginalised communities** that feel isolated by the absence of media covering certain issues or offering biassed and inaccurate coverage (Arguedas et al., 2023). [2] For example, some community media in Germany nurture programmes in many different languages to build connections with culturally and linguistically diverse audiences; or in the case of Austria, migrant communities are one of the initial contributors to newly set up community media (Peissl et al., 2022). In such a way, this type of media contributes to including and integrating various minority groups, as well as allowing them to preserve a characteristic sense of belonging within their community while living abroad.

---

[2] Marginalised groups refer to groups of individuals that are discriminated or in danger of being discriminated either because of individual traits or based on "sex, gender, age, ethnicity, religion or belief, health status, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, education or income, or living in various geographic localities." (EIGE, 2016). By minority group, we consider a cultural or social group that is numerically inferior to the rest of the population, and which holds a non-dominant position in society, with their members possessing ethnic, religious, or linguistic characteristics that differ from those of the rest of the population.

Community media can therefore, assist in improving this situation as they are emphasising, not place, but "human connectivity" and in such a way continue to take care and build on the sense of being at home (Robinson, 2015). To that end, the OSCE encourages States to support and acknowledge the community media that can serve the national minorities' needs well, due to their specific characteristics (OSCE (HCNM), 2019).

To further corroborate the difficulties in finding common standards, the data retrieved from the Media Pluralism Monitor 2023 show how the very same legal recognition of community media is still fragmented across Europe. Moreover, in some countries, the definition is subsumed under other media typologies. This, in turn, has consequences in terms of available and potential protections to the community media sphere, as evidenced in the following sections.

4.   Issues and risks for local and community media

Despite the different definitions regional, local and community might have, a common agreement is that they play a special democratic role due to the closer relationship these media usually establish with the people from the areas or communities they cover, if compared to national media. Trust is facilitated through these channels of communication because place-based and community-based identities facilitate recognition with these outlets and their stories (Wenzel, 2018). Moreover, they usually cover issues, such as local politics and other crucial local information, that are under-represented or absent from the national media content. However, the local media sector is experiencing a crisis, often even more accentuated than the general crisis of the traditional media sector, not only from the point of view of its market viability and sustainability, but also from the point of view of political independence, the capability of offering a socially inclusive coverage of news and events, including coverage of minorities and marginalised communities, and the risks for local journalists' safety.

- ## *Market*

Local and community media are often in a disadvantaged position in comparison to national or international outlets, looking at the size of their audience, profit, or coverage. In the last few years, for example, the constant decrease of local and national newspapers circulation and of their revenues has been noted (Abernathy, 2016; Nielsen, 2015; Irion et al., 2022).

The disruptive market dimension that the local media environment is experiencing nowadays risks provoking concentration processes that may reduce external pluralism. According to Baker (2007, p. 5), "concentration of media ownership undermines the normative values of equality and autonomy embedded in the 'egalitarian structural distribution principle of democracy'". While, on the one hand, the acquisition of smaller outlets by bigger groups may support their economic viability, on the other hand, this may enable monopolistic structures that, at the local level, which may, in turn, impede a diverse production and distribution of information. This can be particularly sensitive in contexts characterised by direct or indirect ownership control of media by politicians.

It is however difficult to assess the exact extent of the crisis of local and community media, especially on the side of demand (audience), and for certain media sectors: research about local news audiences has been criticised for being insufficient (Nielsen 2015, Jangdal, 2021). This peculiarity is part of a context where audience measurement assessments are fragmented throughout the EU, insufficient and partial, especially with regards to the local level (Brogi et al., 2022). The negative trend is however a certainty. From a media ecology perspective, the value of having functioning local and community media in place is also related to the fact that those stories might also be picked up by regional or national media, while – in their absence – certain news might never reach a wider audience despite their potential national or even international public interest. The disruption of the local media sector enhances the phenomenon of "one-way flows" of information, in which media content flows from large markets to small ones, and not vice versa (Usher, 2019).

The digital transition and the overall crisis of the media sector contributed to **many editorial offices of local media shutting down, overlooking the coverage of events and stories taking place in rural areas, compared with the main cities** and leading to a divide in the information levels in many EU countries.

Such difficulties often resulted in centralisation of covering local events by newsrooms based in the main cities, reducing coverage and often through "desk journalism" (Jangdal, 2021). This way, the quality of local news coverage lowers significantly, with interviews being conducted over the phone, the lack of access to resident sources, and – most importantly – the lack of local and community knowledge by the reporter.

 The disruption of the local media market, similarly to the general media sector, is also dependent on the **challenges in the digital media market**: the dissemination of news content is increasingly dependent on the dissemination via social media platforms; and the algorithmic strategies of targeting the users might clash with the traditional dynamics of reach and engagement performed by local and community media. Furthermore, the media are in a constant race with algorithms that social media platforms are implementing which can affect the quality of content on the account of profit, more attention and clicks. As stated by Cherubini and Nielsen (2016, p.9), "the battle for attention is a central challenge for journalism because its public role is premised on connecting with an audience - as is the business model of private news media and the legitimacy of public service media". And this attention-seeking battle can stimulate local media to adopt a more "market-driven mindset" on the account of public interest stories (Morrison, 2020). That is why "[b]uilding a sustainable model for news is increasingly important as the market experiences a shift of advertising dollars from news companies to big tech platforms" (Marconi, 2020, p. 30). From this point of view, then, the digital age we live in seems to put at stake a level playing field for local and community media: solutions could be found in terms of support provided to local and community media through finding adequate business models, building capacities of these media, and increasing local media presence in the digital realm (Council of Europe, 2022).

However, at the same time, **social media platforms also constitute new spaces of expression for local and community media (and stories)** (Boccia Artieri and Marinelli, 2018). The digital transition has been beneficial for the **flourishing of numerous digital native media,** with local and community focus. In Spain, for example, some of the most innovative news media projects in the country were launched by local and hyperlocal digital media, which, according to Negreira-Rey; López-García & Rodríguez-Vázquez (2020) are present in all the 17 administrative regions of the country and amounts to 1.148 in number.

Based on the Project Oasis [3] report (Geels, K. et al., 2023) the goal of some digital native media is to report news that are missing, to focus on stories on marginalised groups and to nurture trust and engagement. Sometimes these digital native media use social media or messaging platforms for sharing news or they use some innovative approaches such as solution journalism, data-driven journalism, fact-checking, slow journalism or covering specific niche topics (see also European Federation of Journalists, 2021). "If news providers hope to stay relevant, useful, and, perhaps most important, financially viable in an ever-connected world, they must embrace an interactive mind-set and constantly find new ways to effectively engage their audience." (Batsell, 2015, p. xvi). Therefore, practices of engaged journalism can contribute to the trust levels between all relevant parties (media outlets, community and CSOs) (Wenzel, 2020). However, the long-term sustainability of these projects, often relying on alternative business models such as grants, donations and crowdfunding, is still uncertain (Konieczna, 2018).

Alternatively, or in parallel, **local and community media sustainability increasingly needs to rely on financial support from the state.** According to the most recent data from MPM 2023 (CMPF, upcoming), public subsidies are distributed to local media in 19 Member States, and in 15 of them, there is a line of subsidisation specifically targeted at local media (see Fig.1 below).

However, according to the MPM data, public subsidies are considered adequate only in five EU countries (Austria, Denmark, Hungary, Spain, and The Netherlands)[4].

---

[3] This database of digital native media contains 3 hyperlocal, 19 local and 29 regional media from 18 EU countries (Bulgaria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia,Lithuania, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden).

[4] For example, in Austria, subsidies for radio and television companies are tied to radio and television firms that promote local/regional programming and identities (see Art. 4 para. 1 sec.16 of the ORF Act). The Press Subsidy Act (2003) also ensures that financial support is earmarked for regional newspapers. Austria, furthermore, has established a separate promotion fund for non-commercial local radio and TV broadcasters under the Art. 29 of the KommAustria Act. In the last couple of years, the Danish Ministry of Culture decided that non-commercial local television should receive additional funding from 2019- 2023 (Rasmussen et al., 2022). In a 2021 report, the Ministry of Culture plans to allocate more economic support to local and regional media, in an effort to strengthen the feeling of local democracies. In practice, this means cutting subsidies at the national level and allocating more funds to local and regional media, to alleviate what the Ministry calls "news deserts" in smaller, local communities (Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet., 2021).

Fig.1 - Mapping subsidy strategies in the EU for local media: Country count of general subsidies, targeted subsidies to local media, and the absence of subsidies across EU Member States
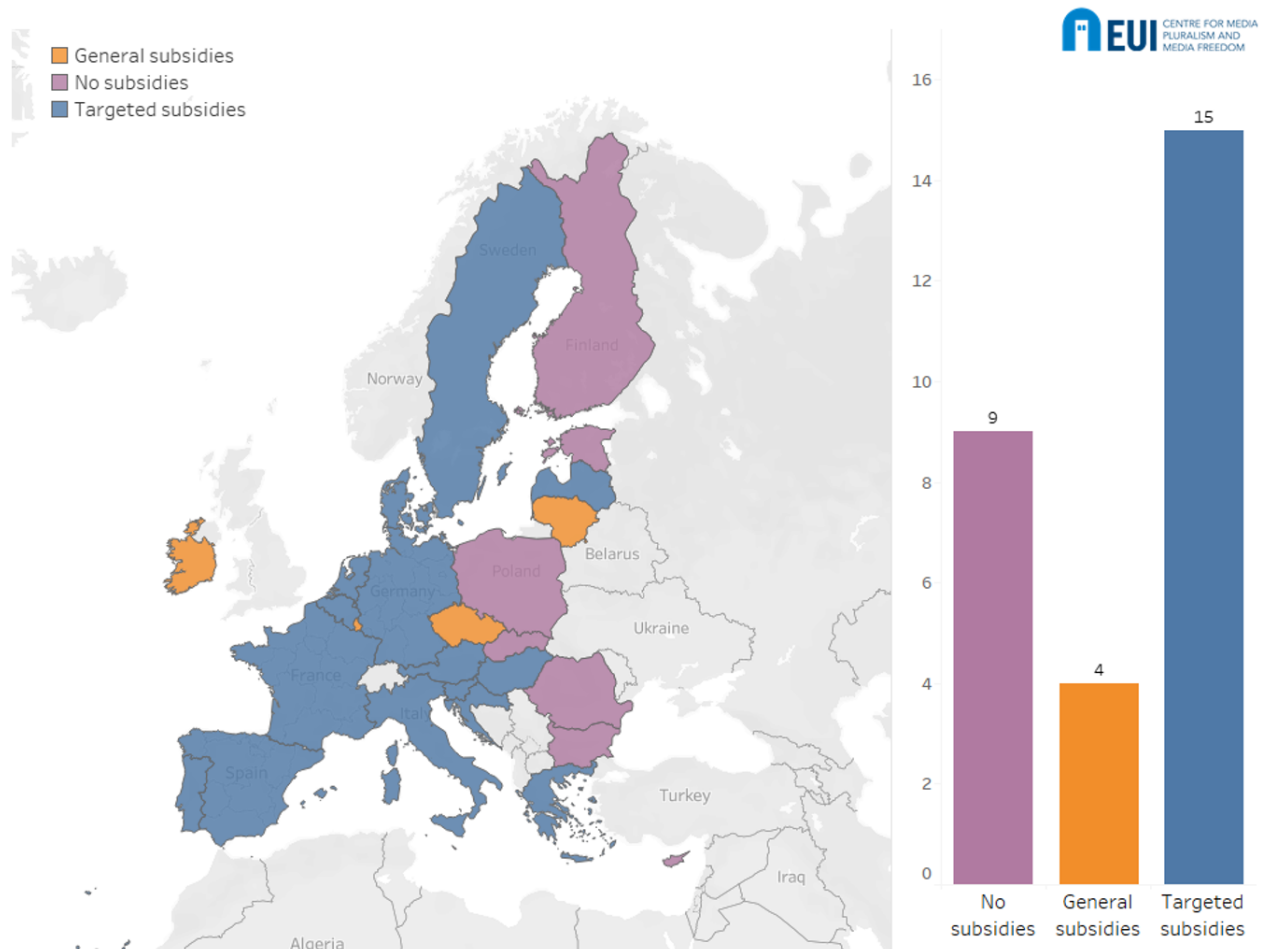
In Sweden, press subsidies to local media have been an important source of support. However, to be eligible for support, local newspapers must have at least 1500 paid subscribers and a publication frequency of at least once a week, which could be reasonably interpreted as being overly restrictive (Leckner et al., 2019). New subsidies for underserved areas have been provided since 2022. In the Netherlands, the SvdJ is the organization tasked with distributing subsidies to local media. The pilot study titled "professionalisering lokale media" shows that state subsidies have a positive effect on both the quantity and quality of the content of local media (SVDJ, 2019). In the Netherlands, small public local broadcasters are funded at the municipal rather than national level (De Swert et al., 2022). In particular, Articles 2.62 and 2.63 of the Media Act specify that at least one broadcaster for each province and one per municipality must receive funding. In Ireland, both Community Radio Ireland (CRAOL) and the Community Television Association (CTA) have proposed the creation of a Community Media Support Fund which would provide funding assistance, training, and assistance with content production. CRAOL and CTA also propose an additional source of funding that may come from a content levy from on-demand media service providers (Future of Media Commission, 2022:155).

Covid-19 as a silver lining

Despite the many difficulties engendered by the COVID-19 pandemic inflicted on media economy, such as a sharp fall in advertising revenue and reduced print sales (Carlini R., Bleyer-Simon K., 2021), the pandemic represented a 'silver lining' in that it appeared to trigger an increase in public funding for local and community media. In the Netherlands, the government announced a financial aid package (€5,5 million) for local media through the Temporary Support Fund Local Information Provision (Tijdelijk Steunfonds Lokale Informatievoorziening) (De Swert et al., 2022). This was done to assist local media in coping with decreased advertising revenues as a result of the pandemic. Similarly, in the Flemish speaking regions of Belgium, financial assistance was allocated to regional broadcasters to help them deal with the economic disruption caused by the pandemic (Lambrecht, I., & Valcke, P., 2022). In French-speaking Belgium, economic support measures for freelancers were introduced such as the deferral of social security contributions (European Federation of Journalists, 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Germany also became more proactive in providing financial support to local media. For instance, in North-Rhine Westphalia, local radio networks and community media were supported via direct subsidies. In addition, the state of Brandenburg in Germany provided some funding to support local media (Holznagel et al., 2022). In addition, the state of Thuringia passed a pandemic law that provided five million euros in emergency aid targeted at local TV, regional and local private radio stations, citizen media, as well as community media. Similarly, Saxony-Anhalt earmarked 275,000 euros in the state budget for advertising and marketing measures for local commercial television stations. In addition, a further 75,000 was allocated to promote community media. Similarly, Saxony granted subsidies for private local broadcasting (mdr.de, 2020).

In Ireland, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) awarded funds to independent commercial radio stations according to assessment criteria such as the public value and feasibility of the project proposal. Some of the successful local projects include the 'Radio Kerry – Speak Up' series offering training to local community groups to produce and present their own radio programs; and 'Clare FM' to

transmit virtual concerts featuring local artists. However, again, funds were open to all media at the local, regional, and national level (BAI, 2020b). To mitigate the adverse economic effects to local media wrought by the pandemic, in December 2020, the Sound and Vision Scheme's Round 36 of funding allocation was solely focused on community radio broadcasting (BAI, 2020a). According to the 2019 Mediatique review of the Sound and Vision fund, the fund has been crucial in sustaining the community medias' current level of content production (Mediatique, 2019).

That said, the ostensible increase in state financial support probably did not offset the significant economic hit engendered by the pandemic. Moreover, these bespoke measures were too short-lived to provide sustained support, and many countries in Europe, particularly in Southern and Eastern Europe failed to intervene at all. Based on the MPM 2022, in several countries such as Poland, Hungary, Greece and Croatia there were transparency and fairness issues with subsidies allocation, and this was considered a high risk to media pluralism (Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom, 2022). In the case of Cyprus, for example, the practice changed in 2021 from 2020 and raised suspicion of being fair (Christophorou & Karides, 2022) or in Malta, subsidies were granted to media close to the government following a non-transparent procedure (Vassallo, 2022).

Based on a preliminary analysis of the MPM data, public subsidies are distributed to community media in 17 Member States, and in 10 of them, there is a line of subsidisation specifically targeted at community media [5].

_____

[5] To point out a positive example, in 2018, in Ireland, the Community Services Programme (CSP) was adopted. Through a 'social enterprise' model, the CSP helps, via funding, community-based organizations – such as community radio stations and other forms of community media – to deliver regional social, economic, and environmental services (Pobal, 2019). Community media are understood through the lens of 'social enterprises', that is, 'specific services with a social dividend' (Pobal, 2019:6). Support includes providing co-funding to partially cover the cost of hiring managers or full-time employees. In 2020, the Indecon CSP review was published by the Department of Community and Rural Development. The CSP's new vision was built around two key goals: to 'support the development of vibrant, inclusive and empowered communities; and […] provide funding to potentially viable social enterprises' (Indecon, 2020:9). The authors suggested that several sub programmes be created to achieve three main objectives: 'a) improve utilisation of community infrastructure to support sustainable communities; b) provide targeted services in marginalised, socially disadvantaged communities; c) initiate and develop potentially viable social enterprises' (Indecon, 2020:9).

This indicates that **community media are even more neglected in terms of funding than the local and regional ones when it comes to support through subsidies** (see Fig. 2 and 3 below). Moreover, in some countries they are lacking guarantees and safeguards for their independence, and the possibility to access TV/Radio infrastructures and frequencies.

One of the reasons for such a situation is that, in some EU countries, community media are still not legally recognized. According to the MPM2023 data, this is the case in eight countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, Greece, Latvia, Estonia and Portugal), while in some others the official definition is subsumed under other types of media (for example, public interest media), as in the case of the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark and Lithuania.

Fig.2 - Mapping subsidy strategies in the EU for community media: Country count of general subsidies, targeted subsidies to community media, and the absence of subsidies across EU Member States
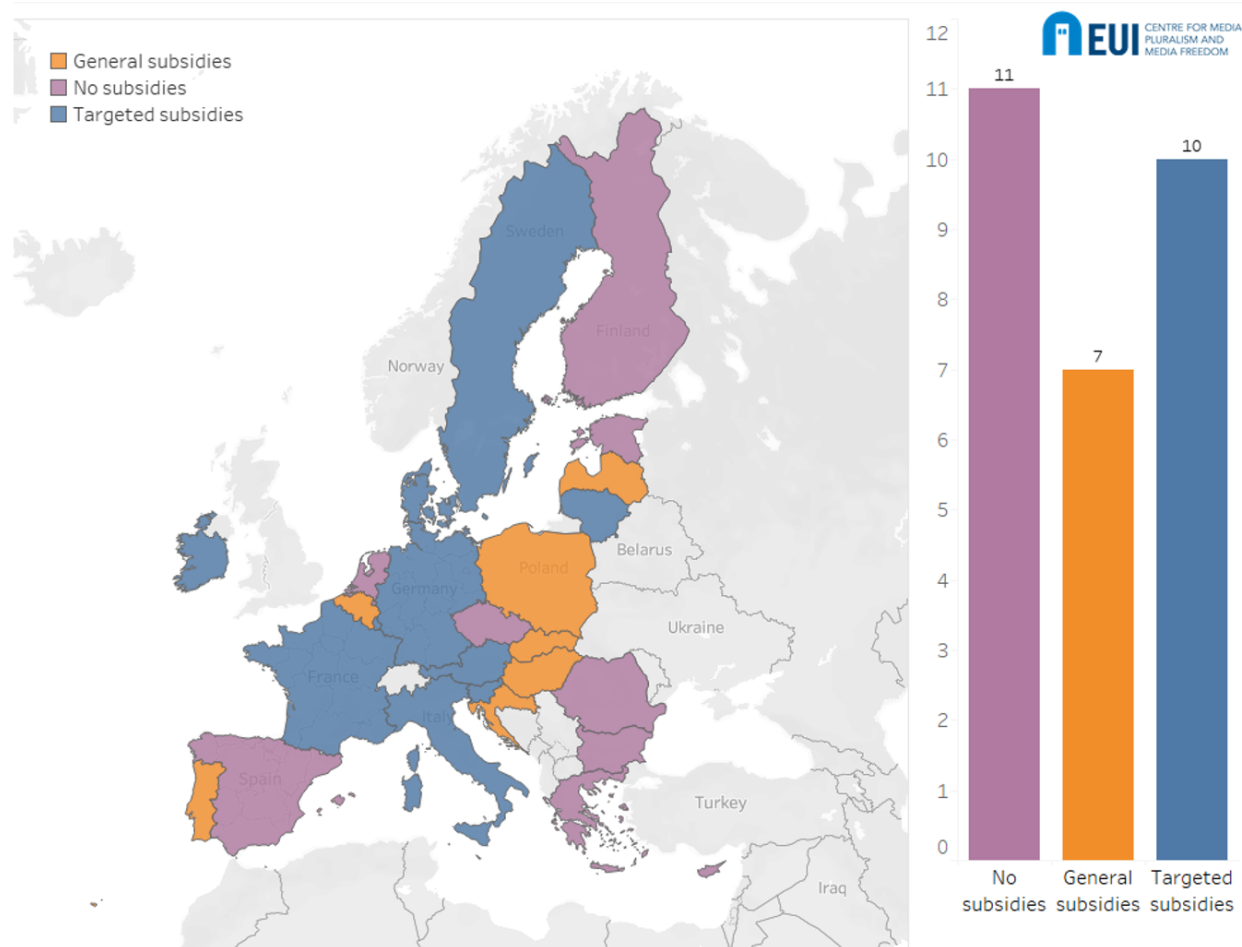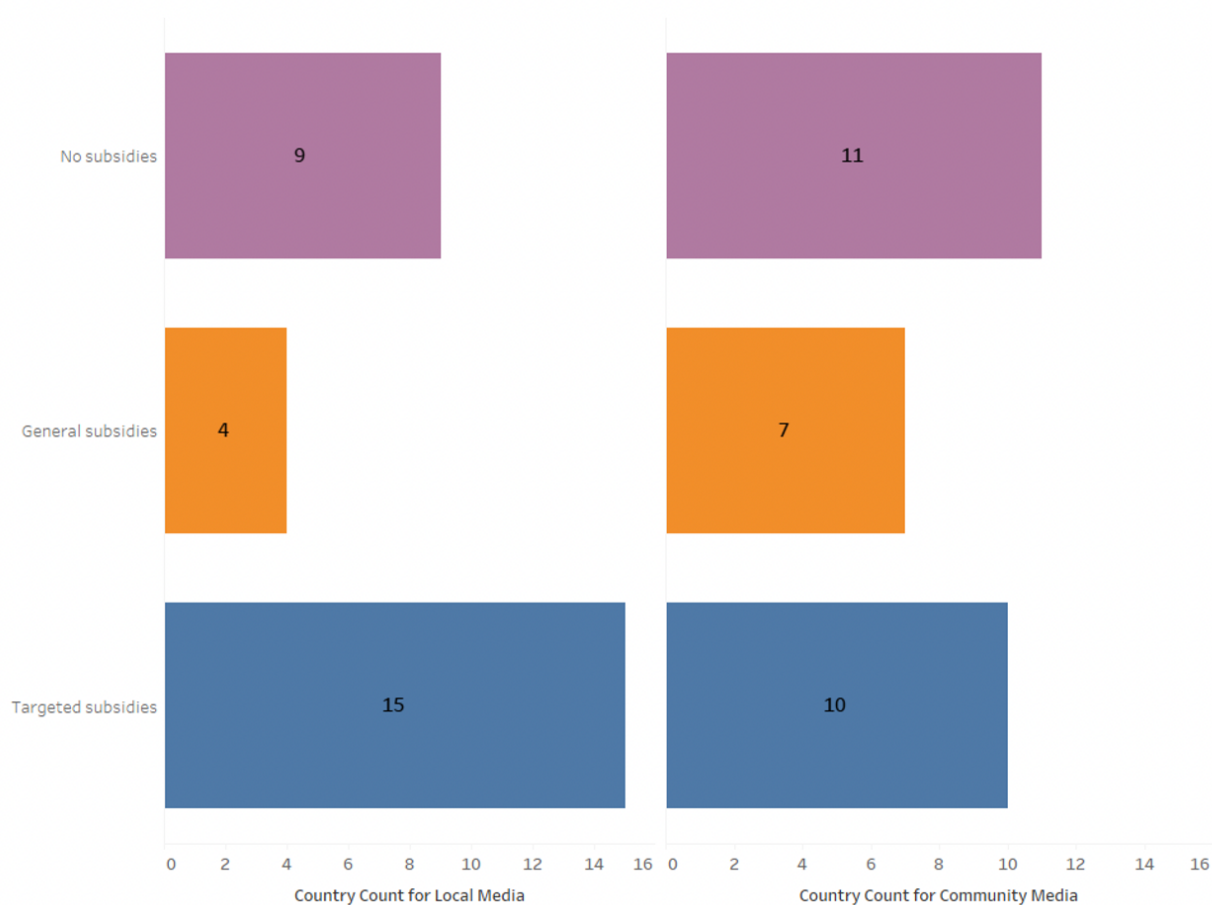
Fig 3 - Country count comparison of subsidies for local media and community media by type: general subsidies, targeted subsidies, and no subsidies across EU Member States

• *Political independence*

From a preliminary analysis, several sources are indicating processes of economic disruption on local independent media, with detrimental effects on editorial offices and, ultimately, the informative offer to citizenry. These processes seem to reinforce **dynamics of political and commercial capture, such as the direct media ownership control by politicians or the indirect control via intermediaries** (i.e. family members or friendly business people), **excessive concentration of media ownership, or the unfair and non-transparent distribution of public subsidies and state advertising to media.**

In some countries, local journalism reflects the local administrations' communication (Bousquet and Smyrnaios, 2014), something often referred to as "PR", in contrast with the media function of holding institutions to account.

One of the reasons for this dynamic to happen is the need for local outlets to rely on public financial support.

These issues have, ultimately, huge consequences on the editorial independence of local media outlets, that is something specifically investigated in the Local Media for Democracy research questionnaire. Depending on the context, public subsidies can carry risks of political capture, fostering "close ties between the press and politicians; the growth of increasingly dominant press conglomerates; monopolistic rather than diverse local media markets; organisations that are dependent on subsidy and slow to innovate or respond to market changes; and a system in which up to 50 per cent more copies of local newspapers are printed than sold" (Gulyas & Baines, 2020, p. 13), thus eventually bringing even more disruption to this fragile sector. Therefore, not only the availability of public subsidies to local and community media has to be taken into account, but also the fairness and transparency of the criteria for their allocation, as well as a more general evaluation of their creation of "false sustainability", not directly linked to actual demand by audiences. Moreover, these dynamics can be further exacerbated by the absence of effective codes of ethics and conducts to which local journalists and newsrooms adhere.

Traditionally, the issues for local and community media and their absence or disappearance, connected with the emergence of news deserts, have been studied mainly from a market perspective. Instead, **political and commercial control have indeed to be considered among the factors contributing to desertification of informative sources,** as it prevents citizens from receiving quality and plural public interest information.

• *Social inclusiveness*

All in all, the central assumption is that **the existence of more local media outlets or news does not necessarily mean more diversified content is being disseminated** (Kizilkaya & Yilmaz, 2021). In this regard, it is useful to adopt an audience-oriented perspective and to focus on the key concept of **"critical information needs"** (Friedland et al., 2012), namely the kind of information playing an important role in securing that citizens of a particular local community are adequately informed on essential local issues [6]

---

[6] The US- based Knight Foundation developed a "Community information Toolkit" in 2009 providing a methodology for community members to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their information environment.

Relevant issues include risks and emergencies, welfare and health, education services, system of transportation, opportunities for economic development, citizen information and politics (Napoli et al., 2019; Napoli & Weber, 2020).

The capacity of fulfilling these needs is related to the capacity of local reporting to be balanced, and consider the consequences of what and whom is being reported. As **the community addressed by this news is smaller, the chances a person is physically more exposed to the other members of the community are higher.** Sometimes local or community media associations assist these media in respecting ethical and professional standards. Various studies highlighted that local media tend to focus on negative news and crime, on dramatisation and polarisation, thus not helping to empower the community of reference (Jangdal, 2021). This is especially true when local editorial offices are decentralised, and the area is covered only if something extraordinary happens.

A challenge is thus to deliver professional journalism, while offering a sense of identity. In the context of people being overwhelmed by "information overload", it may be even more important for media outlets to be closer to their audience also in terms of their editorial line. This would also help them in the competition with cohesive, but non-professional groups, covering local issues in social media (Ugolini and Colantoni, 2017). In order to do so, digital tools might be of great use for local and community newsrooms in order to identify new topics that could be covered, opening a conversation with their audience and adding a greater level of context to their reporting. This could be done leveraging new methods of data analysis, story sourcing, and machine-driven audience analytics (Marconi, 2020). Unfortunately, due to financial constraints, small-scale local media work without making use of huge data mining or artificial intelligence (AI) techniques (Napoli, 2019b). Still, based on the latest WAN-IFRA's research, the use of AI tools will be essential and beneficial for the local media, even if carrying with it challenges for their implementation (WAN-IFRA, 2023).

The Federal Communications Commission started a comprehensive assessment of how community information needs were met, and later commissioned a literature review's report on thecritical information needs (CINs) on the American public (written by Friedland et al. in 2012). The report's recommendations called for a "multi-level analytical framework that could be employed in assessing local communities, [...] to understand the emerging patterns of information production, distribution and consumption".

Local and community media are also key resources for the engagement and integration of minority and marginalised communities living in a given area. This is traditionally associated with public service media's remit with particular regard to linguistic minorities [7], but can also be analysed under the point of view of the kind of representation offered by (public and private) media of these communities, as well as considering some media initiatives established by some members of minority or marginalised communities themselves, as explained above (Para. 3). In this case again, the digital environment offers opportunities and challenges, opening new and low-cost spaces of expression, but carrying with it risks of polarisation.

In fact, the algorithms driving content distribution are often biased and polarised, leading to the mis and/or underrepresentation of these minorities, and eventually affecting their right to freedom of expression and opinion (Eliska Pirkova et al., 2021). As Nikki Usher notes, "the power of platforms to define our experience of place through algorithms that automate judgments about the place-based knowledge we encounter may have significant consequences for civic efficacy, social cohesion, and institutional trust." (Usher, 2019, p. 132).

• *Safety of local journalists*

The fact that local journalists are well-known by the local public in the communities they cover represents at the same time an advantage and a risk; while it can be an advantage for obtaining information, it could also mean **higher exposure to attacks** (Rita, 2022). These journalists are also, often, less well-known at the national level, and their lack of visibility also translates into difficulty in being protected, both online and offline.

Local journalists are in dire need of support but often "public authorities appear less prepared in this sector; support centres and unions tend to be more active in bigger cities, overlooking the single little episode that happens on the territory; media lawyers, particularly important in the local context for protecting journalists and newsrooms from lawsuits, are

---

[7] In this regard, see for example the 1998 OSLO Recommendation by OSCE: "Persons belonging to national minorities should have access to broadcast time in their own language on publicly funded media. At national, regional, and local levels the amount and quality of time allocated to broadcasting in the language of a given minority should be commensurate with the numerical size and concentration of the national minority and appropriate to its situation and needs." (OSCE (HCNM), 1998, p. 6).

forced by financial constraints to engage only in mediatic cases that could create a precedent and greater echo in the public opinion" (Rita, 2022, p. 9). This situation could be further exacerbated for women journalists and media workers working in smaller contexts, as they themselves are usually more exposed to safety threats, offline and online.

Furthermore, the usually lower incomes of local journalists when compared to national journalists make them more vulnerable to Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), namely intimidating lawsuits by powerful subjects that require expenses for legal assistance to be faced. Local newsrooms often are not able to provide such assistance to their employees and even less to their freelancers.

The lack of resources of local media outlets can also result in a lack of training opportunities on safety issues, SLAPPs and digital threats. Finally, intimidation can lead to self-censorship, influencing also the lack of solidarity from colleagues who fear to be threatened themselves (Rita, 2022).

If all these challenges that local and community media face are combined with the decreased interest in news and trust in media in general (Newman et al., 2022), the emergence of "local media gaps" (Gulyas & Baines, 2020), "news hole" (Hayes & Lawless, 2021) or "news deserts" (Friedland et al., 2012) can be observed. The following section will outline the situation for local and community media in some EU countries, exemplifying the main issues just mentioned, and finally proposing a definition of news deserts fitting to the European context. Lastly, the methodology of the research task led by CMPF will be reported.

5. A holistic definition of news deserts for the European context

US scholars and policymakers have put the news deserts concept into the spotlight to explain the crisis of traditional news media and the vanishing of local news outlets as a consequence of the digital transformation and the 2008 global economic crisis. With stretched resources, a considerable number of media outlets closed or were bought by larger organisations, which focused only on profitable markets, leading to the creation or worsening of news deserts in areas – towns and communities – where

news businesses were not commercially viable (Unesco, 2022).

In an attempt to provide a definition for this concept, some authors have focused on digital accessibility by measuring the availability of broadband and wireless technology in local communities. A second group have focused on linguistic and cultural barriers that leave ethnic communities marginalised and disenfranchised, whereas a third group have concentrated on the quality and quantity of news available.

One of the most widely used definitions, however, is the one proposed by Abernathy (2020), namely that of "a community, either rural or urban, where residents have very limited access to the sort of credible and comprehensive news and information that feed democracy at the grassroots level" (p.18). In other words, **a news desert can emerge not only in rural areas but also in inner cities, neighbourhoods, and suburban towns.**

In Europe most of the academic contributions on this topic come from the United Kingdom (Guimera, Domingo & Williams, 2018) and Northern Europe countries. For instance, some studies analysed the quality and commercial viability of British journalism in face of the digital transformation, pointing to the potential emergence of news gaps in the UK and its serious civic consequences (Currah, 2009; Franklin, 2006). In 2018, another study focusing on Finland, UK, France and Germany explored the challenges for local media in the digital age (Jenkins & Nielsen, 2018).

Higher amounts of research on a topic are expected to go hand in hand with higher numbers of public policies problematizing and addressing the issue of news deserts. This seems to be the case in Sweden, which has been relatively proactive compared to other EU countries in addressing the problem of news media deserts. Since 2015, the Institute for Media Studies (Institutet för Mediestudier) has created a database to count and monitor the number of local newsrooms in Sweden in real-time (mediestudier, 2015). In May 2022 a new package on media subsidies was approved by the Swedish parliament Riksdag, which proposed media subsidies specifically targeted at underserved areas (the so-called "white spots" or "Vita fläckar-stödet") (see Sverige Riksdag, 2022). In Finland, the topic of 'news deserts' has gained some traction in recent years, prompting the Finnish news media union to assess the situation in more detail (Mäntyöja, M., & Manninen, V., 2022).

According to the news media union (Uutismedian liitto), there are no 'white spots' in terms of the supply and distribution of media content, with local newspapers operating in 94% of the country (Virranta, 2021). This is, of course, only a quantitative measure which does not take into account the multifaceted and quali-quantitative nature of 'news deserts', as the Finnish magazine, Suomen Lehdistö, pointed out (Virranta, 2021). The situation in Lapland appears to be particularly problematic due to limited resources and infrastructural capacities in the region. [8] In the Netherlands, in 2012, the Stimulation Fund for Journalism (Stimuleringsfonds voor de Journalistiek), in collaboration with the research group, Journalism in Digital Transition, conducted a study to map how many media there are per municipality. The findings suggest a significant increase in "hyperlocal media" in recent years, despite a high rate of turnover, with evidence that media outlets are unable to sustain themselves over a longer length of time (SVDJ, 2021).

More recently, other European countries started to study and map the situation of news deserts and local media in their territories. In 2022, a comprehensive report explored and mapped the situation in Portugal (Jeronimo, Ramos & Torre, 2022). Inspired by recent Brazilian and American studies (Atlas da Noticia, 2022; Abernathy, 2022), the Portuguese report adapts the concept of news deserts used by those studies to the Portuguese context and defines news deserts as "municipalities where there are no local media or where there are no media covering local news on a regular basis." (Id., p. 8). Moreover, according to this study, news deserts usually emerge in regions far from urban centres, with low economic activity, where traditional local newspapers can no longer survive, and the community does not attract new journalistic and media projects. Therefore, though local media (in Portuguese also called jornalismo de proximidade) has always played an important role in the country media landscape, especially due to the country administrative organisation (Ramos 2021; Negreira-Rey; López-García & Rodríguez-Vázquez, 2018), 54 out of the existing 308 municipalities in Portugal, do not have any news productions about their territories (Jeronimo, Ramos & Torre, 2022, p. 20).

---

[8] Editor-in-chief Antti Kokkonen of the Finnish national newspaper, Lapin Kansa. Kokkonen recently called for channelling financial resources to support local media content production (Virranta, 2021).

It is also possible to find studies and reports on the historical relevance and mapping of local media in other South European countries, such as Spain and France, but not specifically on news deserts. In Spain, local journalism (in Spanish periodismo de proximidad) has always played an important role and continues to be relevant in the country. For instance, local printed press reached 39% more readers than national newspapers during the 90's in the country (Negreira-Rey et al., 2020). According to research developed by Negreira-Rey et al. (2018), in 2017, 2000 local or hyperlocal news media outlets were identified, including digital and traditional media. In France, according to Festival de l'info Locale (2023), there were some 1.512 local news outlets in the country, including printed press, TV, radio and digital players in 2020. However, the country also suffered the closing down of local media providers as demonstrated by a newspaper article from Mediacité from 2019, which reports the closing of 108 local news media agencies during the 2000's (Mediacité, 2019).

Italy has also a strong tradition of local media, with a high number of local media providers when compared to other EU countries, including broadcasters, newspapers and also public service media (Brogi et al., 2016). Local newspapers were affected by the digital transformation as in other parts of the world but still play an important role. Regarding local broadcasters, the transition to digital television reduced the number of local TV stations in the country (Mangani & Pacini 2022). The government provides subsidies for local television, radio and newspapers (MPM, 2023) and despite the decrease in the number of providers, local media conserves its established role, which stems from Italy's cultural and linguistic diversity (Carlini et al. 2023). According to MPM2023 findings, in Greece, local and regional media are recognized by law and play an important role. State subsidies however are granted only to daily and weekly local/regional newspapers. In effect, the importance of local media is confirmed by the fact that the most trusted news source is the local press (Newman et al., 2022). In Cyprus and Malta, due to the size of the countries, local/regional media do not have a strong tradition.

In Cyprus, the government does not provide subsidies to local media, but there are a few local providers, such as local implanted TVs, which broadcast across the country, offering programs of local interest (Christophorou & Karides, 2023). In Malta, local news is mostly covered by national media outlets (Vassallo, 2023).

As far as Eastern Europe (EE) is concerned, scarce literature addressing specifically news deserts can be detected.

At the same time, over the past few years, several regional-based studies have been focusing on the critical situation affecting local media, evidencing, from different perspectives, symptoms of news desertification in both Central Eastern Europe (CEE) and Southern Eastern Europe (SEE), as well as their specific characteristics. As seen above, political and commercial control have indeed to be considered among the factors contributing to desertification of informative sources, as they put at stake the right to receive quality and plural public interest information. By specifically considering the dimension of political capture via ownership, some evidence is to be reported in CEE and SEE: in Hungary, for example, the pro-government media conglomerate KESMA owns plenty of news outlets, including regional newspapers and the largest community media network Karc FM (Bleyer-Simon et al., 2023). The extent of control in the country is such that some organisations, such as Szabad Hírek (Free News) and The Nyomtassteis movement, started the creation of non-standards projects aimed at counterbalancing governmental propaganda at the regional level (Trunkátová et al., 2023).

By looking precisely at how subsidisation and advertising are distributed to local outlets, the EE reality exemplifies a situation where funding mechanisms interrelate in a biassed manner with media ownership, ultimately contributing to a process of desertification of the local media sphere: in Poland, regional titles belong to the Polska Press group, whose owner is the oil conglomerate PKN Orlen, that has been "one of the greatest state-related advertisers supporting other media (mostly rightwing press and PSM) with large portions of advertising expenditures (…). Such ownership structure creates a significant advantage on the advertising market, which projects to further weaknesses of an already vulnerable local media market" (Klimkiewicz, 2022, p. 19).

A specific symptom observed in EE is also the dependency of local media on city governments and businesses: as highlighted by a report by the International Press Institute (IPI) investigating media capture in Bulgaria, which "has stifled press freedom and helped turn parts of the country into independent news deserts" (IPI, 2022, p. 17). This assessment is shared by the publisher and editor of the local news website Sevlievo Online, Emilia Dimitrova, who described how "the predominance of state and municipal funding in Bulgaria has put local journalism in a "medically induced coma", with loyal newspapers receiving enough funding to survive, while independent outlets surviving by a thread" (Association of European Journalists- Bulgaria, AEJ, 2022). A similar situation is observed in Croatia, where local governments of cities, counties and municipalities own plenty

of local media and "there is a lack of independent financing models" (European Federation of Journalists, 2023): as stated by MPM2022 report on Croatia, "these types of funding agreements are usually funded through non-transparent 'advertising' transactions which severely damage their independence and turn them into mouthpieces of local politicians and businessmen" (Bilić et al., 2022, p. 18).

Furthermore, it has to be observed how the countries in question sometimes lack legal safeguards and guarantees related to the possibility of being granted access to tv and radio frequencies: a relevant issue to consider when addressing the phenomenon of news deserts, indeed, is the extensiveness of the media infrastructure, that in turn depends on several factors, such as the legal recognition to exist as a media typology (e.g., see the issues outlined above for community media), the fairness of licensing criteria, as well as the availability of local branches and correspondents of the Public Service Media, that might fill the void in the absence of commercial local outlets.

In this regard, the reality of CEE and SEE reality has revealed to be quite problematic, as suggested by the data retrieved by the national country reports of the Media Pluralism Monitor and, specifically, the data related to the indicator "Local/regional and community media", assessing "whether local and regional communities are guaranteed access to the media, both in terms of legal safeguards and of policy or financial support", and covering community media "both from the point of view of the legal and practical guarantees of access to media platforms and independence, and in terms of policy measures" (Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom, 2022, p. 105). In the Czech Republic, for example, "no frequencies are reserved for regional and local broadcasting", no law on community media is available, and "community media are not part of the media system despite a strategic plan for their implementation that was prepared already in 2013" (Štětka, 2022, p. 16). In Bulgaria, "legislation does not provide for reservation of frequencies or must-carry rules for regional and local media", nor for community media (Spassov et al., 2022, p. 17). As far as community media are specifically concerned, the same situation is observed, for example, in Romania and Slovakia.

In this specific context, one has also to consider the extensiveness of the PSM infrastructure, depending on the availability of public service media local correspondents or branches. MPM data show that only the Czech Republic, Romania and Slovakia are associated with a low risk level, in these terms, while only Hungary presents a high-risk scoring (Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom, 2022).

As specifically reported by Batorfy et al. (2022), the 2010 Media Act provoked a huge level of centralisation of the national Public Service Media based on the closure of regional television and radio stations. This adds to the fact that the national news agency (Magyar Távirati Iroda), obtained the privilege to be the only one producing news programmes for the PSB.

As already introduced above, significant economic disruption is observed across the whole region, when specifically considering the market dimension: the huge drops in circulation and sales has led to a process of downsizing and closure of editorial offices, ultimately provoking the disappearance of local informative content and exposing the regional local media sphere to commercial and/or political dependence. This seems not effectively counter-balanced neither by effective state support and policy measures, nor by the possibilities offered by the online realm.

According to the methodology developed by Trunkátová et al. (2023, p. 50), in Slovakia "the news desert covers more than a third of the country" [9] and "the space of traditional regional independent media is occupied by municipal newspapers and commercial advertising newspapers". Moreover, the report evidenced how, in the Czech Republic, "half of the regional print newspapers (…) have disappeared in the last ten years", with the owners of local media tending to "de-localize" print media for profit (Waschková Císařová, 2020, p. 224).

Expanding the definition of news desert

Tackling and understanding news deserts is of utmost relevance since their existence contributes to cultural, economic, political and societal divides (Barclay et al., 2022), as there is a correlation between the consumption of local news and voter turnout and civic participation (Barthel et al., 2016). Moreover, the disappearance of journalistic investigation and information leads to a loss of scrutiny of local institutions and national policies and issues, which has consequences for the local area (Miller, 2018).

---

[9] The report defines "the optimal state as the full existence of at least one daily independent regional newspaper. Only less than a quarter of all municipalities achieve this coverage".

Taking into account what has been outlined above, for the scope of this project, the CMPF suggests extending the concept of news deserts beyond the dimensions usually taken under consideration, and introducing specific criteria that are suitable for the variegated cultural, political and linguistic differences in the European Union context, thus enabling a more holistic interpretation of the phenomenon. Therefore, **in addition to demography, geography, reach, viability, access, the CMPF will incorporate the dimensions of independence of news production from political interference and sources of local media funding, as well as considerations on the working and physical safety for local journalists, and the capability of local and community news initiatives to be truly inclusive**. This will be done considering the distinctive historical, social, political, and cultural context of each member state, region, and local area.

Ultimately, for the scope of this project, we consider a news desert as **a geographic or administrative area, or a social community, where it is difficult or impossible to access sufficient, reliable, diverse and independent local, regional and community media and information** (CMPF, 2023).

According to this approach, a news desert can be identified not only by the absence or decline of local news outlets in a specific geographic area, but also in areas where local media companies are owned by a limited number of individuals, resulting in a highly concentrated market and a lack of external plurality. Alternatively, a news desert can also be observed in areas where political interference is prevalent, resulting in the selective reporting of news or reporting of similar stories (i.e., lack of internal plurality) or where certain communities (e.g. minorities, or lower-income citizens living in rural areas or in the suburbs of big cities) are not able to access information of interest to their social group.

Therefore, the **Local Media for Democracy Project** (LM4D) considers a news desert **as an area where the citizens do not receive public interest information, their right to receive plural and quality information on social and political local questions is not guaranteed, and their so-called "critical information needs"** (Napoli, 2016) **are not fulfilled**.

5.1 Methodology of the upcoming research

LM4D is a multidisciplinary research aimed at assessing the state of play for local and community media in Europe, identifying news deserts in the areas and/or communities where these outlets are at high risk for a smooth dissemination of diverse and quality information. One of the final aims of this study is outlining which are the relevant dimensions for studying the phenomenon of news deserts in a European context, while informing about local and community media outlets and journalists in the EU countries and offering examples of best practices in the management and innovation of local newsrooms and sustainable funding models throughout Europe.

The theoretical part of the project, concerning the main definitions used across the research, such as 'news deserts', 'local media' and 'community media' applied to the European Union context, has been developed through bibliographical and desk research (please see the Glossary). It departs from the concept of 'news deserts' formulated by authors derived from the Anglo-Saxon tradition, and then contrasts this concept to the actual situation of local and community media in the European Union to finally build a 'news deserts' definition that is context based.

For the mapping of 'news deserts' in the European Union, LM4D counts on the collaboration of country-based researchers who analyse the situation of local and community media in their respective countries, indicating the level of risk for local and community media outlets, and consequently signalling the existence or potential emergence of 'news deserts' across the 27 EU Member States. For this part of the research, the main method used is the collection of data and information on a country basis through the answering of a structured questionnaire by the researchers (please see the Questionnaire).

The LM4D project is a pilot study, thus the questionnaire developed here must be considered as the first test throughout its first implementation and might need fine-tuning in the future. Nonetheless, it has solid foundations based on the long-tested Media Pluralism Monitor project, implemented for 10 years by CMPF: indeed, the LM4D research project builds on MPM's methodology.

The questionnaire consists of **55 questions (variables)** of legal, economic and socio-political nature, clustered into 6 indicators. It is built in a way that allows for the gathering of both quantitative and qualitative data, and for a cross-comparative analysis between EU member states. The data gathered with the questionnaire will be reviewed by CMPF researchers and will be compiled in the form of a final report divided into country sections. Before beginning the data collection, the questionnaire was reviewed by the roster of local researchers, and by the LM4D Consortium's research Committee.

The questionnaire is composed of **12 contextual variables,** to be considered as independent variables for the purpose of this research. They cover general questions about the country size, population, general state of play in the local and community media sector. No risk score is associated with these questions.

Following the above-mentioned section, the questionnaire consists of 6 indicators aimed at evaluating the risks for local and community media, in the countries under study. These indicators are:

- **Granularity of the infrastructure of local media:** This indicator assesses the presence and offer of local and community media services in a country, as well as of local journalists. It contains 6 variables.
- **Market and reach:** This indicator assesses the economic conditions, the viability and sustainability for local and community media in the country. It investigates revenues, supply distribution levels, subsidies, state advertising and market shares. It contains 13 variables.
- **Safety of local journalists**: This indicator assesses the situation for local journalists when it comes to their working and physical safety, also assessing the presence of SLAPPs or other forms of harassment. It contains 6 variables.
- **Editorial independence:** This indicator assesses the independence of local and media from political and commercial pressures. It investigates the risks of conflict of interest, the fairness and transparency in the allocation of state subsidies and state advertising, the diversity of news content, to name a few. It contains 8 variables.
- **Social inclusiveness:** This indicator assesses the extent and quality of news offered for and about minorities and marginalised communities, and whether local and community media meet the critical information needs of the community they serve, and if they offer public interest news. It contains 7 variables.

- **Best practices and open public sphere:** this indicator assesses the actual existence of innovative practice for enhancing an open and thriving public sphere in specific communities, not only by professional media services but also, for example, through citizens' initiatives and social media ("other media actors", see the Glossary attached). It contains 2 variables, and the levels of risk for this indicator are coded differently.

Finally, the questionnaire asks the local researcher to draw, building on the data and information collected throughout the filling in of the questionnaire, the areas that could be considered as news deserts as from the definition taken under consideration for this research, namely a geographic or administrative area, or a social community, where it is difficult or impossible to access sufficient, reliable, diverse and independent local, regional and community media and information. [1]

A key deliverable of this project will be the elaboration of a sound methodology to study the issue of news deserts in Europe with a comparative perspective.

6. *Bibliography*

Abernathy, P. M. (2016). The Rise of a New Media Baron and the Emerging Threat of News Deserts. U. o. N. C. Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media.

Abernathy, P. M. (2020). News Deserts and Ghost Newspapers: Will Local News Survive? (Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media, Hussman School of Journalism and Media, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).

Abernathy, P. M. (2022). The State of Local News 2022.

AEJ. (2022). The future of local journalism: in search of the Holy Grail of funding. АЕЖ-България

Arguedas, A. R., Banerjee, S., Mont'Alverne, C., Toff, B., Fletcher, R., & Nielsen, R. K. (2023). News for the Powerful and Privileged: How Misrepresentation and Underrepresentation of Disadvantaged Communities Undermine Their Trust in News. t. R. I. f. t. S. o. Journalism.

Atlas da Notícia (2022). Relatórios - 2017 a 2021.

BAI (2020a). More than €6.2m allocated to projects under BAI's Sound & Vision Scheme. Broadcasting Authority of Ireland.

BAI (2020b). BAI allocates €2.5m to 32 independent commercial radio stations under Sound & Vision COVID-19 initiative. Broadcasting Authority of Ireland.

Baker, C. E. (2007). Media Concentration and Democracy: Why Ownership Matters. Cambridge University Press.

Barclay S., Barnett S., Moore M., Townend J. (2022) Local News Deserts in the UK: What Effect is the Decline in Provision and Information Having on communities? (Research by the Charitable Journalism Project, June 2022)

Barnett, S., & Townend, J. (2015). Plurality, Policy and the Local. Journalism Practice, 9(3), 332-349.

Barthel M., Holcomb J., Mahone J., Mitchell A. (2016) Civic Engagement Strongly Tied to Local News Habits: Local voters and whose feel attached to their communities stand out (Report Pew Research Center, Nov. 3, 2016).

Bátorfy, A., Bleyer-Simon, K., Szabó, K., & Galambosi, E. (2022). Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the year 2021. Country report: Hungary. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom.

Batsell, J. (2015). Engaged Journalism: Connecting with Digitally Empowered News Audiences (C. U. Press, Ed.).

Bellardi, N., Busch, B., Hassemer, J., Peissl, H., & Scifo, S. (2018). Spaces of Inclusion - An explorative study on needs of refugees and migrants in the domain of media communication and on responses by community media.

Bilić, P, Valečić, M., & Prug, T. (2022). Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the year 2021. Country report: Croatia. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom.

Bleyer-Simon, K., Polyak, G., & Urban, A. (2023). Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era: application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the year 2022. Country report: Hungary. Florence, Italy.

Bousquet F., Smyrnaios N. (2014), Les pure players peuvent-ils renouveler l'information locale?, La revue des médias.

Brogi, E., van Eijk, N., Ó Fathaigh, R., Furnémont, J-F., Gerber, O., Iacino, G., Janssen, M., Kevin, D.; McGonagle, T., Ostling, A., Pellicanò, F., Selier, B., & Valais, S. (2016). Regional and local broadcasting in Europe. European Audiovisual Observatory, IRIS Special.

Brogi E., Borges D., Carlini R., Irion K., Micova S. B., Poort J., Ranaivoson H., Seipp T., Trevisan M., & Verza S. (2022). Methodologies for measuring media plurality and options for policy intervention, in European Commission, Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology, Parcu, P., Brogi, E., Verza, S.et al., Study on media plurality and diversity online – Final report, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022.

Buckley, S. (2011). Community Media: A Good Practice Handbook. UNESCO.

Carlini R., Bleyer-Simon K. (2021). Media Economy in the Pandemic: A European Perspective, Technical Report, Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom, European University Institute.

Carlini, R., Trevisan, M., & Brogi, E. (2023). Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era: application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the year 2022. Country report: Italy. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF). Florence, Italy.

Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (2023), What are "news deserts" in Europe?, blog post.

Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (2022). Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era : application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the year 2021. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF). Florence, Italy.

Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (2023). Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era : application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the year 2022. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF). Florence, Italy.

Cherubini, F., & Nielsen, R. K. (2016). Editorial analytics: How news media are developing and using audience data and metrics [Report]. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

Christophorou, C., & Karides, N. (2022). Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era: application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the year 2021. Country report: Cyprus. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF). Florence, Italy.

Christophorou, C., & Karides, N. (2023). Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era: application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the year 2022. Country report: Cyprus. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF). Florence, Italy.

Cook, C., Geels, K., & Bakker, P. (2016). Hyperlocal Revenues in the UK and Europe- Mapping the Road to Sustainability and Resilience. Nesta.

Council of Europe. (2009). Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the role of community media in promoting social cohesion and intercultural dialogue.

Council of Europe. (2018). Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)1[1] of the Committee of Ministers to member States on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership.

Council of Europe. (2022). Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on promoting a favourable environment for quality journalism in the digital age.

Council of Europe. (2023). Community media. Council of Europe.

Currah, A. (2009) What's happening to our news (Publisher's version). Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford (RISJ).

De Swert, K., Schuck, A. R. T., & Boukes, M. (2022). Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the year 2021. Country report: The Netherlands. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF), Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM).

Dimitrakopoulou, D. (2015). INFOCORE Definitions: "Local, National, Transnational/International Media". H. F. f. E. a. F. Policy.

Downman, S., & Murray, R. (2020). The Hyperlocal 'Renaissance' in Australia and New Zealand. In A. Gulyas & D. Baines (Eds.), The Routledge Companion to Local Media and Journalism. Routledge.

EIGE. (2016). Glossary & Thesaurus. European Institute for Gender Equality.

Eliska Pirkova, Matthias Kettemann, Marlena Wisniak, Martin Scheinin, Emmi Bevensee, Katie Pentney, Lorna Woods, Lucien Heitz, Bojana Kostic, Krisztina Rozgonyi, Holli Sargeant, Julia Haas, & Joler, V. (2021). Spotlight on Artificial Intelligence and Freedom of Expression: A Policy Manual.

European Federation of Journalists. (2020). Mapping COVID-19 support: Belgium. European Federation of Journalists.

European Federation of Journalists. (2021). Sustainable innovative journalism and new business models.European Federation of Journalists.

European Federation of Journalists. (2023). News Deserts Aren't New: The cases of Croatia, Portugal and Turkey. European Federation of Journalists.

European Parliament. (2020). European Parliament resolution of 25 November 2020 on strengthening media freedom: the protection of journalists in Europe, hate speech, disinformation and the role of platforms (2020/2009(INI).

Federal Act on the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF Act), BGBl. I Nr. 150/2020.

Festival de l'info Locale (2022) Combien de médias locaux en France?

Franklin, B. (2006). Local Journalism and Local Media. Routledge.

Friedland, L., Napoli, P., Ognyanoba, K., Weil, C., & III, E. J. W. (2012). Review of the Literature Regarding Critical Information Needs of the American Public.

Geels, K., Ciobanu, M., Warner, J., Iastrebner, M., Breimer, S., Vujanic, L., Ledda, E., Chang, N., Breiner, J., & LaFontaine, D. (2023). Project Oasis: A research project on the trends, impact and sustainability of independent digital native media in more than 40 countries in Europe.

Guimerà Orts, J. À., Domingo, D., & Williams, A. (2018). Local journalism in Europe: Reuniting with its audiences. Sur le journalisme, 7(2), 4-11.

Gulyas, A. (upcoming). MPM Local and Community Media Analysis. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF).
Practice and Policy Routledge.

Gulyas, A. (2021). Local news deserts. In D. Harte & R. Matthew (Eds.), Reappraising Local and Community News in the UK: Media, Practice and Policy. Routledge.

Gulyas, A., & Baines, D. (2020). The Routledge Companion to Local Media and Journalism. Routledge.

Gulyas, A., O'Hara, S., & Eilenberg, J. (2019). Experiencing Local News Online: Audience Practices and Perceptions. Journalism Studies, 20(13), 1846-1863.

Harte, D., Howells, R., & Williams, A. (2018). Hyperlocal Journalism The decline of local newspapers and the rise of online community news. Routledge.

Hayes, D., & Lawless, J. L. (2021). News Hole: The Demise of Local Journalism and Political Engagement. Cambridge University Press.

Hess, K., & Waller, L. (2017). Local Journalism in a Digital World. Palgrave.

Howley, K. (2005). Community Media: People, Places, and Communication Technologies. Cambridge University Press.

Indecon (2020). Review of Community Services Programme. Prepared for Department of Rural and Community Development.

International Press Institute. (2022). Media Capture in Bulgaria: Hidden Alliances and Vested Interests.

Irion K. Carlini R., Klimkiewicz B., Idiz D., Stasi M.L., Micova S. B., Poort J. (2022), Overview of distribution of advertising revenues and access to and the intensity of use of consumer data, in European Commission, Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology, Parcu, P., Brogi, E., Verza, S.et al., Study on media plurality and diversity online – Final report, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022.

Jeronimo, P; Ramos, G; Torre, L. (2022) News Deserts Europe 2022: Portugal Report (MediaTrust.Lab study.

Kizilkaya, E., & Yilmaz, E. (2021). News Deserts Spread in Turkey's Inner Aegean, Central Anatolian and Eastern Regions. Journo.

Klimkiewicz, B. (2022). Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era : application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the year 2021. Country report : Poland; Monitor Pluralizmu Mediów w Erze Cyfrowej: Stosowanie Monitora Pluralzmu Mediów w Unini Europejskiej, Albanii, Czarogórze, Północnej Macedonii, Serbii oraz Turcji w 2021 roku. Raport krajowy : Polska. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF). Florence, Italy.

Knights Foundation & Gallup Inc. (2023). American Views 2022: Part 2: Trust, Media and Democracy G. Inc.

Kohring, M., & Matthes, J. (2007). Trust in News Media. Communication Research, 34, 231-252.

KommAustria Act – KOG (2022). BGBl. I Nr. 51/2022.

Konieczna M. (2018). Journalism Without Profit. Making News When the Market Fails, Oxford University Press.

Lambrecht, I., & Valcke, P. (2022). Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the year 2021. Country report: Belgium. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF), Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM).

Leckner, S., Tenor, C., & Nygren, G. (2019). What about the hyperlocals? The drivers, organization and economy of independent news media in Sweden. Journalism Practice, 13(1), 68-89.

Lindén, C.-G., Grönlund, M., Hujanen, J., Dovbysh, O., Lehtisaari, K., & Tenor, C. (2022). Resilience of Hyperlocal Media in a Global Media Environment. In K. Jan & P. Tassilo (Eds.), Handbook of Media and Communication Economics : A European Perspective. Springer.

Mäntyöja, M., & Manninen, V. (2022). Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the year 2021. Country report: Finland. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF), Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM).

Marconi, F. (2020). Newsmakers: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Journalism. Columbia University Press.

mdr.de (2020). Lokale Nachrichten sind Zuschussgeschäft | MDR.DE. [online] www.mdr.de.

Media Act 2008. (2008). Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschappen; OCW. Applicable from 01/07/2021.

Mediacité (2019) 'Au moins 108 agences locales de presse quotidienne régionale ont fermé en dix ans', published 26 June 2016.

Mediatique (2019). BAI - Review of Sound & Vision 3.

mediestudier.(n.d.).Kommundatabasen. Kommundatabas.mediestudier.se.

Miller J. (2018) News Deserts: No News is bad News (Urban Policy, Manhattan Institute).

Morrison, J. (2020). From Community to Commerce? Analytics, audience "engagement" and how local newspapers are renegotiating news values in the age of pageview-driven journalism in the United Kingdom. In A. Gulyas & D. Baines (Eds.), The Routledge Companion to Local Media and Journalism. Routledge.

Napoli P. M., Stonbely S., McCoollough K., Renninger B. (2016), Local Journalism and the Information Needs of Local Communities (Journalism Practice, 11:4, 373- 395).

Napoli, P. M. (2019a). Place/Space and the Challenges Facing Local Journalism and Local Journalism Research. Journalism & Communication Monographs, 21(2), 147-151.

Napoli, P. M. (2019b). Social Media and the Public Interest: Media Regulation in the Disinformation Age.

Napoli, P. M., & Weber, M. S. (2020). Local Journalism and At-Risk Communities in the United States. In A. Gulyas & D. Baines (Eds.), The Routledge Companion to Local Media and Journalism. Routledge.

Napoli, P. M., Stonbely, S., McCollough, K., & Renninger, B. (2019). Local Journalism and the Information Needs of Local Communities: Toward a Scalable Assessment Approach. Journalism Practice, 13(8), 1024-1028.

Negreira-Rey, M.-C., López-García X., & Rodríguez-Vázquez A.-I. (2018). Los cibermedios locales e hiperlocales en España y Portugal. La fase de búsqueda de modelos. Sur Le Journalisme, About Journalism, Sobre Jornalismo, 7(2), 50–63.

Negreira-Rey, M.-C., López-García X., & Rodríguez-Vázquez A.-I. (2020) Mapa y características de los cibermedios locales e hiperlocales en España. Revista de Comunicación, 2020, vol.19, N° 2, 193-214.

Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Robertson, C. T., Eddy, K., & Nielsen, R. K. (2022). Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2022.

Nielsen, R. K. (2015). Local Journalism : The Decline of Newspapers and the Rise of Digital Media. I.B. Tauris.

Nygren, G. (2020). De-Professionalization and Fragmentation: Challenges for local journalism in Sweden. In A. Gulyas & D. Baines (Eds.), The Routledge Companion to Local Media and Journalism. Routledge.

OSCE (HCNM). (1998). The Oslo Recommendations regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities & Explanatory Note. OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM).

OSCE (HCNM). (2012). The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies. OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM).

OSCE (HCNM). (2019). The Tallinn Guidelines on National Minorities and the Media in the Digital Age & Explanatory Note. OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM).

Park, J. (2022). Local Media Survival Guide 2022.

Peissl, H., Purkarthofer, J., Bellardi, N., & Scifo, S. (2022). Community Media: Contributions to Citizens' Participation.

Pobal. (2019). Community Services Programme Operating Manual for CSP service providers 1st January 2019 Version 3.

Press Subsidies Act (2004). Federal Law Gazette I No. 136/2003.

Ramos, G. (2021) Deserto de Notícias: panorama da crise do jornalismo regional em Portugal. Labcom/Universidade da Beira Interior, Estudos de Jornalismo, n.13.

Rasmussen, J.C., Redhead Ahm, K., & Bollmann, A.T. (2022). Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era: application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the year 2021. Country report: Denmark. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF), Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM).

Rita M. F. (2022). "Interviewing Journalism II. Needs and gaps in support for women and local journalists", Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa.

Robinson, S. (2015). Community journalism midst media revolution. Routledge.

Spassov, O., Ognyanova, N., & Daskalova, N. (2022). Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the year 2021. Country report: Bulgaria. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom.

Štětka, Václav (2022). <u>Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the year 2021. Country report: The Czech Republic.</u> Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom.

SVDJ. (2019). <u>Pilot professionalisering lokale omroepen 2019 - 2022</u>. SVDJ.

SVDJ. (2021). <u>Aantal lokale nieuwssites bijna verdubbeld: elke gemeente in Nederland telt minstens één hyperlocal.</u> SVDJ

Sverige Riksdag. (2022). <u>Konstitutionsutskottets betänkande 2022/23:KU27 Tryck- och yttrandefrihet, massmediefrågor</u>

The Future of Media Commission. (2022). <u>Report of the Future of Media Commission.</u>

Trunkátová, Š. Z., Krutišová, M., Zelenka, M., Kostelanský, Ľ., Kroková, K., Piško, M., Kovács, I., Polyák, G. b., Urbán, A. g., Batko, K., Jakubowski, K., & Pietruszewski, K. (2023). A Booklet Summarising Research in V4 Countries: The Crisis of Local Journalism in v4 Countries and the Specific Role of Municipal Newspapers.

Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet. (2021). <u>Tættere på - Flere uddannelser og stærke lokalsamfund.</u>

Ugolini L., Colantoni M. (2017). Informazione e social network sites: una sfida di responsabilità. Il giornalista tra professionalità e identità. Problemi dell'Informazione, 2, 323-344.

Unesco (2022) <u>Journalism is a public good: World trends in freedom of expression and media development; Global report 2021/2022.</u>

Usher, N. (2019). <u>Putting "Place" in the Center of Journalism Research: A Way Forward to Understand Challenges to Trust and Knowledge in News.</u> Journalism & Communication Monographs, 21(2), 84-146.

van Kerkhoven, M. (2020). I've Started a Hyperlocal, So Now What? In A. Gulyas & D. Baines (Eds.), The Routledge Companion to Local Media and Journalism. Routledge.

Vassallo, L. (2022). Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era: application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the year 2021. Country report : Malta. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF). Florence, Italy.

Vassallo, L. (2023). Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era: application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the year 2022. Country report : Malta. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF). Florence, Italy.

Virranta, R. (2021). Onko Suomessa uutiserämaata? Suomen Lehdistö.

WAN-IFRA. (2023). World Press Trends Outlook 2022-2023:The annual global survey, analysis and report on publishers' business and predictions.

Waschková Císařová, L. (2020). Local Media Owners as Saviours in the Czech Republic - They Save Money, not Journalism. In A. Gulyas & D. Baines (Eds.), The Routledge Companion to Local Media and Journalism. Routledge.

Wenzel, A. (2020). Community-Centered Journalism: Engaging People, Exploring Solutions, and Building Trust. University of Illinois.