

The Role of the “VANG” Organization in Media Literacy of the Young Generation of Croatia

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SUMMARY

Due to the lack of formal media literacy during primary and secondary (and, to considerable extent, university) education in Croatia, there is a need for various forms of informal approaches to systematic media study. In these surroundings, the role of media experts, theoreticians and participants is of great importance, as they take part, as volunteers, in the process of creating and holding education programs for young media users in the form of seminars organized by non-profit organizations. The paper consists of a survey conducted among the participants of media literacy seminars organized by the non-profit organization “The wave of a new generation” (VANG) with the purpose to determine: the reasons for attending the seminars, the satisfaction with the seminars, as well as the opinion on the obligatory media literacy in formal education. Out of 150 seminar participants, 46 or 31% responded and filled in the questionnaires appropriately and, according to results, 67% are completely satisfied with the seminars frequented, 43% of respondents do not have experience with media literacy in formal education, while 74% of respondents confirmed that the possibility of free additional education had encouraged them to attend the seminars. As high as 89% of respondents believe that media literacy should be a part of formal education: in primary schools as part of extracurricular

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activities/projects/workshops (50%), in secondary schools as a distinct subject (50%), and within university education as an optional course (61%).

Key words: VANG organization, media literacy of the young generation, survey

Introduction

The need for raised awareness of media and the content they produce is growing among the young people of the 21st century, as they are, as well as the society in general, confronted with the lack of quality material and credible information. The mass media, especially the public ones, should fulfill their duty of releasing content with the emphasis on education rather than entertainment, as this would contribute to the fulfillment of their media literacy task.

According to media educator Krešimir Mikić, a wide availability and constant development of media set new tasks and questions to parents, educators and teachers. They must learn how to access a particular medium and its contents, determine their influence on spiritual and social development of the child and decide whether media contribute to child's development, or whether they obstruct it. In this matter, emphasizes Mikić, the fact that young people are often their parents' teachers when it comes to media, should be taken into consideration. (Mikić, 2007: 15)

Individuals are considered to be media literate if they are able to successfully fulfill their development tasks using the media, as well as think about the consequences and the risks that arise through that use. (Schmidt, Lampert and Schwinge, 2010: 267 according to: Pfaff-Rüdiger, Riesmeyer, Kumpel, 2012: 43)

In this sense, Nada Zgrabljic Rotar points out that it is extremely important for national governments to implement media literacy at all levels of education from kindergarten to lifelong learning, in order to prevent the digital gap as a result of various age and social status of an individual. Her viewpoint is „that literacy in times of mass and digital media does not consist only of an ability to read and write, that it is necessary to adopt new technological, social and humanistic knowledge that will facilitate access of all the citizens to new media, increase their ability to analyze media contents, enable them for a quality evaluation of these contents in their ethical, artistic and political range, and provide them with skills to successfully use new media as means for creating and broadcasting contents via these media.“ (Zgrabljic Rotar, 2011: 31)

Media literacy within the formal education

The idea of media education arose in 1964 and was supported by UNESCO that, twelve years later, with its group of experts, created a model for mass media

education that would teach young people how to adopt critical approach to media contents.

In Germany in 1982, 19 countries accepted a declaration which emphasized the importance of education that would teach young people how to be responsible citizens and that would raise critical awareness of media users. (Erjavec, 2005: 90)

Education and educational media are inextricably connected. Mikić argues that education today is definitely impossible without the active presence of media structures. In his opinion, intermedia structures determine our lives and cognition ever more intensely.

Therefore, it is no longer possible to exclude media competence, critical judgment, or evaluation of content mediated through media, from the educational concept for the 21st century. Without competent mastering of the media, it will be impossible to understand and judge the world we live in. (Mikić, 2007: 20)

In Croatian primary educational system, computer science is only an optional subject from the fifth grade and, depending on their affinities or, possibly, on parents' encouragement, children choose that subject which can, in a certain measure, give them some guidelines on how to responsibly use the Internet. This is just one of the many illustrations of the lack of media literacy in the education system. In today's information chaos children need to know the advantages and disadvantages of the Internet. Schools should serve as signposts that help children and teach them how to be media users capable of critical approach and reflection. However, many countries are still underdeveloped in this area, media literacy is generally at the end of educational priority list and it is often more of personal than of social character. It depends too much on the involvement and interest of an individual, and for educators, teachers and professors, who are expected to make children media literate individuals, there isn't an adequate place where they could receive proper education about the matter.

After adopting a declaration on the necessity of media education in Germany in 1982, the text proved to be common good, which, as such, works perfectly on paper, but in practice it is almost impossible to achieve a certain consistency and transparency for several reasons, primarily because of the diversity of countries.

According to Karmen Erjavec, in view of the successful inclusion of education for media in school systems, the countries can be divided into three groups. (Erjavec, 2005: 91) The first group consists of countries that have implemented the education for media in school schedules: Australia, Denmark, Finland, Canada, Hungary, Germany, Norway, Ireland, Slovenia, Sweden and Great Britain. In almost all these countries, education for media had been present in school systems even before the declaration was issued and it already has a long tradition, both in primary and in se-

condary schools. “Croatia with Austria, Italy, the Netherlands and the United States¹ belongs to the second group, with minimal implementation of education for media in school schedules. In the third group, which includes Greece, Russia, Spain and Switzerland, there is no education for media in school schedules. France is a special model, where great attention is given to education within the system, and educators themselves are also being continuously educated.“ (Erjavec, 2005: 97-101)

In Croatian primary schools children can learn about film, theatre, children’s shows, TV and radio genres, press and comics mostly in Croatian language classes. Media education does not exist in secondary schools and vocational schools; there is possibly a film education. Mikić reminds that „precisely Croatia, even in the 60s of the last century, thanks to Stjepko Težak was the leading European country in education for media in our schools, while today, when media are the component of lives of children and youth, education is reduced to only an hour or two in primary and secondary schools.“² This raises the question – how and whether are these minimal thematic units are discussed during lessons.

„Recent empirical studies in our schools have shown that only a minor percentage of teachers of Croatian language actually held the film classes, and received additional training for it (many have no education in this field), and that most didn’t have time or equipment to cover the area of cinema, television and other topics considered to be a part of ‘media culture’.³ In addition, as Mikić emphasizes, “it is questionable how a term ‘media culture’ is suitable for what it embraces”. The media do not imply language, literature or theatre, but do imply “newspapers, radio, television, movie and so-called ‘new media’ which are expanding, and students have to master the basic knowledge of these media.“⁴

The role of the VANG organization in media literacy

A lack of subject or course that would, within formal education in Croatia, introduce media literacy to children from the fifth grade of primary school to university education, creates a huge informal space where media experts, theoreticians, media workers and non-profit organizations find an opportunity to transfer their knowledge and skills to new generations. A non-profit organization “The wave of a new generation“ (VANG) also operates in the context of that potential.

In collaboration with Graphic Art School in Zagreb, the Organization brings together former and current media workers, experts and theoreticians who, in specialized seminars, introduce young people (from the age of 14 to the age of 35) with the media and journalism in general. Seminars for participants are held in Graphic Art School, which has at disposal the necessary infrastructure, while Organization

members transfer knowledge and skills acquired working in media or through engagement in science.⁵

Education is primarily conducted through seminars: basic, advanced and specialized. Also, special media projects are organized in cooperation with participants who show a particular interest in the matter, such as development of media literacy, introduction of information technology to the young and monitoring of the City of Zagreb assembly councilors' work.

The basic seminars are for the acquisition of journalistic skills, they provide general theoretical knowledge of media and journalism, from history basics, ethical principles, public television role and tasks in connection with commercial television, radio journalism, future of newspapers, the Internet as an interactive medium, to the interpretation of communication skills. The seminars also include visiting different media houses in Zagreb.

Advanced seminars are for the students who have passed the basic course and are able to apply their theoretical knowledge. Each theoretical aspect from the last seminar is explained through practical examples and practical work: participants are shown how to write for newspapers, radio, television or web; how to find a topic to write about; how to present the news; how to edit the news on radio, on television and other news programs; language of the electronic media and characteristics of the basic journalistic forms. As a part of the work in each medium individually, a specific product for that medium is produced.

Specialized seminars are dedicated to specific topics or projects. One of the projects created by the participants, in collaboration with mentors from radio and television stations, was focused on the local elections in 2013. Web shows presenting candidates for the major of the city of Zagreb were prepared, and were broadcast live on web portal net.hr during the election campaign.

In the effort to raise the quality of teaching on a higher level, on Graphic Art School's initiative, a project was launched - an Internet radio „Frekva“ with the participation of members of the Organization, former participants of the seminars whose particular interest is the radio as a medium and Graphic Art School students. The School is also the main project holder as they aim to establish the radio as an integral part of practical classes about the media.

Each seminar is evaluated and then upgraded and improved; and some of the participants are actively involved in work of the Organization.

Participants' interest, as well as the variety of the school they attend, is indicative. Both secondary school students and university students apply for seminars; in a wide range from schools of midwifery to the Faculty of Political Science. This is also

an additional indicator of a great necessity to include the subject into regular school schedules that would prepare the young for life with the media.

Research methodology

The survey sent via e-mail included all participants (150) of seminars held by the VANG organization. A total of 46 respondents (31%) filled in the questionnaires properly. Survey questionnaire included 15 close-ended questions. The first group of questions comprised participants' personal data: age, sex, education and employment.⁶

The second group of questions was about seminars by the VANG organization; the participants specified the way of being informed that the seminars were being held, the reasons for applying for the seminars, knowledge and skills acquired during seminars, the possibility to put the acquired knowledge into use, the level of satisfaction with the attended seminars and the intention of attending similar seminars in the future. The third group of questions referred to participants' opinions on media literacy in formal education and on content that should be implemented into formal media literacy.

The purpose of research is to determine:

1. if participants believe that media literacy should be a part of formal education in primary school, in secondary school and in universities.
2. what knowledge and skills should become part of media literacy.
3. if respondents have experience with media literacy within formal education.
4. which are the most common reasons for attending the seminars.

Analysis of frequencies and relative frequencies was performed in *MS Excel*, and results are presented in table and charts.

Research results

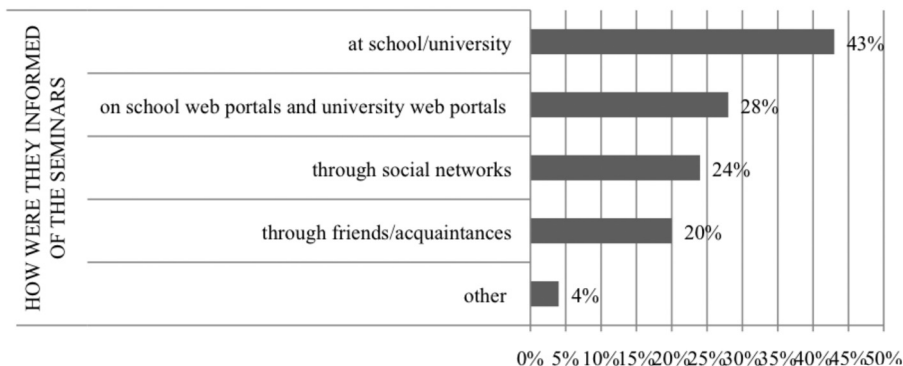
The results show that 70% of 46 respondents are female. Majority of respondents (24 or 52%) are between the ages of 16 and 19; 16 (35%) respondents are between the ages of 20 and 29, 5 respondents (11%) are between 30 and 35, there is one respondent older than 35, while there are no respondents younger than 15.

Highest number of respondents (65%) are still in the process of education; the majority of them are still in secondary school (21), followed by university students (9).

Out of 35% of the respondents with concluded education, 9 have secondary school education and 7 have university degrees. The number of unemployed is greater in a category of respondents with secondary school degree (7).

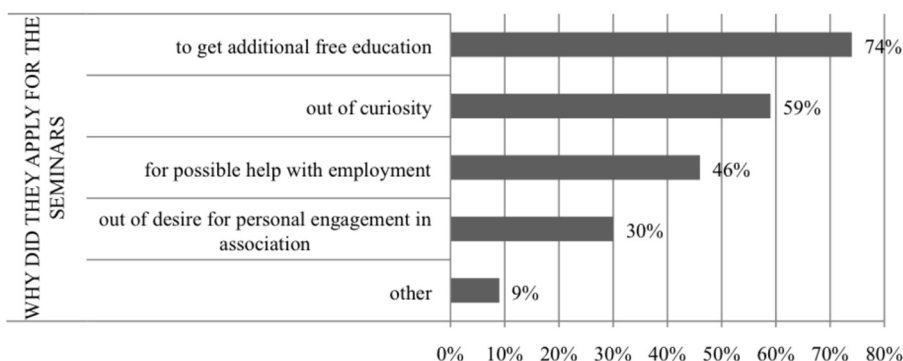
A majority of respondents (43%) were informed about the seminars at school (or at university), followed by notifications on school web portals and university web portals (28%), and through social networks (24%). (Chart 1)

Chart 1 Respondents’ answers about the way they were informed of the seminars
Grafikon 1. Odgovori ispitanika o načinima na koje se informiraju o seminarima



As a reason for applying for the seminars, respondents mention a possibility of additional education (74%) and curiosity (59%). Nearly half of respondents (46%) consider the seminars helpful when it comes to employment, and the number of respondents who applied out of desire to engage themselves in Organization’s work is also significant (30%). Some of them, nowadays, actively participate in Organization’s work. (Chart 2)

Chart 2 Respondents’ answers about the reasons for attending the seminars
Grafikon 2. Odgovori ispitanika o razlozima polazjenja seminarara



In three years, the VANG organized six basic, two advanced and two specialized media literacy seminars. Not every participant, after concluding the basic seminar, attended the advanced seminar (the average is 5 seminars per respondent).

In accordance with seminars attended, they acquired various skills and abilities. They adopted the basics of journalism, the history of news and learned about the characteristics and particularities of media.

They attended workshops: writing for newspapers, radio and web; how to speak on radio and on television, and were introduced with the basics of journalism ethics. A majority of respondents took part in basic seminars (more than 70%), while every third respondent took interest in specialized seminars.

When asked about practical use of knowledge acquired, 54% of respondents answered that they had had an opportunity to put the gained knowledge to practice.

Experiences from the seminars show that participants, thanks to knowledge and skills acquired, make progress at work, in school, and also in private life.

Respondents' satisfaction with seminars attended was expressed on a scale from complete satisfaction, partial satisfaction, to dissatisfaction with seminars frequented.

A majority of respondents (67%) are completely satisfied with the attended seminars, while 33% of respondents are partially satisfied. There were no unsatisfied respondents.

More than a half of respondents (56%) have intention to attend similar seminars in future, while 41% of respondents are not sure. Only one respondent has no such intention. The third group of questions is related to media literacy (acquiring media literacy). A majority of respondents, 43% of them, had no experience with media literacy in formal education. Only 17% of respondents were familiar with media literacy as a part of a school subject or university course (Croatian language, graphic design, public relations and journalism ethics).

Such results are understandable since Croatian schools do not carry out media literacy as a distinct subject, but as a part of other subjects, most frequently within Croatian language. However, the extent and the way of implementation of such contents are up to the teachers, so there are great differences among schools.

Still, 39% of respondents took media literacy as a distinct subject. The explanation for this outcome is in the respondents who attend Graphic Art School in Zagreb that received grants from EU, through IPA fund, for the project Media literacy for the 21st century.⁷

It is interesting that a majority of respondents (89%) think that media literacy should be a part of formal education.

Table 1 Respondents’ opinion on the way of implementing media literacy into formal education

Tablica 1. Odgovori ispitanika o načinima uključivanja medijske pismenosti u formalno obrazovanje

MEDIA LITERACY IN FORMAL EDUCATION	THE WAY OF IMPLEMENTING MEDIA LITERACY	ALL RESPONDENTS		RESPONDENTS 16-19		RESPONDENTS 20-29	
PRIMARY SCHOOL	as a part of a subject	10	22%	2	8%	5	31%
	as a distinct subject	13	28%	11	46%	2	13%
	within extra-curricular activities/projects/workshops	23	50%	11	46%	9	56%
	not necessary	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
SECONDARY SCHOOL	as a part of a subject	9	20%	3	12.5%	3	19%
	as a distinct subject	23	50%	18	75%	5	31%
	within extra-curricular activities/projects/workshops	14	30%	3	12.5%	8	50%
	not necessary	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
UNIVERSITY	as an obligatory course	6	13%	2	3%	3	19%
	as an optional course	28	61%	13	55%	11	68%
	within extra-curricular activities/projects/workshops	9	20%	7	29%	2	13%
	not necessary	3	6%	2	3%	0	0%

Table 1 demonstrates the opinion the respondents gave on the way of implementing media literacy into formal education. A majority of respondents believe that media literacy in primary education should be implemented as a part of extracurricular ac-

tivities (50% of them), and identical percentage thinks that media literacy in secondary education should be a distinct subject. There are no respondents who regard media literacy as unnecessary in both primary and secondary education programs. Media literacy should be an optional course in universities according to 61% of respondents. The same data were analyzed, according to the two most prevalent respondents' age groups.

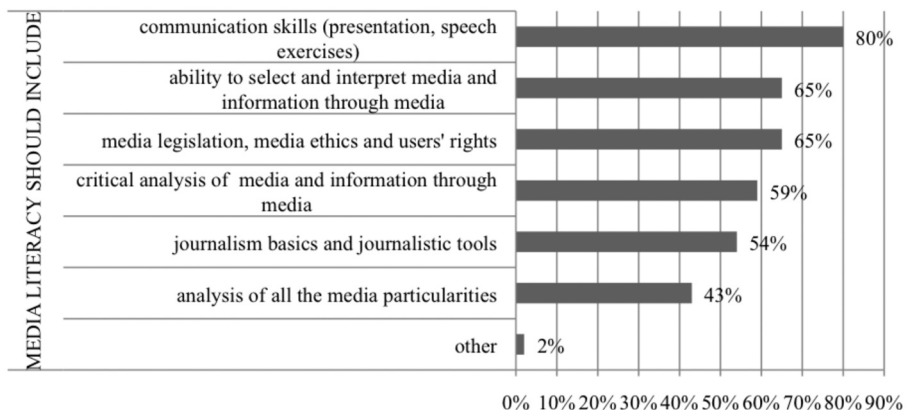
Respondents aged 16-19 believe, in the same proportion (46%), that media literacy in primary schools, should be a distinct subject or a part of extracurricular activities, while a majority of these respondents (75%) think that media literacy in secondary school should be a distinct subject, contrary to identical percentage (12.5%) of those who support media literacy as a part of other subjects or extracurricular activities. When it comes to media literacy as a part of university education, a majority (55%) claim that it should be an optional course.

In the age group 20-29, the results are noticeably different. The largest percentage of respondents (more than 50%) believe that media literacy should be a part of extracurricular activities in both primary and secondary schools, while only 13% of respondents gave the same answer for university education (as opposed to 29% of younger respondents) because 68% see media literacy as an optional course.

It is interesting to notice that there were no respondents in that category (20-29) who said that media literacy shouldn't be a part of university education, while 3% of respondents aged 16-19 gave such answer.

Chart 3 Respondents' opinion on the content of media literacy

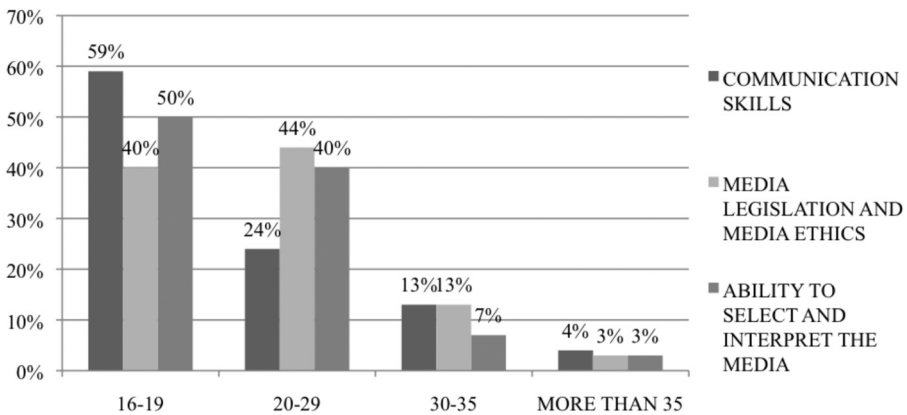
Grafikon 3. Mišljenje ispitanika o sadržaju medijske pismenosti



A majority of respondents gave more than one possible answer to a question about the competences that media literacy should provide. Thus, 80% of respondents believe media literacy should comprise communication skills, while 65% of respondents think media literacy should also include media legislation, media ethics and users' rights, as well as providing individuals with an ability to select and interpret information through media. In total, 59% state that media literacy should enable critical analysis of media and information through the media. Difference, however, lies in a perception of competences, according to age. The difference between secondary school students and faculty students, who form the majority of respondents, is the most noticeable. When it comes to communication skills, almost 60% of respondents ages 16-19 have stated that they should exist as a part of media literacy. Only 24% of respondents aged 20-29 share their opinion. Only 24% of respondents aged 20-29 share their opinion.

Chart 4 The most frequent respondents' answers about media literacy competences according to age

Grafikon 4. Najčešći odgovori ispitanika o razini medijske pismenosti prema dobi



Media legislation, as well as ability to select and interpret the media and information through media, media ethics and users' rights, are the topics that, according to respondents' opinion, should be included in media literacy. Opinions on this matter are identical between respondents in the age group from 16 to 19, and respondents in the age group from 20 to 29.

Conclusion

Media and information literacy are crucial skills of today's digital age. This is also emphasized by Nada Zgrabljic Rotar's theory which points out that the newest age is already one step ahead the media literacy and, therefore, there is a request for „digital literacy that would enable citizens to have knowledge about the new media and technologies, for they have influence on their everyday work, education, health and free time.“ (Zgrabljic Rotar, 2005: 6). In spite of constant exposure to media and increased time spent consuming media, young users are still not experts and need help in understanding the media and selecting media contents.

The importance of parents in the context of media and every other education is unquestionable; however, the role of schools and teachers is also of great importance, as they have influence on development and mind of a young person. Negative effects of media are often mentioned, but media can also be proactive and prosocial, if duly and moderately used.

The implementation of media and information literacy into educational process is a logical consequence in society the image of which is largely formed by media.

The young population recognizes the importance of media literacy as the participants show a great interest in seminars on media. They attend them mostly to receive free additional education (74%), out of curiosity (59%), but also out of belief that the acquired knowledge will help them in each upcoming stage of life; new personal as well as professional experiences (46% of respondents expressed their belief that the seminars would help them with employment). Although they have had no media literacy within formal education (answer given by 43% of respondents), a majority (89%) consider media literacy to be a necessity (most of them believe that, in primary school, media literacy should exist as a part of extracurricular activities/projects/workshops (50%), in secondary school – as a distinct subject (50%), and in universities as an optional course (61%). The respondents also proved to have a clear image of what they want to hear, as well as of competences they do not have but want to gain. A majority of respondents lack communication skills (80%) and the ability to select and interpret information through media, but also knowledge of media legislation, media ethics and their rights as users (65%).

Until media literacy gets a more significant role in formal education, what matters is the role of informal organizations with professional individuals who can provide knowledge necessary for the easier management of media and contents they offer.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ James Potter writes that relative lack of attention to media education in the United States is a serious problem because the United States is the most media-saturated country in the world. In: Potter, W.J. (2011) *Media literacy*. Los Angeles [etc.]: SAGE
- ² Mikić, K. Mediji, odgoj i obrazovanje. Available on the website: <http://kresimirmikic.com/?p=175> (15 May 2014)
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ From 21 September 2012 to 21 September 2013 the Graphic Art School in Zagreb was the holder of the IPA project called “The Media Literacy for the 21st Century” worth 189.000 euros (partners in the project were School of Natural Sciences and Graphic Art in Rijeka and Telecentar Zagreb). The results of the project were 33 trained teachers in the ICT field, three Digital photography, video and sound manuals and two fully equipped multimedia classrooms which were also used to organize the seminars. Available on the website: : <http://www.ss-graficka-zg.skole.hr/ipa-projekt.html> (15 May 2014)
- ⁶ In terms of education, we wanted to separate the respondents who are still in the process of education from those who are no longer a part of the formal education system. Also, it was concluded that it is necessary to examine whether the respondents are employed or not, because, due to the difficult economic situation and especially the large number of unemployed among the young generations, it was assumed that a large number of unemployed respondents took advantage of a free additional education and enrolled in seminars because they assumed it could help them in their employment. According to the date of Croatian Employment Service in April of 2014 the highest number of unemployed persons in Croatia was in the age groups 20-24 (48.989) and 25-29 (48.305). In: Barić, M. & Bulić, B. (editors) (2014) *Mjesečni statistički bilten*, godina XXVII. Zagreb : Hrvatski zavod za zapošljavanje. Available on the website: http://www.hzz.hr/UserDocsImages/stat_bilten_04_2014.pdf (15 May 2014)
- ⁷ IPA program is unified EU pre-accession program for Croatia for the 2007-2013 period. The main objective of the IPA assistance to candidate countries is to prepare them for the use of the Cohesion Fund and Structural funds. IPA Components are: 1. Transition Assistance and Institution Building, 2. Cross-border Cooperation, 3. Regional Development – Transport, Environment, Regional Competitiveness, 4. Human Resources Development, 5. Rural Development. Available on the website: <http://www.safu.hr/hr/oprogramima-eu/ipa> (15 May 2014)

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Uloga udruge „VANG“ u medijskom opismenjavanju mladih

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SAŽETAK

S obzirom na nedostatak predmeta ili kolegija koji bi, unutar formalnog obrazovanja u Hrvatskoj, medijski opismenjavo djecu od prvog razreda osnovne škole do fakulteta, postoji golem „neformalni“ prostor u kojemu medijski stručnjaci, teoretičari, medijski djelatnici te nevladine udruge imaju mogućnost prenošenja svojih znanja i vještina na nove generacije. Cilj je rada prikazati kako i zašto jedna neprofitna udruga mlade educira o medijima te kakve rezultate ostvaruje kod polaznika. Udruga VANG (Val nove generacije) okuplja nekadašnje i aktualne medijske djelatnike, stručnjake i teoretičare. Na specijaliziranim seminarima zajedno s gostima predavačima u suradnji s Grafičkom školom, mlade u dobi od 14 do 35 upoznaju sa specifičnostima i načinom funkcioniranja medija te novinarstvom u novinama, na radiju, televiziji i internetu. Zainteresiranost polaznika i različite škole koje pohađaju jest indikativna. Na seminare se prijavljuju srednjoškolci i studenti, od Škole za primalje do Fakulteta političkih znanosti. Dodatni je to pokazatelj velike potrebe za uvođenjem predmeta u redovitu nastavu u sklopu kojeg bi se mlade pripremalo na život s medijima. Metoda istraživanja jest anketa s kombinacijom pitanja zatvorenog i otvorenog tipa. Postavljena će pitanja biti razvrstana u četiri grupe. Prve tri grupe pitanja zatvorenog su tipa: osnovni podaci o ispitanicima (dob, spol, obrazovanje); kako su saznali za seminare koje organizira udruga VANG te motivi zbog kojih su se prijavili za sudjelovanje; njihova razmišljanja o medijskoj pismenosti (što ona uključuje i na koji bi se način trebala inkorporirati u formalno/neformalno obrazovanje). Zadnja grupa pitanja ostavit će prostor za njihova iskustva (znanja i vještine koje su usvojili na seminarima i njihova primjena u svakodnevnom životu) te praktične preporuke i sugestije koje imaju za stručnjake s područja medijske pismenosti i mjerodavne zakonodavce. Budući da udruga VANG nakon svakog održanog seminara provodi evaluaciju u obliku anketnog upitnika, znamo da polaznici vrlo pozitivno reaguju na rad udruge, predavače i teme seminara koji se održavaju. S obzirom na njihovo neposredno iskustvo s medijskom pismenošću, vjerujemo kako bi njihovi odgovori, kao i iskustva i sugestije, mogli pružiti nezamjenjiv uvid u navedenu problematiku.

Ključne riječi: Udruga VANG, medijsko opismenjavanje mladih, anketa

