Introduction

In the midst of expectations and scepticism, media regulators are booming around the world. So-called independent regulators or statutory regulatory bodies have thrived with liberalization and privatization in the late 1980s and 1990s. Their configuration has been profoundly transformed ever since as technical convergence deepens and more actors expect to play an active role in the overall media regulatory construct. At sub-national, national and transnational levels, the complexification of media self and co-regulatory mechanisms is also notorious. Indeed, the distinctiveness of media regulators (and related agencies) is such that empirical reality is permanently challenging the tentative theorization of the scientific field.

Aiming to address media regulators in different contexts, we have invited scholars from all geographies and backgrounds to join us on the 18-19 July 2013 for the conference 'Media Policy and Regulation: Activating Voices, Illuminating Silences' which took place at the University of Minho, Braga, Portugal. This conference closed a particular cycle of our journey in this field: it was the last conference of the project 'Media Regulation in Portugal: The ERC's Case' financed by the National Science Foundation (PTDC/CCI-COM/104634/2008).

The project 'Media Regulation in Portugal' (http://www.lasics.uminho.pt/mediareg) has created the opportunity for a systematic academic debate over the last three years around a number of issues which were also very present at the July conference: conceptual dilemmas on media regulation, media regulators, media policy, media governance, statutory media regulation, deregulation; convergent and sectorial media regulators (legal frameworks, functions, legitimizing/underlying values, performance, enforcement mechanisms/accountability, institutional organization/composition and funding); links between sub-national/regional, national and transnational media regulators; articulations between media regulation, co-regulation and self-regulation; the independence of 'independent' media regulators; social movements and citizens' dynamics to set up and/or to abolish media regulators; cross-country comparative analysis of media regulators; internet/new media regulation, etc.

The July conference on 'Media Policy and Regulation', with the participation of around 100 researchers from different parts of the world, was a special moment to enrich our reflections and also to recognise how embryonic these debates can still be. In addition to the conference presentations, the inter-personal dialogues on the particularities of national and regional cases were most precious and enlightening.

This e-book builds on work developed at this particular conference. Twenty six articles (some co-authored) are now freely available online with this e-book published by the Communication and Society Research Centre and edited by the Project's team. We are

most grateful to the conference participants who had the time and will to share their thoughts with a wider audience hoping to keep the dialogue alive. Considering that the conference was bilingual (English and Portuguese) we are publishing the texts in their original language.

The publication is divided in five chapters reflecting the aggregation of dominant topics. 'Information Policies and Media Systems' is the first chapter with six contributions from Spain, Brazil and Poland. The second chapter, 'Media Regulation and Digital Challenges' combines Brazilian and Portuguese perspectives on new media regulation and Internet. Chapter 3, 'The State and Beyond: Activating Voices' articulates formal state regulation with the citizen and professional regulation role. 'Unveiling and Deconstructing Silences of Media Regulatory Practices' is the fourth chapter. Here, attempts are made to clarify regulatory areas that are often overlooked (e.g. gender, advertising). The last chapter, 'Rights and Duties: the interplay between Media Regulation and Journalist Practices' brings to the fore integrated perspectives on regulatory dynamics and emergent newsroom challenges, citizen participation, rights of access to information, among others.

Hopefully the present e-book is the starting point for a renewed and continuous debate. Media policy and regulation are never settled. The improvement of the symbolic environment we live in requires attention and action from academics, politicians and citizens. The most crucial issues are not to be solved but to be kept alive in the public domain. Media policy and regulation are necessarily tense because different (if not conflictual) interests are always at stake. Making interests visible and power relations debatable is our endless task.

My deepest gratitude to the Project members, consultants, and to the e-book authors,

Helena Sousa
helena@ics.uminho.pt

Communication and Society Research Centre

Principal Investigator of the project 'Media Regulation in Portugal: The ERC's Case' (PTDC/CCI-COM/104634/2008)