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Input paper:

Empowering citizens through media literacy education

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This paper starts from the assumption that media literacy is an added value and a factor of the quality of life in the everyday lives of 21st century citizens, as well as a pillar of democracy.

As stated in a recent study, "because the media is so omnipresent in modern society, it is no longer simply an advantage to be media literate, but a debilitating disadvantage not to be"[1].

From an educational and cultural point of view, media literacy is the ongoing result of a pedagogical process that must acquire consistency in school and extends over a lifetime.
According to the Council of Europe (2000):

> "*media education can be defined as teaching practices which aim to develop media competence, understood as a critical and discerning attitude towards the media in order to form well-balanced citizens, capable of making their own judgements on the basis of the available information. It enables them to access the necessary information, to analyse it and be able to identify the economic, political, social and/or cultural interests that lie behind it. Media education teaches individuals to interpret and produce messages, to select the most appropriate media for communicating and, eventually, to have a greater say in the media offer and output.*"[2]

Given this socio-political dimension, media education may be considered a "part of the basic entitlement of every citizen, in every country in the world, to freedom of expression and the right to information and is instrumental in building and sustaining democracy"[3]. On the other hand, in the last decades, the development of digital technologies and networks, and its interactive and multimedia aspects, has been opening new experiences and challenges in the information and communication field. In this new context, media literacy should actually be understood as 'transliteracy', creatively combining diverse languages, practices and technologies. Indeed, it is a communication eco-system transformation that we are facing, requiring new competences and a new vision of social relations.

1. Overview of the debates and practices in Europe

Europe has seen a wealth of experience and thought in this field. Throughout the twentieth century, first the use of the printing press and the newspaper in education and, later on, the development of film and audio-visual gave substance to important experiments whose guiding principles remain to the present day.

After World War II, UNESCO played an important role in finding ways to incorporate the media in education and to foster a critical approach to the media. A high point was the Declaration of Grünwald in 1982[4], which advocated media education from early childhood through higher education and a strong engagement in teacher training in this area. Similarly, since the 80s, the Council of Europe has developed multiple initiatives on policies and practices of media literacy around issues such as the development of critical thinking, citizenship and human rights.

In the last decade, in particular, the European Commission has developed a strategy to promote research and encourage development of policies for media education in the Member States. A special attention has been given to the inclusion of this component in school curricula and the assessment of levels of media

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[1] Celot, P. ; Perez-Tornero (2010). *Study on Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels*. Report produced for the European Commission.

[2] Council of Europe (2000) *Recommendation 1466 (2000) – Media Education*. Text adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly on 27 June. URL : http://assembly.coe.int/Mainf.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta00/EREC1466.htm (accessed: 02.05.2014)

[3] Recommenadtions addressed to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO by Youth Media Education, Seville, 15-16 February 2002

[4] UNESCO (1982). Grünwald Declaration on Media Education. URL : http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/MEDIA_E.PDF

literacy among citizens. In addition to a recommendation and a communication on media literacy development issued by the European Union institutions, the Commission issued a directive on audio-visual services, where the European Commission is required to produce periodic reports on levels of media literacy in all Member States[5].

The steps taken by a number of actors have significantly contributed to a greater awareness of the relevance of media literacy and its presence in the public agenda. However, we must recognize that the situation in Europe differs greatly from country to country and from region to region. At the same time, there are different ways of understanding and approaching media literacy from the point of view of concepts, ideologies/motivations and policies. The following provide some examples:

i.   Media literacy as an overall concept with regard to citizenship and participation in a new media environment *versus* digital literacy for adaptation, training and empowerment in terms of ICT and the information society;

ii.   Media literacy from a technological approach *versus* media literacy from a humanistic and social/civic approach;

iii. A focus on technological skills and competences *versus* a focus on a broader, cultural, and 'environmental' approach;

iv.   Media literacy as a matter for children and new generations *versus* media literacy as a matter for everyone, and embedded in lifelong learning.

More than straight forward opposites, we are confronted here by the polarities of a continuum, which clearly express the debates and contradictions involved. Actual policies are in many cases the result of the interplay of different actors and interests. Some discussions about mass distribution of computers in schools (eg. programmes such as "One computer per child") are a good example of a topic where economic, political, educational and cultural views and interests dialogue sometimes collide.

2. Overcoming digital divides, social inclusion and enhancing cultural creativity

One of the most salient concerns of public policy in media and the digital field is the benefits it can bring to people, society and the economy and the significant proportion of citizens who live on the margins of the digital networks. The most recent Eurostat data shows that around one in five EU28 households had no access to the Internet in 2013. If we zoom in on the details, the asymmetries become evident: in several countries – Bulgaria, Greece, Romania – the internet take-up is between 50 and 60 per cent while at the other extreme, in some Nordic countries, internet take-up is above 95 percent[6]. However, the divide is not only a socio-geographical one. Within each country there are other kinds of factors that determine who –i.e. individuals, groups and communities – has access to the media (traditional and new) and/or is able to meaningfully use and appropriate these media. These factors include age, socio-economic wealth, a person's place of residence and, in some societies, also gender.

The social phenomenon of the digital divide has been stated to be the gap between those who can access and use (digital) technologies and information/content effectively, and those who cannot. In recent years, research has emphasized less what separates the fields (the haves and the have-nots) and more the idea of degree and process. As Selwyn puts it, the digital divide "can be seen as a practical embodiment of the wider theme of social inclusion"[7]. Social and cultural resources, at individual and community levels, may

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[5] Art. 33 of the Directive 2010/13/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 March 2010 on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services (Audiovisual Media Services Directive)

[6] Eurostat, Households - level of Internet access [isoc_ci_in_h]. Last update: 09-04-2014.
http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=isoc_ci_in_h&lang=en

[7] Selwyn, N. (2004). "Reconsidering Political and Popular Understandings of the Digital Divide". New Media and Society, vol.6 (3): 341–362. DOI: 10.1177/1461444804042519, p. 343

not be independent of economic conditions or 'technological' issues. As Sorj stresses, "[t]here is a strong correlation between the digital divide and other forms of social inequality"[8].

In this context, the social situation in Europe raises concern and hinders efforts to foster social inclusion. In several regions, the unemployment rate is currently high or very high (in 13 countries it was above 10 percent as of November 2013), affecting above all the younger generations (23.6% in the EU28)[9]. At the same time, more than one quarter (25,9 per cent[10]) of the European population (EU28) is at risk of poverty before social transfers (pensions are excluded from social transfers), which undermines the ambitious goals that the European Union has set itself for 2020.

If the indices for the digitally excluded reflect the social and cultural inequalities, it is also true that emphasis on media and information literacy, which nowadays means access to and efficient use of ICT, may provide the policy dimension to foster social inclusion, so that "no one is left behind". Thus economic performance, employment opportunities, quality of life, social participation and cohesion can sharply be improved by means of broader e-inclusion policies. ICT may "provide innovative networks of cooperation, inclusion, democratic decision-making and mutuality", as well as "offer the potential to expand the notion of community by strengthening existing offline communities and establishing new forms of virtual communities of interest, of attachment and of place in cyberspace"[11].

Social exclusion is a complex and multidimensional concept, as we stressed before. It certainly contains an economic component, with the associated deprivation of livelihood assets by individuals, families and social groups, but it also implies aspects of 'quality of life' and the opportunities generated by it: health, involvement in community life, in cultural and political life. This disengagement is a lack in the lives of those who are directly affected, but also represents a lack for society as a whole. Thus, digital inclusion policies are enriched if employed alongside structural policies to combat social exclusion. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to reduce the new forms of literacy required by the knowledge society to [generalised] access to media and, in particular, to digital media. As mentioned in a recent report on the French experience of the digital divide [12], "maybe the main divide to overcome is the distance between possession and usage". (…)"[E]ven if Internet access is ensured, people may still not use it to the desired extent and with the desired results, as engagement is dependent not only on economic and practical parameters but also on socio-psychological ones" (Selwyn 2004; p. 349). This is what has been called a "second-level of digital divide"[13], which is no longer predominantly focused on access (at least in the developed countries) but also on diversity, frequency, intensity and meaningfulness of usage.

Research on and assessment of digital inclusion policies and projects with socially disadvantaged groups - immigrants, the unemployed, the elderly, ethnic minorities, disabled people, poor communities - are still insufficient. However, it is possible on the basis of analysis of some cases in different countries[14] to draw some provisional conclusions.

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[8] Sorj, B. (2008). Information Societies and Digital Divides. Milano: Polimetrica, p. 62

[9] Eurostat News Release 4/2014 : http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-08012014-BP/EN/3-08012014-BP-EN.PDF

[10] Figure in 2009 : 23.1.

[11] Wilmott, 1986, quoted in Tatsou et al. 2011. http://www.wiserd.ac.uk/files/9013/6560/3628/CC-ICT-LiteratureReviewWeb.pdf

[12] Auverlot, D. et al.(2011), Le fossé numérique en France. Rapport du Gouvernement au Parlement. Centre d'Analyse Stratégique. Rapports et Documents, nº 34.

[13] Hargittai, E. & Walejko, G. (2008). 'The Participation Divide: Content Creation and Sharing In the Digital Age. Information, Communication & Society, 11:2, pp. 239-256. : http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13691180801946150

[14] The information contained in the next paragraphs of this topic comes from a survey conducted in 2013 under the project EMEDUS - European Media Literacy Education Study (www.eumedus.com), conducted by the Communication and Society Research Centre, University of Minho, Portugal, coordinated by Prof. J.M. Perez-Tornero, from the Autonomous University of Barcelona and funded by the European Commission - EACEA.

3. Overcoming the digital divide: case studies from Europe

The situation is quite uneven between countries, depending on factors as diverse as the dynamics of civil society, the degree of socio-economic and cultural development, the attitude towards the role of technologies, etc. Significant actions have been developed for disadvantaged groups, in order to provide access to and support the use of new technologies. However, it seems that the road ahead is still long and challenging.

In some countries apparently there are few or almost no significant initiatives targeting socially disadvantaged groups, because either they are not public policy priority or because there are (public or private) funding difficulties, particularly in the context of the crisis. Indeed, in recent years, some programmes have been suspended due to lack of funding. But there are some good practices. We will briefly mention some of them:

i.   In Slovakia, the Roma Press Agency was established in 2002, with the aim to train young Roma in work with media and to provide information on Roma to the general public. The main focus shifted in 2006 towards producing audio-visual programmes about Roma, broadcast by public service television and radio, and the agency changed its name to Roma Media Centre (MECEM).

ii.   *@Learn Active Ageing* is a European project funded by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union. Six organisations from five countries (Bulgaria, Italy, Spain, Germany and Ireland) are building an on-line learning community to promote active ageing. The aim is "to develop online resources to help both older (60+) and younger (16 - 35 year olds) to learn more about what positive steps can be taken to support active ageing, including the use of social networks to help sustain an active social life as we get older".

iii.   Programa Escolhas (Choices Programme) was created in 2001 by the Portuguese government, as a Programme for the prevention of crime and fostering youth Insertion in the peripheries of the main urban centres. In the following years and particularly after 2009, it has been more decentralized and local-oriented and included new dimensions such as civic participation and digital inclusion. It was overhauled in 2012, to be implemented in 2013-2015, involving a network of 107 digital inclusion centres around the country.

iv.   *World Circle* is a programme that consists of digital storytelling workshops for young immigrants, fostered by Media Education Centre METKA[15], where young immigrants write, describe, draw and record their own digital stories. Metka is a national association pedagogically oriented and specialized in media education. It promotes media literacy for children and young people in relation to cinema and other types of moving image. It aims to raise the children's own culture through media production.

v.   *Media4ME* focused on multicultural settings in six different European countries. It implements approaches and strategies, such as a young reporters' training; a cultural online magazine produced by young people; a local participatory Web TV ; the editing of a supplement for a free newspaper[16]; an international photo contest organization, local radio series of programmes, etc….

4. Elements for future policy orientations /guidelines

In general terms, we can say that there is a limited connection between activities oriented to promote and support computer and digital literacy, on the one hand, and media literacy education, on the other. With few exceptions, ICT is approached from the instrumental and functional point of view, even if, in the same context, there are media education-oriented programmes.

Among the guidelines and measures that could be considered for the future, it is suggested:

i.   Networking in order to facilitate the connection between initiatives and to fight isolation;

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[15] See : http://mediametka.fi/
[16] See: www.media4us.eu/artikel/2012/11/20/media4us_reaches_5_million_european_readers/

ii. Enriching / enlarging the scope of the initiatives, going beyond hardware and software, to include needs and projects of the daily life of people and the problems of local communities;

iii. Valuing the role of media and information literacy in lifelong education, particularly in specific contexts and with specific groups (elderly, professional training, community development)

iv. Paying increasing attention to teacher training and the training of trainers and socio-cultural animators;

v. Considering the role of local community facilities such as libraries, multimedia and resource centres, etc.;

vi. Exploring new areas where digital platforms and information are relevant, such as health promotion and disease prevention; healthy nutrition along life; job improvement and creation; autonomy and quality of life for the elderly, NGOs and volunteering activities; human rights and civic / political movements etc.;

vii. Improving and expanding research on media literacy education that articulates different kinds of skills - creative, social, critical and technical - and on possible convergences between different literacy traditions (media, information, visual, digital, Internet ...);

viii. Developing tools for assessing knowledge, skills and attitudes of citizens towards information and the media, taking into account the semiotic, communicative, technical and ethical dimensions;

ix. Engaging political and civic debate on Internet and global communication's big issues that affect human rights and freedom of expression and information, such as abusive control of the Internet, inequalities of access to the best flow of information ('net neutrality');

x. Consider consultation of individuals, groups and communities when defining and implementing the digital inclusion initiatives that are addressed to them. In this way, they are not only empowered through information and media literacy programmes, but also by participating in the definition of those programmes and policies.