

Legal Frameworks for Media Literacy

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Introduction

Across Europe and beyond, efforts are growing to promote the wider use of digital media by all citizens - adults and young people alike. As such, an increasingly prominent role is being given to the notion that media literacy is a precondition for full and effective participation in contemporary societies. In such a context, interests of policymakers focusing on promoting the benefits of a wider societal digital participation intersect with the traditional function of media literacy to promote enhanced skills and competencies of citizens to access, create and understand media content. Accordingly, a concern with media literacy has moved from being a matter solely of interest to media educationalists to a question of public policy with a variety of stakeholders and actors involved in the process. As a result, Media and Information Literacy (MIL), particularly in a digital context, is now a recurring theme within policy platforms dedicated to culture, education and greater social cohesion.

Our focus in this chapter is on the legal expression of media literacy with particular reference to the ethical and social challenges faced by citizens in the media and information society. Drawing on the relevant literature in the field, our objective here is to develop greater theoretical specificity through the analysis of concepts and relationships mapped against the actual data from the *Translit* project. Close reading of country reports produced in the course of the *Translit* enables us to generate questions, to extend the literature on legal frameworks for MIL and policy and to assess how it applies to varied situations across Europe.

In this chapter, we summarise and synthesize the landscape of legal frameworks for MIL. Following a review of all 28 European country reports from the *Translit* project, the aim is to better understand the extent to which different cultures and institutions within Europe participate within the MIL process. Our premise is that the policy debate around media and information literacy has been transformed since the 1990s. Tectonic shifts in the technical, economic, and policy domains have brought us to a new media landscape.

If in an educational context, media literacy built up a well-documented field of critical enquiry regarding media, its content and consumption, the policy dimensions of media literacy have received much less attention. The notion that various public institutions - government ministries, media regulatory authorities, broadcasting organisation - are viewed as having obligations towards media literacy and for which they are accountable is of relatively recent

origin. Neither has its presence within public policy been without controversy. In this new media ecosystem where almost endless information is pervasive in everyday life, how can people become *media literate*? Can we and/or should we train people to become more critical? How should we give the capacity and the ability to check what is right or wrong information on today's media landscape? Should we refer here about *information* literacy, *media* literacy and/or *technology* literacy? And most important, how can legal frameworks improve media literacy in a European context?

The development of media literacy as represented through legal frameworks drawing on the 28 national reports produced for the *Translit* project led us to suggest two particular avenues/entries for MIL to show up in a policy context: education and human rights. Our analysis distinguishes between those countries in which a legal expression of media literacy as a public policy objective is: a) still at the initial stages, b) at an advanced stage of development or c) fully present. The chapter then proceeds to contrast countries with no legal approach towards the framing of media literacy (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Latvia and Romania) with those with specific strategies to promote media literacy policy (Denmark and Finland). Finally, the chapter assesses the most important issues, challenges and debates facing the further implementation of legal frameworks for media literacy at the local/national/translational level, with particular reference to the impact of digital technologies on education and media literacy policies.

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