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## 10.1 Introduction

For some time now, the news sector is believed to be in a period of *deap-seated change* (Preston 2009), the drivers of which are a continuously dropping audience, an evolution towards free news, failing alternative revenue models, a slow migration of advertisers to the online medium reinforced by the current economic crisis and changes in the news production process and changing patterns of news use [Preston 2009; see also Bruns (2008), Meikle and Redden (2010), Picard (2010), Heinonen (2011)].

In a small country like Belgium, and in an even smaller linguistic and cultural community like Flanders, these evolutions are enacted in a particular way. Belgium is characterised by a federal political system that is furthermore grafted on different linguistic—and consequently to a large extent also cultural—entities, namely the Dutch-speaking Flemish Region and the French-speaking Walloon region, with a small German-speaking community holding a special status. Despite some federal competences (fiscal matters, authors right), media is considered a cultural competence and thus entrusted to the regions. Consequently, the Belgian news media are equally divided, as news products are mainly directed to these regional markets. Both markets are thus characterised by different dynamics. In general, the Walloon news media landscape is much more affected by French media products, always forming a strong competition for indigenous media and news products. The Flemish news market, in contrast, is much more of a stand-alone entity (Table 10.1).

We can identify five key players in the Flemish print ecosystem, with ties to other media branches as well (Ballon et al. 2010). *De Persgroep* is the largest editor of newspapers and magazines. *Het Laatste Nieuws* (print run: ca. 287,000 copies

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**Table 10.1** Financial data of the main Flemish editors (NBB 2012)

Media group (consolidated)	Year	Turnover	Operating profit	Net profit
De Persgroep	2011	899,480	107,310	40,101
	2010	912,659	101,144	34,355
Roularta Media	2011	731,111	34,549	14,909
	2010	711,563	57,038	31,878
Sanoma Magazines	No comparable public data available			
Corelio	2011	387,709	15,251	10,678
	2010	366,654	12,677	7,018
Concentra Media	2011	196,053	6,481	-6,680
	2010	197,800	6,481	2,815

per day), their popular newspaper, is the best-selling daily morning newspaper in Flanders. *Dag Allemaal* (print run: ca. 419,000 copies per day) is the most read weekly celebrity and lifestyle magazine. *Roularta* is a media group that scores well in the information segment with magazines like *Knack* (print run: ca. 126,200 copies per day) and *Trends* (print run: ca. 54,000 copies per day) and has a strong position in the free local paper market. *Roularta* and *De Persgroep* are major shareholders of *de Vlaamse Media Maatschappij* (VMMA), a company that owns several Flemish television channels and radio stations. Also the other three main editors feature strong ties with the audiovisual sector: *Corelio* has shares in TV production company *Woestijnvis* and regional radio stations, *Concentra* in digital television channel *Acht* and regional broadcasters and the international *Sanoma* group in content production company *Jok Foe* and *Woestijnvis*. Also these editors own most of the popular news sites like *HLN.be/7sur7.be* (ca. 600,000 unique daily visitors, owned by *De Persgroep*) and classified ads websites like *Hebbes.be* (ca. 36,000 daily unique visitors, owned by *Concentra*).

At the same time, national or international companies own a lot of newspapers and broadcasting channels. Besides historical arguments, the reason for this “regional offering–national ownership” situation is that making viable media and news products in such small markets is obviously difficult. The Flemish and Walloon audiences, approximately six million and four million inhabitants respectively, do not allow for economies of scale to easily emerge. The cross-regional ownership to a certain extent has been a way of cutting production, distribution and infrastructure costs by serving both markets.

This specific constellation has led to a paradoxical situation regarding the impact of digital media and changing consumption patterns in the Flemish news market, upon which we will focus in this chapter. On the one hand, the Flemish printed press holds its stand remarkably well in comparison with the “red ocean” in big press markets like the USA or UK. The Flemish media landscape, in general, and the press sector, in particular, is rather introvert and not easily susceptible to foreign forces. The major newspapers being part of large media companies offer some opportunities to benefit from scale advantages, e.g. common newsrooms. On the other hand the critical mass for niche products like in-depth news is low, and the small linguistic and cultural community forms a barrier for the take-off of new

(news) products. Making an online initiative like the *Huffington Post* a viable enterprise merely through advertising revenues is virtually unimaginable in a small market like Flanders, limiting the possibilities to innovate on that front. News media organisations are still struggling to find ways to cope with these changes and make the news sector digital future proof.

The situation in the Flemish news market puts a specific question to the forefront when it comes to subsidies to the press. What kind of press support is likely to generate the most benefits for the news sector as a whole in a small-scale market like Flanders? The answer is much dependent on the kind of valorisation one aims to achieve through press support. In general, this boils down to the balancing act between social valorisation, focusing on providing qualitative, in-depth reporting strengthening the press' role as a fourth estate on the one hand and economic valorisation, aimed at maintaining a viable and competitive news sector, on the other hand. Both types of valorisation can go hand in hand, but can also exclude or compete with each other.

The hypothesis put forward in this chapter is that press organisations will increasingly need to adopt a pragmatic and holistic approach towards press subsidies and as such develop a more proactive way of looking beyond merely the dedicated support to the press. This is especially the case in small-scale markets, where journalistic products are bound to reach but a limited segment of an already small audience. While news and journalist organisations can certainly deplore the fact that no more room is created for press support, the current situation, in Flanders and elsewhere, is not likely to change soon in these times of crisis. Innovation support does however rise, as media innovation draws on the promise of technological innovation leading to economic valorisation in the current digital and information economy. In Flanders, this has been translated in the aim of allocating three per cent of its gross domestic product to research and development and to better distributing innovation across all sectors, types of businesses and segments of society (Vlaanderen in Actie, Economie 2013).

Therefore, a pragmatic approach might be best suited. While journalism advocates and pressing groups are likely to continue to press for more means to invest in in-depth news coverage and journalistic storytelling, tapping into the available subsidy streams for innovation in the media might be a welcome—and possibly necessary—addition to more direct and formal subsidies to the press. This will of course necessitate the beneficiaries of traditional funding to play along the rules of project-based, valorisation-oriented innovation support (Table 10.2).

This chapter will start by taking a general look at how principles of media innovation have permeated into the newsrooms and the journalistic practice. This must allow us to get a sense of both the positive and negative outcomes of public innovation support to newspapers. We then proceed to the case study of Flanders, in order to link the insights into press innovation to a small-market context. We give an overview of the existing traditional forms of support to the press as well as of the most important news innovation projects. Further, the role of the current economic climate and political mindset is taken into account. The scope is to assess whether costs and benefits of innovation support are particularly strong in a market where audience reach is limited, advertising budgets are restricted, plenty of news outlets are available and competition among the players is strong.

**Table 10.2** Dedicated vs. innovation support measures to the press

Dedicated support	Innovation-oriented support
Support for the press sector: Support (ca. 1 million euros for in-service journalistic training via the Media Academy Support by advertising in the press	Pre-competitive, strategic fundamental research projects: Institute for Science and Technology (IWT)
Support for journalists: Operating funds for professional organisations of journalists Small advantages and discounts on selected services	Market-oriented, collaborative research projects: Interdisciplinary Institute for Broadband Technologies (formerly IBBT, now <i>iMinds</i> )
Support for journalistic product: Support for individual journalists for investigative journalism	
Support for readership: Zero VAT tariff applicable on newspaper sales Subsidies to the postal service for the early morning delivery of the press Readership sensitising campaigns	Close-to-market, pre-competitive innovation projects: Media Innovation Centre (MIX) Support to entrepreneurship in ICT and Media

## 10.2 Supporting Newspaper Innovation

As Meikle and Young (2012, pp. 181–182) put it, the convergent media environment has rendered it less evident to argue the necessity of publicly funded media. Critics, to be found especially amongst private media representatives, frame the discussion within the market discourse of demand and competition. As media users have a large offering of media products and services to their disposition, direct subsidies are presented as a form of unfair competition. Advocates of media support on the other hand redefine the scope of public media, stepping away from the idea of public support as a means to fill the blank spots unaddressed by commercial players. Precisely the need for public investments in media innovation is being put forward as an important way for public service media to remain relevant. As Meikle and Young claimed (2012, p. 182), government funding of innovation does ensure that the development of new media technologies and forms retains a public good dimension.

Three important questions then emerge:

- In terms of necessities, what kind of innovation is the press in need of?
- In terms of the rationale behind public funding, which kind of innovation can justify public subsidies being used to achieve it?
- In terms of organisation of funding, how should this be organised? Is this the role of a PBS? Or should different organisations be able to benefit from funding? How does this relate to existing mechanism? Is there a tendency to replace instead of complement traditional forms of press support?

Looking at the existing literature on innovation in the press allows us to give an indication of what kind of innovation the press is in need of.

### 10.2.1 Innovation for Competing in the Marketplace

When confronted with the growing digital convergence, news organisation seem to have shown a larger concern with assuring the competitiveness of the sector's existing products than with exploring the new possibilities offered by this new media ecology (Vujnovic 2011, pp. 148; Boczkowski 2004). Indeed, many of news companies' first endeavours into the various waves of new media tools, devices and services that have been surging over the past decades were inspired by copycat behaviour and mainly aimed at maximising reach and revenues. In smaller markets the sense of competition seems heightened, as the importance of winning an audience is not merely a matter of maximising revenues, but also of staying in business or not (Vujnovic 2011, p. 149).

The case of participatory journalism as presented in the work of Vujnovic (2011) offers a clear example of how different groups might aim at different goals through innovation. Subsidies for innovation in participatory journalism for example seem easily defensible: such investment will open up the media sphere for direct participation, empowering media users. However, interviewed journalists and editors in the research of Vujnovic, which actually focused on small markets including Belgium and Croatia, saw citizen journalism as a way of cutting costs, winning time and using limited resources more efficiently. In summary, innovation that in theory can justify public support because aimed at a clear societal finality may in practice be used for a different economic goal. While it should not surprise that in a converged environment, the already fine line between societal and economic valorisation further blurs, this does raise the question to what extent an economic return on investment can be allowed in publicly funded initiatives: when is public investment justifiable and when are market dynamics equally suited to obtain the specific result?

### 10.2.2 Innovation to Facilitate the Journalistic Process

Second, in terms of journalistic production and workflows, a multi-platform approach and a more active audience force newsrooms to adopt flexible work practices, converging job profiles and "multi-skilling". The boundaries between what were once discrete steps in a classical industrial production process are blurring (McKercher 2002). The idea that digitalisation or technological convergence contributes to pulling down the boundaries between previously separate forms of work pushed news media companies to rebuild their organisations and foster dialogue and mutual understanding among departments (Quinn 2002, p. 44). This transition from mono-media to cross-media newsrooms is paralleled by a continuous search for technological innovations to facilitate and automate part of the work of journalists as to increase the efficiency of the process of news production (Paulussen et al. 2011).

News organisations have explored different kinds of process innovation. Data journalism and computer-assisted reporting are one example of innovations that

require journalists to expand their skills set. Another kind of workflow innovation is the use of user-generated content or the crowdsourcing of certain information gathering or processing tasks.

Such developments are not without contestation. From a journalistic perspective, before leading to facilitation of their workflow, a lot of these innovations require new skills and routines and hence a lot of effort and time. For news organisations, such innovations come with prior investments. When looking at these evolutions in light of public funding, we notice that “newsroom innovation” is trapped within a discursive paradox: the promise of computer-assisted journalism as an efficient and in-depth way of doing journalism is in fact implemented with the purpose of cost-cutting and increasing performance. Not only are public benefits used to legitimise innovation support that in reality serves commercial goals. Private players also change their argumentation against public funding, e.g. in the form of public media services, the moment they themselves become beneficiaries of public funding.

### 10.2.3 Innovation in Journalistic Output

The 24/7 news economy enabled by “always on, always connected” Internet technology, new forms of mass self-publication (Castells 2007) and new online publishing platforms like blogs or online social media are but a few developments that have impacted the way readers and journalists conceive of journalistic output. Journalists can now live blog an event, send out Tweets, create stories on *Storify*, easily edit and publish audiovisual material and so forth. This has expanded the range of content formats journalists can use to inform citizens. Remarkably, while blogs and online social media have been pushing news media and journalists towards shorter, more ad hoc news reporting, recent initiatives like *Longreads*, *Instapaper*, *Pocket* or *Branch* all bet on online and mobile devices to promote forms of slow journalism. These are examples of opportunities for digital storytelling, which can lead to new ways to present news to the public.

However, under influence of a strong focus on technology as the motor of innovation, an all too media-deterministic correlation between technological and journalistic innovation can be discerned. A recent example has been the welcoming of the iPad and other mobile and online technologies as the umpteenth saviour of newspapers, resulting in a wave of entrepreneurial activity in the journalism and media world internationally (Pavlik 2011, p. 97). Believing the iPad would both attract new readers and cut production and distribution costs for news, media magnate *Rupert Murdoch* bet big on the 2011 launch of his iPad newspaper *The Daily*, only for rumours of him pulling the plug out of the project, which loses 30 million euros a year (Filloux 2012). The example of *The Daily* is exemplary for two facets of innovation in journalism output. First, technological innovation is not automatically successful. Technological innovations are not free from market dynamics—in this case amongst others the closed app ecosystem that comes with *Apple* products (Fischer 2012). Second, innovation is seen in terms of cost-cutting and readership maximisation. The question whether or to what extent innovations in

the presentation of news such as social media, gamification, location-based information, citizen participation, etc., add to a more robust message, to the transparency of governments and other political and economical stakeholders or to civic participation is rarely the driving force behind journalistic innovation (Pavlik 2011, p. 97).

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### 10.3 Innovation Policy and Newspaper Support in Flanders

In Belgium, newspaper subsidies are scattered across a variety of direct and indirect support instruments. Furthermore, Belgium's particular federal structure results in different levels of policymaking having an influence on the press sector. We differentiate between Federal measures and measures at the level of the Flemish government. In contrast to the centralised, direct subventions for newspapers published in the French-speaking community (Blanchard 2006), government subsidies to the press in Flanders are distributed and managed in collaboration with sector-specific associations such as the *Flemish Association of Professional Journalists*, the *Flemish Association of News Media* and the *Flemish Council for Journalism*.

Focusing on the Flemish region, we will start by summing up the main ways of dedicated subsidies, which come in both direct and indirect forms, on a regional and federal level. We then concentrate on the most recent initiatives and projects that have accounted for supporting the press in terms of innovation.

#### 10.3.1 Dedicated Support Measures to the Press

In Flanders, and Belgium in general, press support is scattered over different mechanism, programmes and benefiteres. We can identify four main forms of existing subsidies to the press in Flanders: support to the press sector, support for journalists, support for the journalistic product and support to increase readership.

Direct support for individual press companies previously existed in Belgium. Due to party, political and linguistic strife and after been repeatedly charged with market distortion, the system was faded out in 1997 (Raeymaeckers et al. 2007a, b). Still, in Flanders, a form of direct support to the press sector applies and is guaranteed by the Flemish government setting aside approximately 1 million euros yearly—although this is subject to a yearly revision and decision by the Minister of Media—to encourage a pluralistic, independent and thriving press sector (see also De Bens 2009).

The subsidy is divided amongst the four main umbrella associations that represent the Flemish press and magazine sector according to the number of full-time journalists employed by their companies—and hence not granted to individual news companies. The support is provided by offering in-service training. While this used to be left to the benefitting companies to organise internally, these funds have now been centralised in the installation of a Media Academy for professional journalists. The remaining funds are divided between the four umbrella associations

of the press and magazine sector. A more indirect way of supporting the press is by way of advertising in the press. In 2007, all Belgian authorities together spent 93.7 million euros on advertisement (Musschoot and Lombaerts 2008).

Support for journalists is provided in a two-step flow model, i.e. by providing (part of) the operating funds for professional organisations of journalists on the one hand and by direct support to journalists to be invested in high-quality journalistic output on the other hand. The main beneficiaries of the first strand are the Flemish Association for Professional Journalists (VVJ) and the Council for Journalism (the self-regulation organisation working on a federal level and for the other part funded by members of the Flemish media corporations), covering the costs to run the VVJ's daily activities and to partially fund the Council. The second strand allows journalists to apply funding grants for investigative journalism granted as an individual subsidy through the *Fonds Pascal Decroos*, which is given a yearly dotation of approximately 300,000 euros to divide amongst applying journalists. The fund allows grants to projects of exceptional journalism that would not be possible within the normal workings and budgets of a newsroom. The goal is to enhance qualitative and in-depth journalism in Flanders and beyond, to create the possibility for young people to develop journalistic talents and to bring together people from different walks of life. Further, professional journalists (accredited by the Association for Professional Journalists) enjoy a series of rather symbolic advantages. Journalists can receive a pass for free use of the national railways as well as for the Flemish bus company *De Lijn*. Reductions are offered on certain airplane tickets in the business category of *Brussels Airlines*. National telecom provider *Belgacom* offers discounts on their subscriptions. Journalists also profit from a reduced occupational insurance, renting a car and buying a car (with certain companies).

Support for readership can mainly be found in subsidies aimed at lowering the cost of press products for the end user. In Belgium the zero VAT tariff is applicable on newspaper sales. Policymakers are now looking to harmonise this on a European level and add e-publications to this preferential tariff. Also, the public post service is granted a subsidy of 120 million euros to support the early morning delivery of printed press. Readership sensitising campaigns are the second main form of readership support. Newspapers in the classroom (*Kranten in de Klas*) is a yearly readership stimulation campaign, funded and organised by the Flemish Association of News Media (*Vlaamse Nieuwsmedia*)—in turn funded by the Flemish government—to introduce high school students to Flemish newspapers as a source of information. The measure tries to encourage readership and the construction of a critical mindset and citizenship. Evaluation has shown that on the short term this initiative is successful in introducing newspapers to groups with the lowest access rate and lowest level of education (Raeymaeckers et al. 2007a, b). To achieve this, classrooms are provided with free newspapers and workbooks, which include extra activities. The Centre for Media Literacy, which is to be installed by 2013, will be a new initiative of the Flemish government aimed at stimulating a media-savvy audience.

### 10.3.2 Support to the Press Under the Moniker of ICT and Media Innovation

However, these are only very limited resources compared to subsidies for other sectors, e.g. technological and media innovation. Bhagwati's (1989) "three I's of International Political Economy" (ideas–interests–institutions) offer an interesting perspective to look at the case. The "ideas" driving innovation policy in Flanders are strongly focused on becoming a knowledge economy, as put forward in the *Flanders in Action (Vlaanderen in Actie)* strategic agenda for the region adopted in 2006 and largely translated into the coalition agreement of the Flemish Government for its 2009–2014 term (*Flanders in Action* 2012). The rationale behind it is mainly economic: labour in Flanders is expensive, amongst others, because of the substantial social security system. Innovation must guarantee a vibrant knowledge economy able to sustain these attainments. As the overview of the most important institutions below will show, the innovation policy of the Flemish region is strongly grounded in an open innovation approach (Chesbrough 2003, 2006) where knowledge leading to innovation is meant to be broadly distributed instead of monopolised. In the same line, in order to foster innovation, new forms of cooperation are to be implemented. As the cooperation between universities and industry partners emerges as a red thread throughout the Flemish innovation support initiatives, the Flemish government seems to have based its innovation policy on the Triple Helix proposed by Etzkowitz (2003): Cooperation between universities, government and industry forms the key to successful innovation, without having to hamper competition, and with government playing a facilitating role through appropriate rules and direct and indirect support.

Different institutions have been installed over the years to foster innovation. The most important Flemish subsidising bodies in terms of technological innovation are aimed at stimulating innovation through research and development. From a research perspective, the *Institute for Innovation through Science and Technology (IWT)* has been an important motor of innovation support, mainly aimed at academic research groups. Interestingly, certain changes made to the various funding schemes show how innovation support within IWT has evolved from a purely economic to also a societal finality. Since 2005, the *Strategic Basic Research* programme was subdivided into an economic and a social valorisation strand. The valorisation of the technological innovation research could then also be aimed at not merely economic, but also societal benefits. One of the first projects to be accepted for funding within this programme was the "Flemish E-publishing Trends" project (2006). In this interdisciplinary research project carried out by a consortium of six research groups, the scope was to assess the impact of digital publishing opportunities on the press, from an economic, legal, journalistic and users' perspective. The viability of the press sector was understood in terms of its democratic role. Attention was paid to new revenue streams as well as to the impact of digital media on journalistic workflows and citizen participation.

Another important evolution was the implementation of the *Interdisciplinary Institute for Broadband Technologies* (formerly IBBT, now *iMinds*) as an umbrella

organisation regrouping different technical, social and legal academic research groups with the scope of fostering innovative research and collaboration with commercial partners under its members. Over the years, *iMinds* has developed from a mere funding organism to an incubator for ICT and media innovation and entrepreneurship in Flanders. A series of projects have been submitted by press organisations. In 2005, the E-paper project was one of the first projects in Europe to test the then revolutionary e-ink technology amongst early adopters in collaboration with Flemish financial newspaper *De Tijd*. Since then, different press companies have been involved in research projects aimed at developing innovations in terms of business models, interactive and local news offerings, journalistic practices and so forth.

In parallel, a more applied and specified support for innovation through the media had been set up in the capacity of the *VRTMedialab*. This lab for technological innovation in the media was initially harboured within the Flemish public service broadcaster *VRT*, while at the same time the articles of association stipulated that the technological innovations coming from the lab should be upon to use by any media organisation in Flanders. This rather unbalanced situation led to a lot of critical voices amongst the commercial media organisations. After an evaluation study, the Flemish government decided to lift the *Medialab* out of the PSB and merge it with the Programme Innovative Media (PIM) of the *IWT* and accommodate this new structure within *iMinds*. The renewed lab was inaugurated in January 2012 under the name *Media Innovation Centre (MIX)* and was incorporated under the larger *iMinds* umbrella. It is a centre organised to stimulate innovation in the Flemish media sector. Projects need to be handed in and evaluated before any support is given. In order to create a more competitive media sector, *MIX* will encourage cooperation between media actors in order to pool resources when working on innovative projects. The focus of the aid is for pre-competitive projects, as to not interfere with the workings of the market. Finally, these institutions, individually or together, offer a series of funding mechanisms tailored to the needs of entrepreneurs in the field of media and ICT, ranging from boot camps and trainings to seed funding.

These “institutions” have a mandate to foster innovation in ICT in general and media specifically that seems to strongly reflect the innovation “interests” of the large media companies in Flanders. That is translated in a mostly economic valorisation aim of innovation. Not unsurprisingly, *MIX* had to face critics amongst alternative news organisations and investigative journalists, who questioned the public value and social finality of the programme.

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## 10.4 Lessons Learned

The Flemish government has in recent years backed a number of financial programs like *iMinds* and *MIX*, alongside other project-based research and development initiatives. This focus on innovation benefits the interests of media companies, as they are forced to adapt to the digital environment. However, the emphasis on

technology, product and business innovation might, on the other hand, go to the expense of content quality. One might indeed argue that subsidies go to the creation of innovations that would emerge anyways out of the current market logics, while exactly the kind of products that are subject to market failure, like investigative journalism, are deprived from it. By way of its director, *Ides Debruyne*, *The Pascal Decroos Fund for Investigative Journalism* warns for the fact that innovation in media technology does not automatically improve the quality of journalistic output. Investing in knowledge is a more sound way of developing innovative forms of journalism, which is something media companies are not interested in. The “app” becomes more important than its content. Referring again to Meikle and Young (2012), innovations do not per definition retain their public good dimension because they are supported by public funding. More is needed to guarantee that the outcomes of innovations in the media and the press are beneficial from a societal point of view.

Still, when again turning to the concepts of *Bhagwati*, in Flanders, the “ideas” of Flemish policymakers and the “interests” of large media companies seem to have largely found each other in a common belief in ICT and media innovation as an important driver of growth. Institutions like MIX, where the board of advisors is composed of leading representatives of the media sector, are the emanation of this convergence. A number of press companies anticipated this reality by applying for such projects or grants. Newspaper companies struggling with the switch from analogue to digital distribution indeed took this opportunity to find financial means to research and experiment with new forms of distribution, new business opportunities and models, user behaviour, etc.

What becomes clear is that this innovation bias puts the definition of quality to the forefront. If journalistic quality is seen as a necessary marketing investment for newspapers (Mantrala et al. 2007, p. 29), as an economic notion, it is likely to be measured in terms of user appreciation, in turn measured in terms of circulation numbers and revenues. Or should quality be defined in terms of criteria that characterise the democratic tasks of a newspaper, including criteria such as truth/correctness, relevance, neutrality, impartiality, immediacy and diversity (Leroch and Wellbrock 2011; Westerstahl 1983).

Admittedly, public funding in innovation does prevent innovation from becoming the sole domain of corporate interest. If however that means that public funding in media innovation needs to abide by the rules of economic valorisation, favouring economic above democratic quality of news, the argument does not completely stand. As a matter of fact, if investments in quality are inspired by commercial motivations, the market logic would suggest that they are likely to be made regardless of public funding being available or not. Understandably, advocates of investments in the democratic quality of news are critical towards such kind of support and, consequently, are wary of innovation support to the press that is often embedded in this commercial logic.

Still, based on the current evolutions in Flanders, we suggest that press organisations will have to take a more creative and proactive approach if they want to enjoy support measures. Innovation grants can be a welcome source of

funding for Flemish press companies. As they will be unlikely to benefit from advantages of scale, they might be forced more than others to look at more efficient ways of producing and distributing news content. Innovation funds can serve exactly this purpose. But at the same time, media companies will have to stress the double articulation of media (Silverstone and Haddon 1996), namely that media are both technology and content, and innovation in the one should benefit—or at least not harm—the other. “Content quality advocates” will have to put this on the agenda of their own media organisations, of the funding organisations and of policy makers.

Direct subsidies to the press have remained largely unchanged in scope and amount over recent years. But through this kind of media innovation funds, resources are available for which press organisation can apply for too and which they can put to their needs. Of course, this means they will have to learn to play by the rules of a more project-based and competitive market. In a way similar to the convergence of media leading previously partnering companies to become competitors, the same companies now also compete for funding in the recent, more integrated R&D funding schemes offered by the Flemish government. As direct subsidies are unlikely to be raised soon, these kind of innovation-centred funding mechanisms should be seen as a much-needed addition to more traditional forms of subsidies to the press. Developing an innovation policy then becomes a priority for press organisations. In a well-balanced innovation policy, using these resources for product and service innovation might allow available resources to be invested in the otherwise too expensive practices of in-depth journalism.

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