

MIL Policies in Europe 2004-2014: The Uniqueness of a Policy and its Connection to UNESCO

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Since 2004 the European Union (EU) has been committed to the development of media literacy (ML). Examples of this fact can be seen in the Safer Internet, eLearning, MEDIA and Creative Europe programmes -within which different studies have been conducted- and the enactment of different public policies in the field, such as the AVMS (2010) as well as the European Commission (2007; 2009) and the European Parliament's (2006) recommendations on ML implementation. These processes have been influenced and guided by different international organizations such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe. In this regard, the EU has pursued one of the most active ML public policies in the world. The 2014 Paris MIL Forum -sponsored by the EC and UNESCO- was the occasion to visualize the EU's progress. This article describes and analyses, in an objective and systematic manner, what this development means to the creation of innovative ML public policies and educative processes. The result is an interpretative analysis that showcases the principal outcomes of the EU's programmes and actions in the field. In addition, this article examines how recommendations and conclusions from different EU-funded research projects on digital, media and audiovisual literacy have been executed, and describes the European approach in the hope of making it a reference for the development of ML in other regions of the world.

Keywords: media literacy, MIL public policies, eLearning

Introduction

Since 2004¹ the European Union has demonstrated its commitment to the development of media literacy which has produced public policies and private initiatives in the areas of legislation, education, the media itself and economics. In all cases the objective has been to acquire new skills related to the environ-

ment of new digital media. In few areas of the world has there been such movement in the field of ML, with respect to public and private policies, in such an integrated, systematic and organised fashion as has taken place in the European Union over the last ten years.

Why is this the case? What are the pillars of this organisation? What are the characteristics of this movement, its mechanisms and its *modus operandi*? These are the questions that this report will try to answer. In it we hope to describe the unique process carried out in the designing and execution of policies that have been developed since 2004, paying special attention to the concatenation of initiatives realized over the last decade.

A New Conceptual Framework

With the name of media literacy, the European Commission (EC) adopted a broad and inclusive term whose definition would include the necessary skills citizens would need to develop in order to use all media (digital or not) critically, understand its content and specific/technical languages and thus develop – through the acquisition of such competences – active and democratic citizenship.

It must be said that this framework is the same used by UNESCO, also recently created, which, however, adopted a slightly different name: media and information literacy (MIL). Within this framework different approaches are used and incorporated, approaches that have been circulating for some time now, both in academic circles and in public policies: “audio-visual literacy”, “digital”, “media”, “information”, “film”, “media education”.

UNESCO, as with the EC, understands the conceptual framework of MIL to be the processes of acquisition of skills and competencies that promote the understanding and use of traditional media of mass communication as well as new media; this is a direct result of the digital age (UNESCO, 2011a).

In accordance with the approach adopted by UNESCO, promoting the critical consumption of the media, and encouraging the development of an autonomous awareness of the media, leads to the improvement not only of the individual circumstances of its consumption, but also to the creation of a truly committed and active citizenry (Carlsson et al., 2008). All this demonstrates that the last ten years have witnessed a unique conceptual agreement between important international organisations such as the European Commission and UNESCO, albeit with slight variations.

From the Seville Seminar to the Consolidation of the Media Approach

The concurring positions between the EC and UNESCO had a foundation in shared landmarks. These shared conceptual frameworks were reached through a process of conceptual development and through shifting paradigms that should now be described, albeit briefly.

UNESCO was the first to initiate a series of historical milestones in Europe that constitute the development of what is now known as MIL. These milestones are the Grünwald Conference, 1982; the Toulouse Conference, 1990; the Vienna Conference, 1999; the Seville Seminar, 2002. In addition, its development involved a large number of European experts² as well as different governments within the EU.

But it was precisely after the Seville Seminar on Media Education in 2002³ (which concentrated on media-education) when the landmark policies of UNESCO and the European Commission began to intertwine. In fact, since then, the EC has become an active agent in the construction and introduction of the new paradigm of media literacy⁴.

Between 2004 and 2010 the European Commission displayed leadership in European policies and managed to inspire the entire European movement, which also had an influence internationally. It did so in a systematic way. Namely by:

- Trying to integrate and promote all existing initiatives on the subject.
- Combining studies and research with recommendations for action and even legislation.
- Introducing economic incentives and influencing political will through subsidies, contracts and political consensus.

All this has led to an unprecedented movement in Europe and has stimulated action both in the public and private sectors.

For their part, the European Commission has been working on digital literacy since the early 1990s. In 1991 it launched the MEDIA Programme aimed at promoting the European audiovisual industry. This soon led to the realisation that there was a need to develop new capabilities which also included audiences and the public in general. In a similar vein, other programmes developed by the EC emphasised the need to empower citizens. The program launched in 1999, Safer Internet, is an example of this. In fact, many of the concepts, policies and actions developed in these two programmes were gradually integrated into the new paradigm of media literacy.

The historical landmarks for the emergence of this paradigm can be summarised as follows:

1. The promotion of digital literacy included in the policy on the Information Society adopted at the European Council in Lisbon (2000).
2. The transition from digital to media that occurred after the Seminar of Seville (2002), which can be found in the study: Promoting Digital Literacy (Pérez Tornero, 2004); its consequences being the most significant milestone.
3. The consolidation of the “media approach,” which is based on the study commissioned by the EC in the *Study on the current trends and approaches on Media Literacy in Europe* (Pérez Tornero, 2007). It was in this study, where the term “media literacy,” which includes all media, became popular.

This work understands that media literacy corresponds to a process that involves and integrates literacy skills combined with an understanding of the use of any kind of media. However, beyond its conceptual nature, what the cited study initiated was the possibility to define a comprehensive policy strategy for the development of MIL in Europe, a policy which should involve all stakeholders in the field: political, legislative and regulatory institutions, families, schools and teachers, the media and cultural industry as well as associations in coordinated, integrated and arranged actions (Pérez Tornero & Varis, 2010).

Legislative Development

This study led the EU to develop over the last decade certain legislative instruments which consolidate public policy related to media literacy. This development includes an aspect of conceptualization which was driven by the EC and the European Parliament between 2006 and 2007, culminating with the enactment of the European Directive on Audiovisual Services of 2010.

In the *Communiqué* from the EC to the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions –COM(2007)833–, the EC formally established, via statute, an initial definition of media literacy. This *communiqué* sought to develop what was established in the strategy of Lisbon (2000), relating media literacy to the digital environment.

Similarly, the Council of Europe (the maximum governing body of the EU) launched in May 2008 a message of support to the EC *Communiqué* of 2007, in which it gives its blessing to the statement by the EC indicating that industry should encourage and include actions for the development of media literacy at EU level. It establishes that the EU should promote the development of actions to encourage media literacy and the active participation of European citizens, creating opportunities for economic, social and democratic development (European Council, 2008).

In this report the Council of Europe⁵, where it makes reference to these developments, already emphasizes that the Audiovisual Media Services Directive of 2007 “calls for the ‘development of media literacy in all sections of society’ and for close monitoring of progress in media literacy. It sets out a reporting obligation for the Commission to measure levels of media literacy in all the Member States. Criteria for the assessment of levels of media literacy are therefore needed”.

In 2009 the EC recommended that EU countries and the media industry should work together to increase the awareness of people as to the many forms and types of media messages present in the European communicative environment (advertising, movies and/or online content).

As a result, among the Council’s conclusions on media literacy in the digital environment adopted at the meeting of the Board of Education, Youth and Culture on 27 November 2009, the commitment to ML was reiterated. The EC recommendation of 20 August 2009 –C(2009)6464–, was also welcomed which again urged governments to include ML in their national curricula.

In 2010 the directive of the European Parliament (AVMS) –Directive 2010/13/EU– established the compulsory need to measure and promote the development of ML in all Member States as of the year 2011. The directive also issued the need to develop and establish a tool to measure these levels.

A System of Indicators

The legislative policy was soon accompanied by measures of executive order.

The *Study on Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels* (2009) identified seven different areas that are important for the measurement of media literacy. These seven areas were proposed by the *European Charter for Media Literacy*⁶ as the measurement model. They are:

1. the efficient use of technologies
2. the capacity to access information and make informed choices and decisions
3. the need to understand how media content is produced
4. critical analysis of techniques, language and content related to the media
5. the use of the media to express and communicate ideas
6. the need to identify and avoid harmful media content and services
7. the efficient use of the media in order to exercise democratic and civil rights (Pérez Tornero, 2007:12-13).

These seven areas can be divided into media availability and media literacy context, on the one hand, and use, critical understanding and communication skills, on the other, which take place within the measuring scheme proposed (Pérez Tornero, 2009). This pioneering study was completed by a subsequent study conducted by EAVI and the Danish Technological Institute (DTI) in 2011 in which the criteria laid down initially were refined.

The *Study on Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels* laid the foundation for the first reliable ML assessment system in Europe and enabled the EC to fulfil its obligation of reporting on levels of ML in Europe. The conceptual model illustrated in a pyramid chart – developed in this study – has been used specifically as a measuring tool for ML in Europe by different research groups and institutions involved in the development of this discipline.

Members of the EC expert panel on media literacy have developed individual pilot projects using these indicators in several European countries. The Spanish project DINAMIC (Developing Indicators of Media Literacy for Individuals, Corporations and Citizens) is an example of state investment in this area.

From European Indicators to UNESCO Indicators

Study on Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels helped to inspire work done in parallel on MIL by UNESCO. The first expression in this regard appeared in a document published in 2011 titled, *Towards Media and Information Literacy Indicators*, in which UNESCO began to develop the concepts for their study in an attempt to systematize the various indicators that lead to measuring national levels of MIL.

In this document, UNESCO makes it clear when summarizing the advances proposed in the research conducted by the EC (Pérez Tornero, 2009), that “it is (and will be) through their critical assessment in the application of the tool [to be developed for the EC to assess MIL levels] that this expert knowledge and insight in each territory is (and will be) able to measure appropriately media literacy levels (EAVI, 2009)” (...) “It is important to note that if this is true for one (relatively small) continent it is all the more likely to be true across the globe” (UNESCO, 2011b: 17).

The pilot document proposed in 2008 for measuring indicators of information literacy (Lau & Catts, 2008), gives an initial systematization of competences to take into consideration when developing a scenario of information and digital literacy. On the other hand, the document published in 2013 by UNESCO establishes values, indications, competencies and variables for the actual assessment of MIL levels.

In accordance with UNESCO, “defining and measuring a country’s MIL readiness and available competencies at national levels should be regarded as a key

component of national information and media development policies. This kind of assessment should also be linked to educational plans and can contribute to employment, productivity, innovation, participation and empowerment” (UNESCO, 2013: 37-38).

In developing the guidelines for measuring levels of MIL, the EC and UNESCO worked simultaneously and in parallel on a theoretical-conceptual framework (UNESCO, 2013) which coincided with the findings submitted to the EC in 2009 (Pérez Tornero, 2009), which demonstrate the correlation between contextual factors and communication skills. Consensus shows that MIL development is better when there is a public policy in place that encourages these skills. This correlation, as outlined in the document UNESCO 2013, is set forth in the following table:

European and UNESCO MIL Assessment Frameworks			
UNESCO (2013: 47)		Pérez Tornero ⁷ (SC. Coord.) (2009: 34-50)	
Tier One: MIL Country Readiness	Tier Two: MIL competencies	Environmental Factors (for ML)	Personal Competences
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. MIL education, 2. MIL policy, 3. MIL supply, 4. MIL access and use, and 5. Civil society. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access and retrieval; 2. Understanding and evaluation; 3. Creation and sharing. 	Media literacy context: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Media education (presence in curriculum; teacher training) 2. Media literacy policy (regulation) 3. Media industry 4. Civil society Media availability: (mobile phone; Internet; television; radio; newspapers; cinema)	Use: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Computer and Internet skills 2. Balanced use of media 3. Advanced Internet use Critical Understanding: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understanding media content and its functioning 2. Knowledge of media and regulation 3. User behaviour
MIL competency		Communicative skills	
Cognitive elements: attitudes (rights, principles, values and attitudes), knowledge and skills.		Social relations; Citizen participation; Content creation.	
Which “together play an important role in the MIL Assessment Framework, as they do in the learning and teaching processes, and in relation to employment, for participation and empowerment in societal life” (2013: 47).		“Social relationships demonstrate the potential for individual and group relationships via the media. (...) the media manages social groups and dictates the type of frequency of contact (...) [cooperation or conflict] among them” (2009: 44).	

Source: Authors’ own elaboration, Information from UNESCO (2013) and Pérez Tornero (SC.Coord) (2009)

ML Takes Off in Europe

Since 2004 a series of initiatives related to media literacy, which highlight the vitality of a movement, has taken place, namely: the launch of the European Charter for Media Education; the celebration of EUROMEDUC – a major effort to bring together experts and European institutions in the sector conducted in 2004 and 2009; the MEDEA Conference in Brussels; events created within the framework of the EC MEDIA Programme (2007-2013); Creative Europe (2014-2020) and the Prix MEDIA. For their part, the Education, Audio-visual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) has been active in financing educational activities and programs such as Creative Europe.

In 2014, the EC then implemented EMEDUS: European Media Literacy Education Study Project, which aimed at consolidating and stabilizing the European movement for media literacy. This project had a double objective: 1) the description of how media literacy was developing in the European education system and 2) the creation of a European Observatory on Media Literacy. Specifically, the Observatory was created to serve as continuity to the policies and programs developed by the EC.

Along with the Observatory, the EMEDUS Project –in conjunction with other European projects such as Translit (Frau-Meigs et al., 2014)– convened the First European Forum on Media and Information Literacy in Paris in May 2014. It is significant that this first European Forum on MIL was organised with the help and sponsorship of the EC and UNESCO.

On the other hand, the FilmEd Project (Showing films and other audio-visual content in European Schools – Obstacles and best practices) analysed and studied the development of a specific field of media literacy – film literacy. It contributes to research that coincides in recommending the creation of opportunities to exchange knowledge and experiences in MIL. It was proposed as a continuation of the study of the British Film Institute (BFI), “Film Literacy in Europe 2012”.

2014 is also the year of the emergence of the European Digital Agenda, one of the seven pillars supporting the EU 2020 Strategy, which aims to create a suitable space for the development of daily tasks and economic, social, educational (and any online activities) in the EU. Like other initiatives and programs described, the Agenda responds to legislative and academic developments that have taken place on the continent, and constitutes the promotion of an environment conducive to the emergence of media literate citizens.

European policies, with their uniqueness and specific strategies, have launched media literacy in Europe, which is now in the process of consolidation. Above all, it is clear that the European model is unique and can be used as a reference in other contexts.

A European Policy Model for ML

In view of the evolution of European policies on media literacy it is possible to trace the defining features of what may be called the European model in this field.

Firstly, the active role of the European Commission must receive a mention as an intergovernmental institution as it has led the process in MIL, proposed objectives and established milestones. It has also managed to bring together and involve experts and institutions to participate in the task of promoting MIL. Its modus operandi has been the following:

1. The creation of expert groups which, through the exchange of experiences, defined the conceptual framework, established objectives and proposed studies and research.
2. The execution of studies and research proposals from the panel of experts. These studies were put to public tender although private and public institutions, as well as individual private interest groups, could participate.
3. Legislative and/or concerted action with Member States. As far as possible, the EC presented before Parliament *communiqués* that collected the recommendations of the studies commissioned or consensus reached among experts.
4. Activity to create incentive. In this context the EC, through public tenders, provided subsidies for the implementation of initiatives to coincide with strong policies, involving different actors from the system.
5. Evaluation. Finally, the EC established criteria and indicators, as well as other evaluation systems, which served as feedback for the projects developed.

Secondly, the overall involvement of stakeholders in the system. EC policies have always tried to integrate all participants in the system. This was characterized by the establishment of formal and informal platforms depending on the various participants at the European level. This has been carried out using the following scheme:

1. The creation of large participation platforms.
2. The commitment to consensus and reciprocity.
3. The acceptance of common objectives.

Thirdly, we must highlight the emphasis placed by the EU on human capacities, both creative and critical, with respect to the use of the media. Until 2004 the topic of media education had been guided by the principle of active resistance

and critical media content while digital literacy was oriented towards the practical and instrumental use of technologies (or, in any case, to its safe use). But since 2004 media literacy in Europe has balanced critical and protective principles with creative skills. The development of these capabilities will lead to, according to the EC, a substantial improvement of the media in terms of transparency, pluralism and communication security.

Fourthly, we must recognize that the majority of EU countries have already opened the possibility, or have actually included MIL, in their compulsory school curricula (EMEDUS, 2014).

The promotion of media literacy, according to the European model, includes in its objectives the consideration of such literacy as a new right to add to the right to education, the right to information and the right to freedom of expression (Gavara & Pérez Tornero, 2012). This has been transferred to some laws – especially from the Directive on audio-visual services – but has also, in some cases, included the direct involvement of regulatory authorities in promoting audio-visual media education. Media literacy has become the third pillar of the rights of communication of our time. This opens a new European horizon for the development of communication within the European Union.

Finally, all these characteristics have made the European model of media literacy an effective policy capable of promoting development in Europe in this area that had not been previously achieved; hence its impact and relationship to other policies such as those of UNESCO, which have recently begun to spread across the entire planet.⁸

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Notes

- 1 2004 was the year in which *Promoting Digital Literacy* (Pérez Tornero, 2004) was published and in 2014 the European Media Literacy Forum was held which completed a cycle in which Europe changed its policies from digital literacy to the more complete concept of media literacy.
- 2 It would be difficult to cite everyone but the following deserve mention: Evelynne Bevort, Suzan Krugsay, Cary Bazalgette, Manuel Pinto, Vitor Reia-Batista, Divina Frau-Meigs, José Manuel Pérez Tornero, Lluís Artigas, Hara Paddy, David Buckingham, Sonia Livingstone, Len Masterman.
- 3 Seville Seminar was conducted by José Manuel Pérez Tornero, Divina Frau-Meigs, Valentín Gómez Oliver and representative of UNESCO Lluís Artigas.
- 4 As an example, the MENTOR Project, financed by the EC, created a curriculum for media education for teacher trainers in the Euro-Mediterranean area.
- 5 Council conclusions of 22 May 2008 on a European approach to media literacy in the digital environment (2008/C 140/08).
- 6 This initiative stems from the efforts of the British Film Institute (BFI) and the UK film Council in 2005 which organised two seminars (EUROMEDUC) up to 2009. Although the initiative is still active, they have not organised any seminars since. Initial countries participating in this charter were Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK.
- 7 *Study on Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels* was coordinated by J.M. Pérez Tornero (scientific coordinator) and P. Celot (Project coordinator and editor).
- 8 Proof of this is the establishment of MIL observatories in Latin America and Europe, the Arab and European forums and the forum of Mexico City, as well as the expansion of the Chairs of UNESCO- UNAOC MILID UNITWIN.