

# Media Literacy Policy in European Union

## A New Horizon

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The **recognition of media literacy** in the *European Audiovisual Services Directive* (Art. 37) and the consequent development of the media literacy indicators –applied to all people, even youths and children – is a result of a long process in which organizations such as UNESCO<sup>1</sup> and the European Commission (EC) have played an important role, and not only in the development of the public dimension of media literacy but also in the acceptance of the importance of media education in the political agenda.

This article briefly describes the long road that has been needed for Media Literacy to be addressed within the European Union's Public Policy. To do this we draw on the documents by the European Union and UNESCO related to Media Literacy, Media Education and, recently, Media and Information Literacy. These play a key role in understanding the process.

The journey we show might seem to constitute a systematic continuity with an indisputable internal consistency. But this is simply a result of the appearance perspective adopted in this article. Actually, if we could examine the academic and intellectual movement policies and practices that have surrounded media literacy in Europe (Potter, J. W.:2004; Rivoltella, P. C.: 2005; Buckingham, D.: 2007; Marsh, J. and others: 2005; Fedorov, A. 2007; Celot P. y Pérez Tornero J. M.: 2008; Pérez Tornero, J. M.: 2008; Bazalguette,C.: 2008) it is most likely that we would see all the uncertainties, interrupted progress, setbacks and insecurities typical of a movement that has taken a long time to recognize itself and to be recognized.

Still, the point of view chosen – the continuity of European policy and European legislation in this field – has the virtue of providing a suitable framework for the development of specific policies and action. It is also useful to try to imagine the future development of Media and Information Literacy policy in Europe.

The UNESCO International Congress on Media Education, which took place in Germany in 1982, issued the **Grünwald Declaration on Media Education**<sup>2</sup>,

which was ratified by the 19 participating countries and became the benchmark for why media education should be a central topic in the public debate. The *Grünwald Declaration* was probably the first international document to claim the need for educational and political systems to promote a critical understanding and awareness by citizens regarding media.

The rapid technological development in the late 90s caused the congress organized by UNESCO in Vienna, titled *Educating for the media and the digital age*<sup>3</sup>, seventeen years after the *Grünwald Declaration*, to establish: “Media Education is 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...”. In 2002, UNESCO held the *Youth Media Education Seminar in Seville*<sup>4</sup>, which reaffirmed the creative and critical component of media literacy, highlighting that media education should be included in both formal and informal education in order to promote both an individual and a community level.

The European Parliament (EP) and European Commission (EC) have also played an important active role in the progress of media literacy in Europe, developing this concept to include the protection and promotion of human rights, mainly the protection of minors.

The permanent **Safer Internet Programme**<sup>5</sup> was created in 1999 to empower parents, teachers and children with Internet safety tools. However, it also covers other media. Its objectives include “fighting illegal and harmful content and conduct online”, especially those aimed at youngsters. At the Lisbon European Council<sup>6</sup> (March 2000), the European Union (EU) acknowledged that “the E. U. is confronted with a quantum leap stemming from globalisation and the new knowledge-driven economy”. Later, the multi-annual eLearning Programme 2004-2006<sup>7</sup> established as one of its priorities “to counteract the digital divide”. Its action plan sets out the following steps: “a) Understanding digital literacy; b) Identification and dissemination of good practices”.

Additionally, from 2000 to 2008 the EC launched several initiatives to promote digital literacy among the EU Member States and established a set of studies and indicators to measure their progress. During this period, a high-level expert group advised the development of these actions. Some studies were carried out and, gradually, the outcomes were reflected in a change to the Commission’s strategy from “promoting digital literacy”<sup>8</sup>. At this moment the important were not merely to promote access to digital tools but the most important were foster public policies on media literacy with the support of all actors in the field<sup>9</sup>.

## Promoting Digital Literacy

The EC requested the implementation of a new course of action: promoting digital literacy within the *eLearning Programme*. In order to do this, the Commission ordered a study “to identify and to analyse a limited number of successful and innovative experiences for promoting digital and media literacy and identifying strengths and weaknesses...”. The resulting report ***Promoting digital literacy***, carried out by the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), focuses on two aspects: the identification and analysis of a limited number of successful and innovative experiences that have helped promote digital and media literacy, and the strengths and weaknesses of these experiences; and, the drawing up of recommendations for the implementation of the *Promoting digital literacy course of action*.

After identifying a) unaddressed groups and gaps in practice and b) methodology and promotion of digital literacy, and in order to implement these strategies for development, the study recommends adapting to the different learning contexts and needs of the different publics, with a view to reducing the digital divide that exists in Europe. This puts us before a new concept of media literacy whose characteristics are broken down into a literacy that is **not only digital or technical**, but also **cultural, comprehensive and complex, linked to the citizens, and humanistic**<sup>10</sup>.

## Digital Literacy High-Level Experts Group

As part of the *2010 e-Inclusion initiative*<sup>11</sup>, the EC set up a Digital Literacy High-Level Experts Group to provide expertise and guidance on digital literacy policies in preparation of the Commission Communication on *e-Inclusion*. The experts – researchers, academics and representatives of stakeholders and industry – were invited to comment on the findings of the digital literacy review the Commission had conducted as part of its commitments from the *Riga Declaration* of 2006<sup>12</sup>:

The experts offered some recommendations for digital literacy policies:

- **Put into context:** Embed initiatives in local socio-economic contexts.
- **Support awareness campaigns** (particularly for disadvantaged groups).
- **Use formal and informal learning** (and platforms); lean on intermediaries for motivation, and enable groups and individuals to generate content.
- **Support the development of content** and services for marginalized users.
- Focus on the development of **users' critical, cultural and creative skills**.
- Develop and use **evaluation and impact assessment** frameworks.

- Propose strategies that will encourage **synergies and partnerships amongst public authorities, civic society and industry**; engage the private sector. (VARIS, 2009)<sup>13</sup>

During the *e-inclusion Ministerial Conference & Expo* (Vienna, 2008), Directorate General Information Society and Media presented the outcome of the digital literacy review carried out by the EC, as well as the aforementioned recommendations. The main conclusions were that “Digital literacy remains a major challenge and more efforts need to be dedicated to supporting disadvantaged groups, in particular those over 55 (and) secondary digital divides may be emerging in relation to quality of use and more needs to be done to increase the levels of confidence and trust in online transactions and the use of ICT for lifelong learning for all.”<sup>14</sup>

At the legislative level, in 2006 the Council of Europe also developed the *Recommendation on Empowering Children in the New Information and Communications Environment*<sup>15</sup>, adopted by the Committee of Ministers at the 974th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies. The recommendation calls on EU Member States to familiarize children with the new ICT environment<sup>16</sup>. A new *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning*<sup>17</sup> identified the abilities that should be developed: **digital competence** (enables the critical use of technology), **social and civic competence** (gives individuals the tools to play an active and democratic role in society), **critical awareness** and **creative competence** (enables individuals to assess the creative expression of ideas and emotions spread by the media). The same year, the European Parliament issued the *Recommendation 2006/952/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 December 2006 on the protection of minors and human dignity*<sup>18</sup>, emphasizing **the need for teacher training in the matter of media literacy**, as well as **the inclusion of media literacy in the curriculum** in order to protect children and at the same time promote responsible attitudes by all users.

In parallel, the EC set up the EU Media Literacy Expert Group<sup>19</sup>, including experts with different backgrounds reflecting both the role of media industry in media literacy and academic research to analyse and define media literacy objectives and trends in order to highlight and promote best practices at the European level and propose actions to take to promote media literacy. The group meets three times a year, and the first meeting was held on 30 March 2006.

Based on the findings of the Media Literacy Experts Group the EC launched a Public Consultation<sup>20</sup>, a questionnaire seeking the public’s views on media literacy in relation to digital technologies, and information about initiatives in commercial communications as well as cinema and the online world.

The replies to this questionnaire showed that spreading regional and national good practices in media literacy is the correct way to speed up progress in this

field. “It also emerged that criteria or standards for assessing media literacy are lacking and that good practices are not available for all aspects of media literacy. Accordingly, the Commission sees an urgent need for larger-scale, **longer-term research** into developing both new assessment criteria and new good practices.”<sup>21</sup>

In the second half of 2007, the study titled *Current trends and approaches to media literacy in Europe*<sup>22</sup> was commissioned by and carried out for the EC by the UAB. The study maps current practices in implementing media literacy in Europe, confirms the results of the aforementioned consultation, and recommends measures to be implemented in Europe to increase the level of media literacy. It also outlines the possible economic and social impact of an EU intervention in this field.

The trends identified by this study are: a general **media convergence**; a growing **concern for the protection of users, mainly children**; the **critical awareness of citizens**; the **growing presence of media literacy in curricula**; a more attentive and responsive media industry; the **active participation of civil associations**; as well as the participation of European institutions and the emergence of regulatory authorities.

As regards the difficulties media literacy faces, the study mentions the **lack of a shared vision of goals, concepts, methods, research and assessments**; the **cultural barriers that prevent innovations** in some regions; and the **lack of coordination among the parties** involved, on both a national and a European level. In response, the study proposes recommendations covering all these areas: **promoting the technology-innovation relationship**; **stimulating creativity** through media literacy; **public campaigns to encourage awareness**; **boosting research** on media literacy; setting up **regulatory authorities** able to promote media literacy; developing **quality standards and indicators** in relation to media use and content that promote media literacy awareness; and establishing **public policies that ensure that all citizens participate in the benefits and responsibilities** of the Information Society.

Another significant European initiative is the *MEDIA Programme 2007*<sup>23</sup>, which stresses the importance of media literacy and particularly film education initiatives, especially those organized by festivals (in cooperation with schools) for young people.

On December 20, 2007, the EC presented Parliament with the Communication *A European approach to media literacy in the digital environment*<sup>24</sup>, which builds on the results of the work of the Media Literacy Expert Group on the findings of the public consultation, and on the experience of the Commission’s previous and current media literacy-related initiatives. This Communication established the most precise concept of media literacy concerning the main aspects the EC and Member States should cover in regard to media literacy.

A year later on December 16, 2008, the European Parliament adopted - by 583 to 23 votes with 4 abstentions - the resolution<sup>25</sup> on the report *Media literacy in a digital world*<sup>26</sup>, which had been tabled (November 24) for consideration in plenary by Christa Prets on behalf of the Committee on Culture and Education, demanding that EU Member States pay systematic attention to the development of media literacy:

The European Parliament welcomed the Commission's communication COM (2007)0833 on the same issue. However, it believes that "there is room for improvement to the extent that the European approach intended to foster media literacy needs to be more clear cut, especially as regards the inclusion of traditional media and recognition of the importance of media education" and urges the EC to establish a systematic policy and request the regulatory authorities for audiovisual and electronic communication to cooperate for improving of media literacy. This Communication also recognizes the need to develop codes of conduct, and calls on the Commission to develop **media literacy indicators** with a view to fostering media literacy in the EU; it also urges it to expand its policies to promote media literacy, working with local, regional and national authorities, and to intensify cooperation with UNESCO and the Council of Europe.

Finally, the Parliament urged the EC to develop an **action plan on media literacy** and organize a meeting with the committee on Audio-Visual Media Service to facilitate information exchange and cooperation on a regular basis.

### **European Audiovisual Media Services Directive**

These efforts to make digital and media literacy a key element of the development of the Information Society in Europe concluded in the enactment of the *European Audiovisual Media Services Directive* (AVMSD),<sup>27</sup> incorporated into legislation in December 2009 in all Member States of the EU, introducing the need to promote media literacy for the first time in regulations concerning the media system.

The AVMSD will become one of the main instruments of the policy on media in Europe due to Article 37, which institutionalizes media literacy as one of the measures to be boosted. The Directive thus makes media literacy a vital element of European audiovisual regulation and provides a definition of media literacy that is not as detailed as previous definitions but that resumes the key elements that: "It includes the skills, knowledge and understanding that allow consumers to use the media effectively and safely".

However, the Directive has shown to be innovative, stressing in its text **the public's creative and critical abilities with regard to the media**, focusing on **informed choice** and the use of **new technological opportunities**. It highlights that the media-literate person is not a passive consumer of programmes

but rather someone who selects what he/she wishes to consume by means of an informed choice. The Directive also stresses the **protective role of media literacy**.

In addition, the AVMSD urges Member States to “promote the development of media literacy in all sectors of society and monitor its progress closely”, thus strengthening the idea that media literacy is the responsibility not only of formal education but also of the media industry, professionals, regulatory authorities and families, among others. Finally, the Directive stresses the creative and critical capacities of citizens before the media. Among other things, it highlights:

- The change of focus on media literacy **from protection to promotion**, with the aim of empowering and involving citizens;
- The change of perspective **from the mass media to new technologies and digital media**;
- The **increasing awareness of citizens**, about the role that play the media industry in our society;
- The increased **presence of media literacy in the teaching curriculum**; and
- The participation and promotion of **media literacy in the agenda of Independent Authority that regulates the media sector**.

In any case, the central point of this Directive is the proposal to measure media literacy competences using new media literacy indicators. To meet this objective, the EC commissioned a study to develop a European consortium led by EAVI: the *Study on Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels*. José Manuel Pérez Tornero was the scientific director of this study. After this study, EAVI and Danish Technological Institute tried to test and to refine these indicators but with a not complete success<sup>28</sup>

The first study proposes a **new framework** in order to find criteria for the assessment of media literacy levels. The starting point of the framework is the concept of media literacy developed by international organizations like UNESCO and the EU, with emphasis on the themes that emerged from the latest communications and recommendations of the EC (*Communication on Media Literacy, EC1, Report on Media Literacy in a Digital World*). Thus, the study accepts the definition adopted by the Commission for Media Literacy: “Media Literacy may be defined as the ability to access, analyse and evaluate the power of images, sounds and messages which we are now being confronted with on a daily basis and are an important part of our contemporary culture, as well as to communicate competently in media available on a personal basis. Media Literacy relates to all media, including television and film, radio and recorded music, print media, the Internet and other new digital communication technologies.”

## Conceptual Map

Using the EC definition as a basis, the study integrates different concepts of media literacy in a systemic way to explicitly highlight the skills for media literacy that should be acquired and measured, where possible, at both individual and country levels.

Media literacy is a complex phenomenon that is observable but mainly not directly quantifiable. It is for this reason that a conceptual map has been compiled and synthesized. The criteria of individual skills and key environmental factors that enable a clearer understanding of media literacy have been further elaborated in this conceptual map.

The media literacy criteria presented here have been converted into social indicators to provide a multi-layered instrument, with different indicators pulled together to form an overall picture and matrix of a population's media literacy.

The study distinguishes between two fundamental dimensions:

- **Individual competences**

A personal, individual ability to exercise certain skills (access, use, analyse, understanding and creativity). These skills are found within a broader set of abilities that allow for increasing levels of awareness about media context; the capacity for critical analysis; a creative, problem-solving capacity; and the ability to create and communicate content while participating in public sphere.

- **Environmental factors**

These are a set of contextual factors that affect individuals and relate to media education, media policy, cultural environment, citizens' rights, the roles the media industry and civil society play, etc.

The conceptual map enables the further elaboration of media literacy criteria as well as the key environmental factors that hamper or facilitate the development of media literacy in the EU countries.

**Table 1.** Framework: Basic Criteria for Assessing Media Literacy Levels

Dimensions	Criteria	Objectives
<b>Individual Competences</b>	• Use skills (technical) • Critical Understand, competences • Communicative Abilities	• To increase awareness about how media messages influence perceptions, popular culture and personal choices; • To provide the skill for critical analysis;
	MEDIA AVAILABILITY Supply of media	• To provide the creative skill to solve problems; • To develop the capacity of production; • To consolidate communicative rights; • To develop intercultural dialogue; • To consolidate democracy, and • To develop active and participatory citizenship. (Amongst others)
<b>Environmental Factors</b>	MEDIA LITERACY CONTEXT Media Education as a process to develop media literacy capacities Media literacy policies and regulatory authorities Media industry role and activity in relation to media literacy Civil society role and activity in relation to media literacy	

## Individual Competencies and Environmental Factors

Thus, the study has delineated two elements that contribute to media literacy: one based on an individual's abilities, and the other on contextual and environmental factors. It then breaks these down further into four competencies, measured by 'indicators': on the one hand a) **Use**, b) **Critical Understanding** and c) **Communicative Abilities**; and on the other, the **Key Environmental Factors** that help or hinder them. Within this there is a further set of variables relating to the level of development of these skills, and this in turn is applied via a statistically validated instrument to assess a Member State's media literacy levels.

The environmental factors include a) the **economic wealth of a country**, b) the **affluence of its citizens**, c) the **legislative and regulatory structures** that support the digital media and their advancement and, crucially, d) the **governmental support** afforded to them in terms of educational policy, subsidies, etc. Media literacy does not exist in a bubble, but is instead affected by a variety of dynamic factors and facilitates interdependent skills and competences to allow individuals the fullest participation in the new digital world.

Individual competences are understood as any individual skill – the capacity to operate – developed along the three dimensions of doing: a) operative ability (practical use), b) knowing critically (or cognitive competence), and c) the objective that the skill set should meet: in this case, communication, social relationships, participation (in the public sphere) and creation.

Within the **individual skills** relating to media literacy, the following components **have been identified**:

- **Use Skills (Technical):** Skills related to media use. The Use component is centred on the relationship between the individual and the media (as a platform); it is in this sense that the study refers to it as a technical dimension. These are the instrumental and operative abilities required to access and effectively use media communication tools. They specifically refer to a set of devices and tools available in a certain context or environment: access and use.
- **Critical Understanding Competences:** Aspects related to the critical comprehension and evaluation of content and media (Potter, J.:2004; Stolbnikova, E.: 2006). The Understanding component is centred on the relationship between individual and content (information – attribute of the message; or comprehension – attribute of the individual), that is, a cognitive dimension.
- **Communicative Abilities:** Communicative and participative abilities are partly related to technical and cognitive abilities. They may be appropriate in different fields, such as social relations, creation and production of content and civic and social participation, which involve personal responsibility. These abilities allow for processes ranging from simple contact to the creation of complex cooperation and collaboration strategies that use media tools as their base. The main fields of application of both the communicative and participative skills are the following:
  - *Social relations:* These relate to the capacity of being in contact with others, cooperating with them and establishing different kinds of networks and communities.
  - *Citizen participation:* These refer to citizen participation in public life (engagement in e-government institutions as well as the civic field).
  - *Content creation:* These are related to the individual and collective capacity to create new media content and produce media text. The abilities used to create and produce allow the implementation and manifestation of a meaning or understanding of information through media messages and texts.

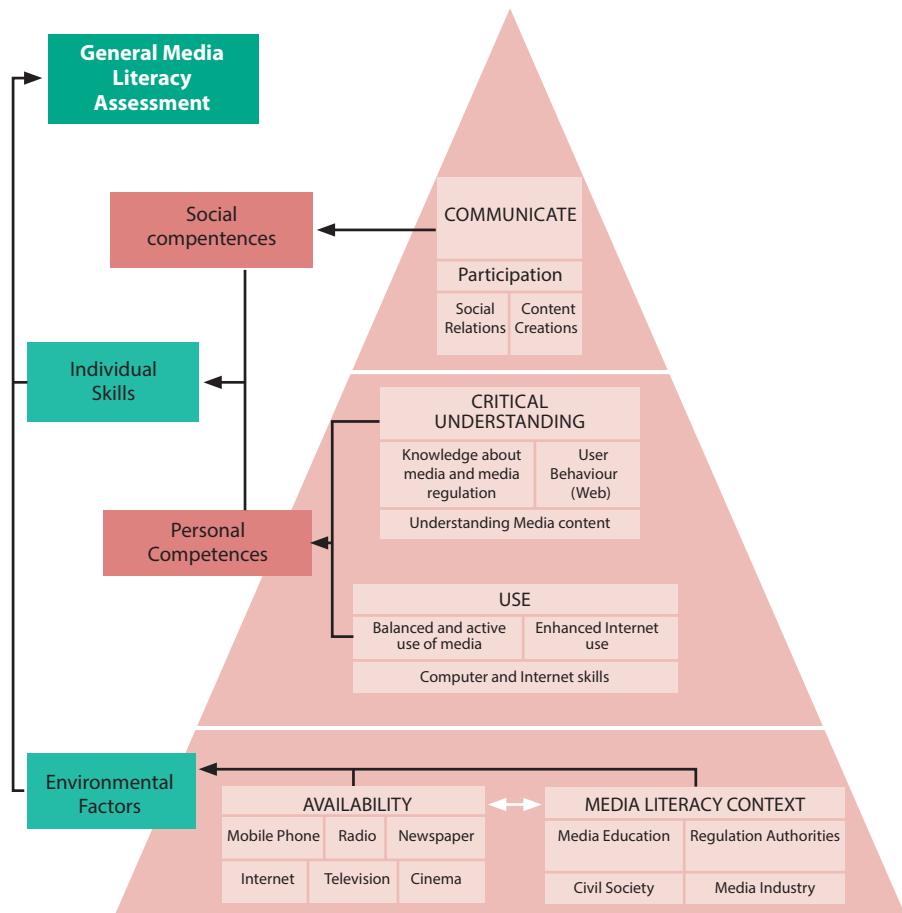
The environmental factors hamper or facilitate the establishment of media literacy in a country, rather than the individual skills required for media literacy. This paper identifies two main environmental factors:

- **Media availability:** Its supply and accessibility in a given context. Here, the types of media selected are Mobile phone, Internet, Television, Radio, News-paper and Cinema.
- **Media literacy context:** The actions carried out in a systematic way by social actors and institutions. This category contains Media Education, in both general education and lifelong learning; Media Literacy policy related to legal obligations, regulations, actions, etc.; Media Industry actions related to media literacy; Campaigns, User's Participation Organizations, etc; and Civic Society Actions related to media literacy such as associations, communities, initiatives, etc.

It may be expected that, if these environmental factors are favourable and are considered important in terms of policy, media literacy levels will be higher. This relationship can be demonstrated through a statistical and general method. This does not exclude the possibility that, in certain environments largely hostile to the development of media literacy or without the economic capacity to foster access to and availability of media systems, exceptional cases of individual development may be found. However, these are most likely an exception and not the rule.

## Framework

Following the identification of the essential components of media literacy, it is possible to collate this data in order to construct a conceptual framework. It takes the form of a pyramid in order to represent the various criteria of media literacy and the ways they are reliant on each other; it is stating the obvious to say that the higher steps cannot exist without the lower ones. The base of the pyramid illustrates the pre-conditions for individual competence: Media Availability, the availability of media technology or services; and Media Literacy Context, the activities and initiatives of institutions and organizations for fostering media literacy capacities. Without these two criteria, media literacy development is either precluded or unsupported. They share a level because, although they are autonomous components, they are interrelated to a degree: media literacy policy is carried out in the context of availability, and certain aspects of availability are conditioned or influenced by context.

**Figure 1.** Structure of the Media Literacy Assessment Criteria

The individual competences are illustrated on the second level of the pyramid, which begins with Use, a secondary prerequisite for media literacy development. Use is the intersection between availability and operational skills (practical skills with a low degree of self-conscious awareness).

Then follows Critical Understanding, which is the knowledge, behaviour and understanding of media context and content, and how it manifests itself in behaviour. This includes all the cognitive processes that influence the user's practices (effectiveness of actions, degree of freedom or restriction, regulation and norms, etc.). Use requires knowledge; this factor requires meta-knowledge (knowledge about knowledge). This allows the user to evaluate aspects of the media by comparing different types and sources of information, arriving at conclusions regarding their veracity and appropriateness, and making informed choices.

The apex of the pyramid represents Communicative Abilities, which are the manifestation of media literacy levels, the quality of which rests on the success or failure of the lower levels. These are skills that manifest themselves in communication and participation with social groups via the media, and content creation. This is the highest degree of media literacy.

Media literacy is the result of dynamic processes between the base (Availability and Context) and the apex (Communicative Abilities), and the route from base to apex is individual media competence (Media Use and Critical Understanding).

## A Look at the Assessment Indicators

### Individual Competences

Any individual skill or operation is developed along three criteria: doing (operative ability and practical use); knowing critically (or Critical Understanding); and its relation to the objective that the skill or operation should meet. In this case it should enable creation, communication, social relationships and participation in the public sphere (Graph 2).

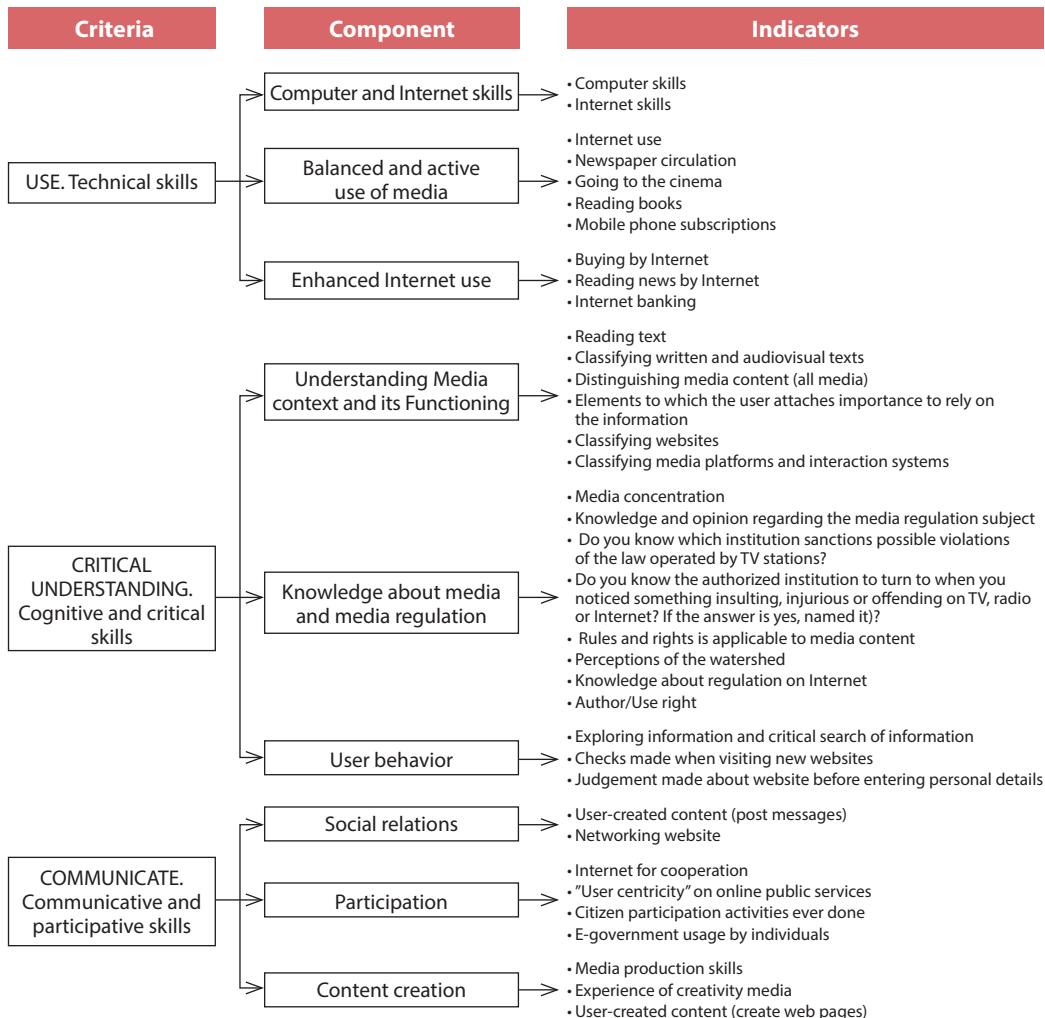
**Use; Technical skills:** These are the operative abilities required to access and effectively use media communication tools. They specifically refer to devices and tools available in a certain context or environment. The Use criteria rely on the individual's ability to use media platforms.

In order to further define these concepts of the use criteria we have proposed the following items: Understanding simple technical functions; Decoding interfaces; Understanding complex technical functions; Adapting and personalizing interfaces; Having the ability to search and choose technical information, devices and configurations; Having the ability to convert informal procedural knowledge into deductive, formal and declarative knowledge (tutorials, guides, etc.); Having critical awareness of technical issues.

In relation to these criteria, the following components may be distinguished:

- **Computer and Internet Skills:** Digital media are increasingly the primary source of media for many individuals. The ubiquity of computers and Internet use make the skills associated with their use reliable indicators of the use of media.
- **Balanced and Active Use of Media:** The use of media by the individual in everyday life, with reference to the function and type of media (newspapers, cinema, books, mobile telephones, etc.), is a manifestation of use and therefore a reliable indicator of this component.
- **Enhanced Internet Use:** Advanced use of the Internet demonstrates a sophisticated level of media use. Activities such as Internet banking, e-government and buying on the Internet are reliable indicators of the individual's use of the media.

**Figure 2.** Dimension 1. Individual Skills



### Critical Understanding

Critical Understanding is the most important aspect of the relationship between the individual and the media. How the individual interacts with the media is dictated by his/her critical understanding of both the content and its context. In order to understand and utilize content, the user decodes it to make sense of its message. These processes are cognitive insofar as they rely on or correspond with cognitive or knowledge-related operations.

The following three components of **Critical Understanding** are developed:

- **Understanding Media Content and Function:** This component indicates the ability to read and make sense of media messages, be they audiovisual or text, interactive or passive. It implies a sequential cognitive process by which the individual recognizes a code (or codes) in the text, to classify it and establish its global meaning in the context of previously acquired information. In so doing, the user classifies the information to make correct and appropriate use of it, and to appropriately respond to it. Therefore, this criterion includes the following general abilities: coding and decoding; critically evaluating, comparing and contrasting information and media text; exploring and searching information actively; summarizing; synthesizing; and remixing and recycling media content.
- **Knowledge of Media and Media Regulation:** This ability allows the user to evaluate the media system and its function in relation to the user's aims and objectives. It includes knowledge of the conventions, rules and norms that impact on the media; the laws and regulatory authorities; the stakeholders; etc. In detail, these skills include: critically evaluating opportunity and restriction, pluralism conditions, regulations, laws, rules and rights of media production; and appreciating the conceptual frameworks provided by media studies.
- **User Behaviour (Internet):** The Critical Understanding of media messages consequently affects, and is evidenced by, user behaviour. The skills are based in semiotic and linguistic capabilities, and allow the user to explore, obtain and use information, to contextualize, evaluate and analyse it, and to be aware of its validity and utility in relation to set objectives. In detail, these skills include the ability to develop a Critical Understanding relating to strategies of information use.

### Communicative and Participative Skills

This factor implies the capacity of individuals to make and maintain contact with others via the media. This includes basic communication, such as using e-government services and participating in online groups in collaborative work towards a common objective. This study subdivides Communicative Abilities into different components:

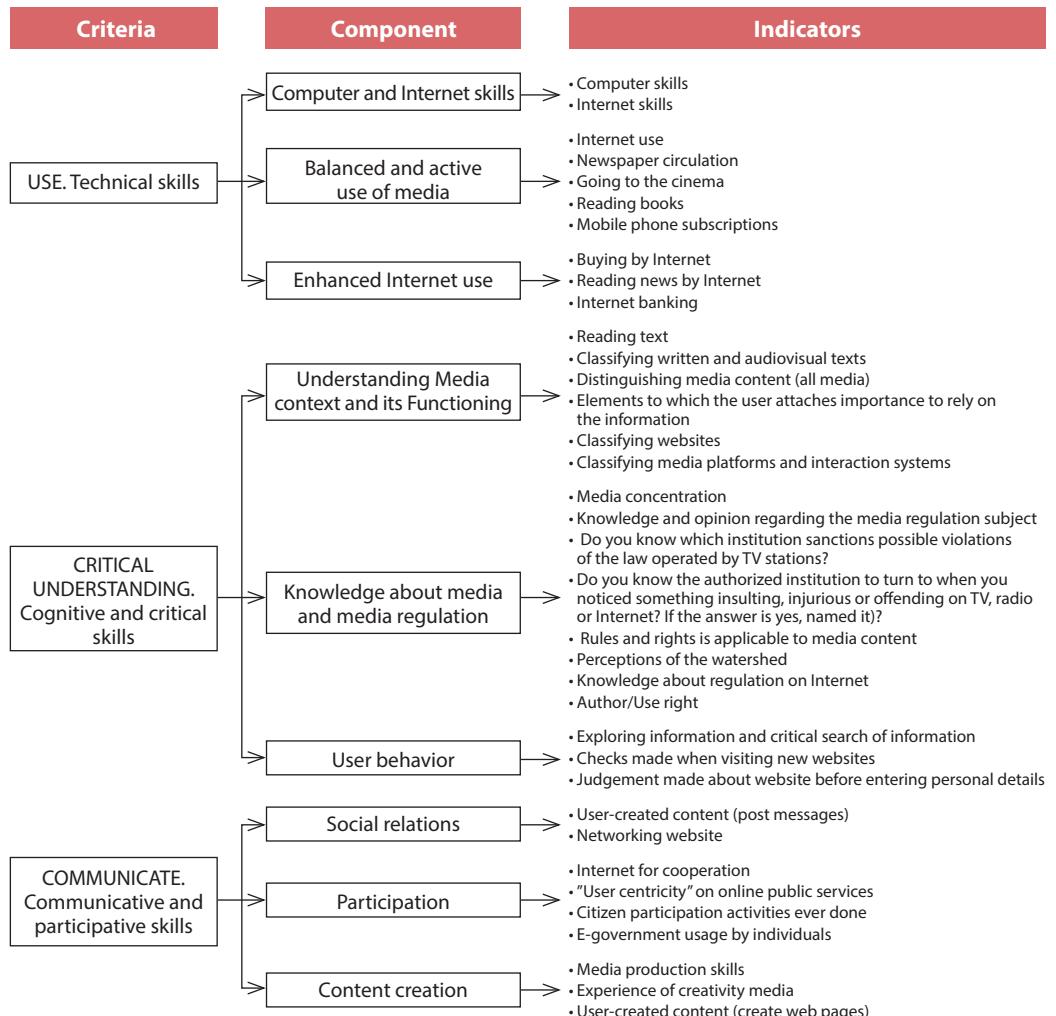
- **Social Relations:** Socializing via the media is a novel concept; MySpace, which was among the first of the social networking sites to enter the public consciousness, was founded in 2003. Facebook (2004), Bebo (2005) and Twitter (2006) have also proved immensely popular, and have provided individuals with the opportunity to present them remotely and to have relationships and socially active lives online. These social lives demonstrate the

capacity of a user to contact other individuals, to work in cooperation with them and to establish different networks and communities. This necessarily includes communicative skills: receiving and producing messages, maintaining contact, and presenting one's identity via profiles and platforms.

- **Participation in the Public Sphere:** Participation in public life via new media falls into one of two categories: the use of e-government (government services provided on the Internet, such as library services or passport applications, which are simple activities, and the performance of traditional tasks by way of new technology); or participation in public life in the political sense (using the media to engage in and communicate with governments and other individuals with the aim of shaping policy). Both these activities refer to civic participation in public life, which can take forms ranging from simple relationships between individuals and government institutions to more complex and sophisticated cooperative actions, such as the formation of or membership in political parties or the organization of protest groups.
- **Content Creation Abilities:** Creative abilities manifest themselves mainly on the Internet. They act not only as a tool by which information in the strictest sense (for example, the population of Belgium) can be shared, but also one by which facets of a user's identity can be transmitted by way of blogs, social networking sites or websites. The creation may be as simple as writing an email or as sophisticated as creating an online identity, and can also be technically complex (for example, creating a video game). These abilities are related to the individual capacity to create new content and produce original media messages, and are the manifestation of the user's ability to use, identify and understand information in media messages, and to respond appropriately to them. The capacity to create has different grades of complexity, ranging from the most basic grades of creation to more sophisticated and innovative ones.

## Environmental Factors

The media do not exist in a bubble, and media literacy very rarely develops in isolation from its environment. Even the basic availability of media and technical devices is affected by the attitudes of authorities, the existence of non-governmental bodies and their activities, and the initiatives of the media themselves in contributing to the creation of a media-literate audience. Environmental Factors contextualize the facilitation of media literacy development, and therefore include those factors that engender or endanger individual skills. The graph 3 illustrates the criteria for the Environmental Factors.

**Figure 3.** Dimension 2. Environmental Factors

## Media Availability

Availability refers to the type of media and tools an individual can access in any given context and how they are socially distributed. The assessment requires a description of the media availability situation in every country.

## Media Literacy Context

Environmental Factors provide insight into the media literacy environment. If the factors are favourable, and media literacy has an important and well regarded position in national policy, it follows that media literacy levels will be high. This relationship can be demonstrated statistically and does not exclude the possibility that, in environments largely hostile or neutral to the development of media literacy, or without the economic capacity to foster access, exceptional cases of individual development may be isolated. However, these are likely to be an exception rather than the norm.

The Environmental Factors are based on qualitative data which is then converted into quantitative data. The criteria are comprised of the following components:

- **Media Education:** Media literacy may be isolated as an explicit competence, or exist in its component parts in the curricula of general education and life-long learning. The prominence of media literacy in the national curriculum as well as resources for teacher training and didactic material has a profound effect on media literacy development. Special attention is paid to school curricula and the capacity of teaching staff, based on their training levels and the system within which they operate.
- **Regulation Authorities:** The level of engagement a public or authoritative body has with the media, the more literate that society can be said to be. The role of public bodies is fundamental to the identification of the general viewing public's media literacy, particularly if the body exists to protect viewers' interests, and promotes and protects users' rights to freedom of expression.
- **Media Industry** (role in media literacy): The media are first and foremost an industry, which demands a uniquely high level of interactivity and involvement from its subscribers. Although public service broadcasters have a remit to act for the common good rather than (purely) for profit margins and shareholder interests, they must still justify their existence by retaining audiences. Some parts of the industry invest heavily in the civic lives of their audiences and the press (also known as the Fourth Estate, after the executive, legislature and judiciary), provide an essential public service, and often conduct activities to encourage the media literacy development of their audiences. Industry initiatives, compounded by the work of non-governmental organizations, have had a significant impact on the literacy of their subscribers. It is for this reason that they occupy a position among the key indicators.

- **Civil Society** (role in media literacy): Civil society organizations and initiatives stimulate the environmental support that increases levels of media literacy. The number of associations, their activities and their quality illustrate the impact of civil society. They do not exist in isolation, however, and their ability to promote citizen participation rests on the cooperation of authoritative bodies and has links to media education.

## UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Indicators

Parallel to the development of European indicators, in 2010 UNESCO began working to create a global framework to establish media and information literacy indicators. The process began with a document written by Jesus Lau and Ralph Catt, *Towards Information Literacy Indicators*<sup>29</sup>. In this document, the authors try to “identify indicators of Information Literacy by the secondary analysis of existing international surveys to select data elements that are valid indicators of IL. This approach will avoid the need to construct a discrete survey. The primary source of such indicators could be the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS)’s Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP) survey” (p. 8). This represents the first formal step by UNESCO to create indicators of Information Literacy. Some months later (November, 2010), in Bangkok UNESCO convoked an expert group to take this further<sup>30</sup>. The issue is not to dispose of the Information Literacy Indicators but rather to create a new set of indicators related to Media and Information at the same time. Through this movement, UNESCO is trying to connect its own developments in the field with those of other institutions, namely the EU, that use the term Media instead of Information. But UNESCO goes further, proposing the composite concept of Media and Information Literacy, which includes computer, digital, information, library, media and news literacy. This takes its inspiration from the *UNESCO Curriculum for teachers on Media and Information Literacy*<sup>31</sup>.

This UNESCO study continues the work done by EU concerning indicators, and tries to adapt some of EC points of view to a global sphere.

The study proposes two indicator tiers: “Tier 1 variables/indicators to gauge availability of institutions that nurture and promote MIL in society, policy-makers, education and work; (ii) Tier 2 variables/indicators for MIL among teacher-trainers, teachers in training/service, and students (primary and secondary) within the educational system”. In this sense, the UNESCO indicators take into consideration not only the media literacy system in the country or region but also the skills of teachers and students. This means that they can be applied to people and professionals, which opens up for new ways to use the indicators not only in cases of countries’ policies, in which European indicators must be used, but also in cases more related to people and institutions.

## New Horizon

In summary, the European development of Media Literacy Indicators, alongside the UNESCO development, opens up a new horizon of opportunities in relation to opening new policies on the field and to building a new style of media education based on new competences, critical understanding, creativity and participation.

Concretely, at this moment we cannot consider that the indicators have raised the operational level; we are rather still in a context of theoretical and epistemological discussion. But it is very likely that a few years of empirical and applied research could give good results. In this case, the progress of Media and Information Literacy will be assured.

There is a long road that must be travelled in the next five years.

In this context, the proposal by the European Science Foundation to focus research on Media Studies on “new media, new literacies” represents an excellent piece of news in the field<sup>32</sup>.

From a global perspective, all the Media Literacy development we have described here assures a new paradigm of research.

But at the same time, it is true that it entails new necessities and requirements. We find ourselves in a time when we not only have to develop the major reference for policy; right now we also need to move from a general framework of policy into concrete actions on the ground. At the same time, we need to address not only the large number of statistics but also the specific indicators able to describe the situations, needs and competences of individuals and groups. Finally, it is necessary to convert large documents and statements of objectives into consistent and systematic practices to obtain concrete results.

The following points attempt to show these new necessities in relation to the indicators' development:

- It will be necessary to transfer the principles and system of indicators to micro-collective situations, institutions, etc., continuing the proposal by UNESCO.
- On the other hand, it will also be necessary to develop more qualitative and precise indicators with the objective that they can be applied to specific individuals and at different stages of development.
- Finally, and most importantly, these indicators must be improved to be applied in measuring the evolutionary development in relation to people and the media environment.

We therefore face a new horizon of research, whose perspectives can be very helpful:

- The study of people's cognitive abilities in relation to the media (and the conditions of sociality these open up for), analysing the move from purely technical and operational capabilities to higher capabilities that contain a certain degree of consciousness and critical sense.
- The analysis of how these indicators can help to evolve people's own psychological development and educational stimuli they receive.
- The specific analysis of the media conditions conducive to the development of personal autonomy: their environment and evolution.

This development of new indicators could contain the following practical objectives:

- Make available forms for the assessment and diagnosis of the impact and consequences of certain cultural settings, media, social and institutional development of skills and communicative behaviours.
- Establish and evaluate frameworks for the development of media education programmes with which to target specific audiences: both general, to increase basic media literacy; and "how-tos" for specific purposes, such as the dissolution of cultural barriers.
- Establish guidelines to promote the creation of content and media-sharing situations conducive to the development of children.

From a global perspective, the development by the European Union on the one hand and by UNESCO on the other has thus far allowed the establishment of broad outlines of an orderly and systematic policy in relation to media literacy.

Specifically, the recent development of indicators offers new possibilities and opportunities to implement informed policy and for permanent evaluation.

But it would be foolish not to recognize some of the barriers that still exist in this field. The two most important, from our point of view, are: the lack of coordination and relationship between the main actors of the system on the one hand, and the lack of operational practice indicators on the other.

Trying to overcome these two barriers will take a few more years in Europe. However, there have already been very important steps toward this and the outlook is optimistic. We only need some trends of scientific research, clarity of objectives, consistency of effort, rigor of processes and mutual trust in establishing an effective cooperation system.

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- 30 *Background Document of the Expert Meeting, Towards Media and Information Literacy Indicators*, prepared by Susan Moeller, Ammu Joseph, Jesús Lau, Toni Carbo (UNESCO, November, 2010). <http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/information-literacy/publications/towards-media-and-Information-literacy-indicators.pdf>
- 31 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001929/192971e.pdf>
- 32 European Science Foundation: *Forward Look on Media Studies*, 2013 (To be published).
- 33 We present a wide range of literature sources and reference documents that allow some quotes from the text, as well as expand some information.