

Editorial

The topic of the present issue of our journal is media literacy. We have already carried occasional contributions on this topic, but this time the entire issue is devoted to media literacy in view of the topical importance of this subject and its significance for a variety of international institutions concerned with human communication rights, in particular the rights of children. In addition to media literacy, the scholars in the field use also the terms “media education” and “education for communication”. The three terms do not refer to the same concepts, nor is the term “media literacy” used in the same way in different countries. Still, this new segment of communication science is gradually developing into a scholarly discipline in its own right, with a number of shared assumptions and objectives:

1. We live in the media world, and the media use a specific media language. If we are to understand them, the knowledge of reading and writing is not sufficient – we need media literacy.
2. Media literacy consists in the acquisition of different kinds of knowledge and skills, an ability to access the media in order to analyze, evaluate and transmit certain content through them.
3. Parents and teachers need media literacy to talk about such things with their children and to act as members of civil society in the design of media policies. Children need it to develop an awareness of their media habits and to acquire a critical attitude towards negative media content, in line with UNESCO’s 1982 Declaration on Media Education.
4. The media as such are neither harmful nor useful. They are a great potential for cultural progress and enrichment of knowledge; but they are at the same time a possible source of fear and frustration.
5. Politicians, law makers, media owners, media professionals and journalists must respect the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child and must take an ethical stand on the portrayal of children in the media and the rights of children to grow in an environment that will not harm their physical and mental development.

Croatia ratified the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992 and thereby it assumed the obligation to respect and protect children’s rights, including media rights, specified in Articles 3, 16 and 17 of the Convention. Several initiatives have been taken since the year 2000 to assess the media policy standards for children in Croatia, as well as to determine the future course of action in this field. An expert working group for children and the media has been established within the National Institute for the Protection of

the Family, Motherhood and Youth in Zagreb. The group has prepared a document on *The fundamental guidelines for the preparation of the media policy strategy for children and children's media education* (project directors Dr. Dijana Bouillet and Dr. Nada Zgrabljic). The working group (project director Nada Zgrabljic) then drafted the priorities until 2005, dealing with the protection of children's media rights and media literacy in Croatia, as its contribution to the revision of the national programme for children in the Republic of Croatia. There have been some attempts to introduce media literacy programmes in Croatia in conjunction with the project *Education for peace and human rights in Croatian primary schools* (1997—1999), which was adopted as the starting point for the National Programme of Education for Human Rights in 1998. However, as far as media literacy was concerned, this remained just an attempt. Media literacy has not found its way in the curricula of higher, secondary and primary education; there are no teachers of this subject, nor are there suitable textbooks for this purpose. Furthermore, the media policy strategy for children, that is, the child as a media consumer and as an object in the media, has not been clearly defined. The media laws regulating this subject have been sublegislated. The professional self-regulation by journalists is provided for in the Code of Honour, which contains detailed ethical rules on the conduct of journalists in relation to children. However, the control mechanisms that would force journalists to live by the Code of Honour are inadequate. As regards media production for children in Croatia, it remains unsatisfactory in both quantitative and qualitative terms and fails to meet the needs of Croatian children in the process of their socialization and identity development. This is particularly important in view of the global media trends towards the ever greater homogenization of personal and cultural values.

The schools – from the first to the eighth grade – deal with the media only in passing, as part of the subject Croatian Language and Literature. Under the heading “media culture”, children learn about film and television genres, theatre, and modes of message transmission – by comic strips, posters, and the mass media. Such an approach is far from the modern concept of media literacy, which responds in much more complex ways to the commercial thrust of the media and the impact that radio, television, the Internet, and other media may have on the children's lives, either in the positive or negative sense.

Croatia's media policy should strengthen the protection of children's rights. Researchers should pay much more attention to the content of the Croatian media and the reception of this content, especially where violence, pornography, stereotypes, and commercial advertising are concerned. Such research should underpin the national education and media policies. The Croatian government and parliament have at their disposal various provisions and recom-

recommendations of international organizations (United Nations, UNESCO, Council of Europe) regarding the best legislation for the protection of the rights of children in the media.

The present issue of *Media Research* carries several papers devoted to media literacy from different perspectives, thus illustrating the wide range of possible action – from the family, through the scholarly community, to various professions, such as advertisers and media policy makers, with their professional codes of conduct.

In her paper entitled “The media in children’s leisure time: Communicating media content”, Vlasta Ilišin reports the findings of her research and shows that the Croatian children, like those in the rest of the developed world, spend most of their free time with the media, mostly television (about four hours a day), and are often exposed to harmful influences, such as stereotypes, violence and pornography. The author thinks that children need more conversation about the media contents. Although such contents are among the most frequent topics of conversation with their peers, they are rather neglected in communication with their parents and, one might add, their teachers.

Zala Volčić’s contribution is entitled “Who wants to be a media literate? Locating media research methods and applying them to the ‘media literacy’ concept”. To show the differences in the understanding of media literacy, she interviewed 12 students from the United States, Norway and Japan. Using the quantitative analysis method, the author concludes that there are essentially two ways to understand this concept – explicit and implicit – but it is always understood as a positive category. The author advocates the development of a new education strategy that would result in an active and intelligent use of the media.

Marijana Hameršak’s paper on “Advertising childhood: Talks about production”, using the ethnographic method of unstructured conversations with the producers of advertisements, focuses on the cultural studies concept of advertising discourse to answer the many questions that arise in connection with children and the media. The study of advertising for children, together with the study of violence in media contents, is a very popular pursuit. The media literacy concept stimulates research, as it is believed that this is the best way to define the needs and rights of children in a media environment. On the basis of such research, international institutions issue recommendations and declarations to assist national governments in drafting their media policies with regard to children. The intention is to raise the democratic standards of media policy to the level of already achieved in the sphere of human rights and to ensure a fair competition between advertisers, the media, and children as consumers of media content. This is important in view of the fact that advertising – as noted

by interviewed parents – has a strong impact on children. Advertising (and stereotypes) affect socialization and identity building in children. Advertisers, for their part, seek to influence children as consumers of their media products and thus gain control of the teenager market.

Franc Trček's paper entitled "E-Slovenia: A critical analysis of the social and spatial dimensions of informatization" gives a survey of the present level of informatization in Slovenia and presents the author's vision of urban design of cyberspace. At the same time, he stresses the need for systematic education of all levels of society in the use of computers and the internet as a necessary precondition for progress in informatization. Although the paper shows the importance of democratization of media literacy, it is important to note that media literacy should not be confined to this one dimension but would rather require the kind of education and media policies that will ensure universal lifelong education for both the printed and electronic media.

Regardless of their different starting points, all of the contributors to the present issue of *Media Research* agree on the need for a social strategy of media literacy for all age groups, both for informatization as such and for the understanding of other public media, such as the printed media, radio and television. Education for literacy means a continuous acquisition of a variety of life and cognitive skills. Since the role of teachers in this is of primary importance, a course in media literacy should be part of the curricula for future teachers. All the available social resources and professionals must take part in the design of such curricula. The media and education are two social discourses that will determine our future more than anything else. For this reason, we need a political culture that will pay due attention to this issue and adopt appropriate legislation.

We wish to thank all the contributors to this issue and invite others to send their papers for publication. We are particularly keen to receive contributions from young researchers in the communicative science and discourse in Croatia and thus contribute to an effective exchange of scholarly information. We are looking forward to receiving your comments, suggestions or criticism.

Nada Zgrabljic, Editor-in-Chief