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MAPPING OUT MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY

1. How the idea of the Competencies Catalogue developed?

A specific problem in the contemporary world is the massive spread of tools unknown to previous generations which have improved communication, remote collaboration and trade, the dissemination of works, ideas, views and opinions, as well as their assessment and comment. Skills required for the effective use of these tools are not sufficiently acquired in the educational process, nor are they passed down to children from parents, who often have more difficulties to keep up with rapidly changing technologies. At the same time, it is difficult to overestimate the role of media and information competence in any area of our life in today's world: from the private sphere, through professional, and finally to the civil dimension.

In 2011 The Modern Poland Foundation started working on „Digital Future” project, which aims to create a complete framework for teaching media and information literacy, which could be implemented into schools and other educational institutions, such as community centres and libraries.

In the first phase of the project The Foundation published a comprehensive report on the state of media and information literacy, which defines a number of problems arising from how little we know about the digital competence of Poles, especially children and young people, as well as related to the lack of a coherent plan for improving the competence level in this area. One of the problems presented in the report was the lack of documents stipulating the scope of media and information literacy. Various government agencies and institutions use not only different definitions, but also use different terms - media literacy, information literacy, *audiovisual literacy*, and finally *digital literacy* - to describe the same or a similar set of competencies.

This is why the team of experts working on “Digital Future” project implemented the concept of *competencies convergence* indicating that it is not possible to work in media and information literacy field without holistic and systematic approach to shaping creative attitudes and competent use of information in all its different forms.

Although media and information literacy has for years been the subject of academic debate and one of the priorities of the state, we still have no answers to the question of what the media and information literacy is, what is the scope of its content and what specific skills should be developed. Ongoing discussions held so far certainly helped popularise the subject and universally recognise its importance, but the time has come to take firm steps leading to its practical implementation. In order to avoid actions based largely on intuition, of random and fragmentary nature, and often focusing on marginal issues, operationalisation of the concept is necessary. Therefore, The Modern Poland Foundation in cooperation with media and information education experts prepared the Catalogue of Competencies.

2. Methodology and structure

The Competencies Catalogue covers all age groups, divided in 2 main sections: formal education and life long learning. In formal education the competencies have been assigned to 6 different educational stages; pre-school, primary school (divided into 2 groups; 1-3 grade and 4-6 grade), grammar school (*gimnazjum*), high school and university. Considering that for adults using age groupings would be much less relevant, we invented 3 categories, depending on the competency level; minimum, optimum and master. The minimum level enables user basic participation in the information society through media. The optimum level user is able to actively co-create media environment. Competencies on master level allow to trigger social change through media, organise other users, share knowledge and advise others.

The Catalogue is intended as a supplement to existing curricula, and therefore it should be read

in parallel with the guidelines for subjects such as Polish language or civil education. We tried to ignore issues introduced in the framework of these subjects, assuming that students will gain the necessary knowledge during these classes.

Although we used the categories related to different stages of education, it is crucial not to narrow thinking about media and information education only to the formal education sector. Tasks in the field of media and information literacy can be successfully performed by non-governmental organisations, community centers, libraries and other educational and cultural institutions.

There is also a need to underline the conventionality of stage borders in young peoples' development. We stress the fact that child development is not linear and often advances by leaps and bounds. A child can develop very quickly in some areas, while others need more time. The proposed set of competences determines what a child can (not necessarily should) achieve at the given stage, it gives guidance on child's potential at a given stage of development.

The subject of media and information education had to be split into thematic fields to allow its analysis. In many places, we made arbitrary decisions and we realise that this division could be done in other ways, perhaps also justified on theoretical grounds. We chose eventually the division into 8 basic categories: *Using the information, Relations in the media environment, Language of media, Creative use of media, Ethics and values in communications and media, Safety in communications and media, Law in communications and media, Economic aspects of media*. This division is in many places arbitrary, since many issues are necessarily located on the intersection of these fields or are present in more than one area. However, as we treat this Catalogue as a map, the most important feature of which should be intelligibility, we have arrived at the conclusion that in the name of this clarity it is better to distinguish problem fields, even if it entails the necessity to make controversial decisions, as it was the case with discrimination between fields "creation" and "processing". We realise that in fact it is impossible to deal with these two (and many other) aspects separately; nevertheless, we decided on such a

division not to contrast these concepts, but to facilitate navigation through such extensive material.

While working on the Catalogue, we consciously decided to rely on the recommendations of the European Commission listed in the document A European approach to media literacy in the digital environment. Bearing in mind that the Commission only indicates the priority directions, we made, however, the necessary additions and clarifications. Although the announcement of the Commission has only general and tentative character, 8 problem fields comprising media and information literacy in our classification correspond to guidelines of the Commission and don't leave without appropriate propositions any of the priority problems related to communications through media.

3. Description of thematic fields

I. Use of information

The category of "use of information" generally matches the concept of information literacy, which is defined as a complex of knowledge and skills needed for effective use of information resources, from the moment of recognition of the information gap, through defining information needs, selection of sources of information, finding in them the needed piece of information and its critical evaluation, to use of the information resources at work and their public presentation in an appropriate form. The importance of information skills is unquestionable, as they are - apart from preparation for lifelong learning process - one of the key conditions for the participation of citizens in the information society and they determine their development.

These competencies are gaining more significance, especially in view of the development of new information and communication technologies and the exponential growth of electronic information sources. The widespread use of such concepts as information noise, misinformation or information overload, suggests that the information not only surrounds every human being, but it can also often overwhelm. This in turn means that every person should have the complex

of skills and knowledge, allowing for the efficient use of information resources. These skills have been grouped into 4 main areas: sources of information, searching for information, critical approach and information management.

II. Relations in the media environment.

In the context of the media an individual enters relationships with other users, the environment and relationships between groups and within groups. Pondering the model of communication, one can conclude that the traditional scheme "sender -> recipient" is not adequate any more for the description of the examined reality. This process is currently taking place in many directions and in different models: "one - to - one" (personal communication), "one - to - many" (eg. comment on a social network), "many - to - one" (eg. reaction to the comment posted earlier) and "many - to - many" (eg. discussion forum), in which everyone can be both a sender and a receiver of messages. The individual establishes relationships within the group, or with the environment of a different nature and degree of permanence. To describe the competences indispensable to create relations corresponding to the objectives set by the individual there have been put forward three major issues: image, communication and environment.

III. Media language

Literacy defined classically as reading and writing became extended in the first half of the twentieth century to new phenomena of audiovisual culture. The discussion about grammar of film and television was started. The creators of this approach (Culkin, McLuhan), were convinced that the audiovisual media are the new language of mankind functioning in a similar way as English. They should be taught as language skills understood in the traditional way.

The first stage is learning the "alphabet", the following ones concern education in the new "literature." The end of the twentieth century brought about the theory of new media literacies (Jenkins, Gee), which studies also such media messages as computer games and blogs in terms of new languages. Today, by the media literacy we understand the media competences in general, but the original meaning of the term was related to the linguistic nature of the media.

Such an approach to the issue of media is also bound up with the semiotic and hermeneutic tradition of conceiving cultural phenomena. The key concept here is "text", by which we mean not only the written or printed communication, but every product of human cultural activity - from sculpture and painting, through film, to multimedia productions. When discussing these issues we will have in mind this wider meaning of language and text. Specifically it applies to the following categories of analysis: linguistic nature of different media, the functions of media messages and culture of media communication.

IV. Creative use of media

Creation of messages with the use of modern digital tools is one of the main forms of activity of people using the internet. New services, equipment and software allow not only for the independent creation of new content, but also for its processing, including the use of resources previously published. In the remix culture, everything available in a digital form - as well as digitalised analogue resources - may become a resource used to create new content. Creation and processing of network and extra-network involves also the issue of content presentation. Creation in the broad sense is often a social activity; production of the content, processing of published resources and presentation of the content on the internet often require cooperation with others.

These three interweaving categories can be examined in more detail. Their separation, more and more difficult in the hypermedia network space, may be useful in the process of building educational materials that refer to this study. In this section we use the concepts of multimedia, understood as a combination of different forms of media and messages made up of different media (eg. digital storytelling - digital narratives that are de facto short videos, the creation of which involves sound, photographs, film clips, text), and hypermedia which are messages composed of various media, based on hypertextual architecture.

V. Ethics and values in communication and media

Our Catalogue would remain incomplete if it lacked an explicit reference to ethical competence. Mastery of technical and social skills are not enough. Today's widely available communication tools do not impose on the user any ethical obligations in themselves. The regulations of many services impose a number of limitations resulting mainly from the commercial policy of the provider and generally binding laws.

Out of range of the technical and formal regulations in the social communication remains an area in which the users set their own limits and define the values of communication. The set of ethical competences and values proposed in this Catalogue is meant first of all to strongly emphasise the need for individual work on this area by any recipient of media and information education. Naturally, the task should not be placed next to the development of specific technical or cultural skills, reflection on ethics should be superimposed on each of them.

VI. Safety in communications and media

Safety in the digital age is a very complicated subject. Because of the emergence of more and more new technologies and the risks linked to them and because of the freshness of the topic (which results in many cases in the lack of well-tried patterns and best practices), it is difficult to create an exhaustive list of competences in this area. Inequalities of opportunities between users and large service providers also should be taken into account here.

The competences in the area of security in communications and media include: protection of privacy, supervision of the network, anonymity, security of communication, work and transactions, as well as addictions and hygiene of using the media.

The consequences of neglecting certain aspects related to the safety of using the media can show quickly or they can take revenge on the user after many years. They can be spectacular (like stealing critically important data from an unprotected computer) or subtle (monitoring another person's network of friends through social media). What is needed is always a compromise between convenience and security in the communication situation, which means that it is

impossible to offer a particular set of tips to ensure complete safety. Decisions on such compromises, however, should be made sensibly. It is very important also to realize the basic truth: the security is not a permanent condition - it is a process.

VII. Law in communication and media

The task of the Law area in this Catalogue is to translate general recommendations and rules into corresponding principles of legal relations, sources of law and the resulting standards. In other words, thanks to the scope of the programme a student should:

- know their rights, what is within the law and what is against the law;
- be able to find out appropriate legal norms and search them for regulations concerning particular problem;
- understand what is the purpose of these regulations, what are premises of their introduction and whose interest is protected by them.

With the development of information society there are developed and implemented legal norms which are completely separate and independent from the generally binding ones and are specific to the electronic communication. As the diffusion of new methods of communication continues, it is necessary to adapt to these timeless, general standards, but the process is delayed, because of the need for the accumulation of social experience which helps understand newly emerging opportunities and threats.

Against this background, the teaching of specific legal norms is associated with the risk greater than in other areas. When teaching law, one must always reckon with the fact that specific legal provisions will have been changed before the student completes their education cycle. In the area of media and information the education risk is even higher: not only specific regulations may and probably will change, but also some core elements of conceptual systems in which these regulations were rooted.

At the same time attempts to identify and discuss various standards shouldn't be abandoned, for it is due their not full adjustment to the new technical tools entering into our lives that their

correct interpretation in the context of the situation related to the use of these tools becomes especially difficult. This implies an increased risk of two types: unintentional violation of the law with its dire consequences or overeager readiness to give up guaranteed rights.

VIII. Economic aspects of media functioning

Economic aspects of the media functioning in the context of the media and information competencies focus on issues such as information, media pluralism and concentration of media, market competition, the impact of financing and regulating on the organisation and content of the media, advertising and commercialisation processes, and also the role of public and private media. The Polish Constitution includes a provision of citizen's right to information. This law is enforced not only by the presence of the media, but also through citizens' activity, who, thanks to modern techniques of communication and access to the internet, gained an opportunity to comment on events and to collect, compile and publish the information on their own.

It is more and more difficult to preserve the traditional division between the media and their customers, as users abandoned the role of passive observers. In this situation, it is even more necessary to understand the impact of economics on the media market (also created by users) and the regulatory impact on the functioning and financial future of the media. Complex issues that make up the economic aspects of the media, are divided into four overlapping categories: media market, information as an economic good, financing of the media and media policy.

4. Future development of the Catalogue

We want to emphasize very clearly that this is a pioneering work, and therefore it is not necessarily exhaustive and definitive. We treat our Catalogue as a "beta version" of a proposal to finalise the issues that will allow the transfer of the ongoing debate to a new, practical level. We don't claim any rights to formulate categorical opinions - we know that although we did our best and engaged highly skilled professionals, this Catalogue should be further developed, completed and corrected. That is why we publish it under a free license Creative Commons Attribution -

Share Alike 3.0 Poland - we expect that not only we, but also other institutions, including public bodies and international organisations, will develop, update it, and expose it to public criticism. It is available online on “Digital Future” project website cyfrowaprzyszlosc.pl. Since the Catalogue was created with the intention to serve today's users using technology available to them, we realize that with the rapid development in this area it will require additions and adjustments to changing conditions. However, to talk about practical skills, we had to rely on technologies accessible to us, accepting the risk of rapid obsolescence of our work.

The Competencies Catalogue is a tool that will allow for the construction of a comprehensive and coherent set of teaching materials for media and information education at different stages and in the field of lifelong learning. This process will be initiated by The Modern Poland Foundation this year, but we hope that we will be joined by other organisations and institutions interested in this field of activities. A broad base of teaching materials will be made available for free under the same CC BY-SA license, which means that you will be free to use, copy, distribute and adapt it to your needs. We believe that the free access to teaching materials will contribute to a significant increase in the number of activities conducted in this area, and consequently to rise in the level of media and information literacy in Polish society.