ARGUING FOR A CONTEXTUAL APPROACH TO EUROPEAN MEDIA EDUCATION RESEARCH

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PREGLEDNI RAD / UDK 316.774:37(4), 791.43:37.036(4), 316.774:8(4) / PRIMLJENO: 05.07.2012.

ABSTRACT *In this article, we focus on how various historical, contextual, and idiosyncratic factors shape the aims and methods of current European media educational practice. We start by briefly situating the history of European media education research and policymaking. We then discuss in more detail three important strands of media literacy initiatives within the Flemish Community (Belgium). While each of these diverging types of media education partly mirrors broader trends in European media research and policymaking, their aims and instructional methods also reveal the specificity of the Flemish media literacy context. In our discussion, we draw upon these findings to pinpoint a number of key determinants which may help to better understand similarities and differences within the European Union.*

KEY WORDS

MEDIA EDUCATION, MEDIA LITERACY, FILM EDUCATION, YOUTH MEDIA PRODUCTION, ONLINE RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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PREGLEDNI RAD / UDK 316.774:37(4), 791.43:37.036(4), 316.774:8(4) / PRIMLJENO: 05.07.2012.

The importance of media education has long been recognised at the international level, from the 1982 UNESCO Grünwald Declaration to the 2007 Paris agenda[1]. During the last decade the European Commission, European Council and the European Parliament also initiated a number of consultations, studies, resolutions, directives, recommendations, and a communication which have given media literacy and media education a more established place on the European policy agenda.

The increased attention in media literacy and media education at the European level is also felt in policies and educational practices in individual Member States. However, as previous research has shown, there are many contextual differences in the general approach to media literacy and in the kinds of learning environments media educators deem most fruitful to attain particular learning outcomes (Martens, 2010; Kubey, 1998, 2003; Buckingham, 2003). In this article, we focus on how various historical, contextual, and idiosyncratic factors shape the aims and methods of media educational practice. We start by briefly situating the history of European media education research and policymaking. Subsequently, we discuss in more detail three important strands of media literacy initiatives within the Flemish Community (Belgium). In particular, we will show (a) how current Flemish media education frameworks are, as in several other European countries, still largely reminiscent of a long tradition of film education, (b) how the increased availability of cheap and easy to use audiovisual production technologies has stimulated media organisations to integrate multimedia production activities in their work, and (c) how more recent media literacy initiatives have shifted their focus from audiovisual media to risks and opportunities in an online environment. While each of these types of media educational practices partly mirrors broader trends in European media research and policymaking, their aims and methods also reveal the specificity of the Flemish media literacy context. In our discussion, we draw upon these findings to pinpoint a number of key determinants which may help to better understand similarities and differences within the European Union.

BRIEF HISTORY OF EUROPEAN MEDIA EDUCATION RESEARCH

European media education has a long history both inside and outside academia, most notably in the UK. For instance, in the 1930s-1950s, key organisations such as the Society for Education in Film and Television (SEFT) and the British Film Institute (BFI) Education Department began operating across a wide spectrum of activities connecting film and children. In those days, *film appreciation* was used as a loose expression to describe a variety of educational practices ranging from training children's tastes to more advanced study of the style and structure of a particular film (Bolas, 2009).

Some point out that *film education* was, in its earliest manifestation,

[1] See Carlsson et al., 2008.

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education against the media; its function to encourage pupils to develop discrimination, fine judgment, and taste by grasping the basic differences between the timeless values of authentic 'high' culture (in which teachers were themselves initiated) and the debased, anti-cultural values of largely commercial mass media (Masterman, 1997: 20-21).

In any case, developments in film theory have long played a decisive role in the media education movement. For instance, in the 1950s, the emergence in France of a corpus of serious critical writing around the journal *Cahiers du Cinema* convinced a generation of teachers to see value in the work of particular film directors who could be seen as genuine authors. In this way, discrimination became something to be exercised not against but within the media.[2] In the late 1960s and 1970s, at a time when the mass audience for cinema was declining, film education was gradually reframed as *screen education* to include television, and later as *media education* in the 1980s and the 1990s to include the whole spectrum of print, audiovisual, and online media (Bolas, 2009; Kubey, 1997; Masterman, 1997).

The historical development of media education is often synthesised as a gradual move beyond cultural, moral, and political defensiveness, whereby popular culture was slowly recognised as valid and worthy of consideration in the primary and secondary school curriculum. What grew out of long-standing concerns about negative effects of mass media on children and adolescents evolved into a less protective approach that aims to develop young people's conceptual understanding of, and participation in contemporary media culture (Buckingham, 1986, 1996, 1998a, 2003; Masterman, 1997). In this view, media education is now no longer seen as a 'solution' to 'problems' caused by the media, because of their (so-called) lack of cultural value, or because these media (allegedly) convey hidden ideologies and/or promote undesirable behaviour. Rather, media educators should design media analysis or media production activities which focus on a number of 'key concepts' or 'key aspects' – such as production, language, representation, and audience – in order to help young people make decisions on their own behalf, without ignoring the importance of their enjoyment and pleasure in the media (Bazalgette, 1992; Buckingham, 1990, 1998a, 2003; Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 1994; Burn and Durran, 2007; Masterman, 1980, 1985).

In line with on-going developments in an increasingly digitalised environment, scholars more recently started to redefine the purpose of media education. To be sure, the comprehensive set of conceptual skills which enable individuals to understand how reality is inevitably constructed or represented by media through the interaction of a production process, a media message, and an audience has not lost much of their initial relevance (Buckingham, 2007a, 2007b; Potter, 2004, 2009; Hobbs, 2011). However, these conceptual understandings were typically included in a broader set of media literacy skills and competences which should enable individuals *to access, analyse, evaluate, and create* the full variety of offline and online media messages (Livingstone, 2004, 2008; Livingstone et al., 2004; Livingstone et al., 2005). For instance, while barriers in *access* now pose relatively few problems for print and audiovisual media (at least in developed countries), the digital divide is (still) a much debated research and policy topic (DiMaggio et al., 2004;

[2] See also Hall and Whannel, 1969.

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Norris, 2001). In addition, it can be argued that the proliferation and commercialisation of digital media channels "puts universal participation in a shared culture and the provision of free-to-all public service content back on the agenda" (Livingstone, 2004: 5-6). As far as *analysis* and *evaluation* are concerned, internet researchers have additionally emphasised the importance of skills that are operational (ability to read and write texts, view, listen to, and make audiovisual programs, operate computers and programs), informational (skills to search, select, and process information), and strategic (the capacities to use these sources as the means for specific goals and for the general goal for improving one's position in society) (van Deursen and van Dijk, 2010a, 2010b; Van Dijk, 2005, 2006; van Dijk and Hacker, 2003). These online skills not only relate to different levels of digital inclusion, they also mediate the relationship between demographic variables and people's experience of online risks and opportunities (Livingstone and Helpser, 2007, 2010). Finally, although media users have long been receivers rather than senders of audiovisual media messages, technological developments have made content *creation* in a participatory culture easier than ever. Nonetheless, there is good evidence that what people do online is far less creative than often suggested (Buckingham, 2010; Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2009; Livingstone and Helsper, 2010).

EUROPEAN POLICYMAKING

At first sight, the current state of European policymaking strongly resonates with this comprehensive approach to media education. To give one obvious example, the European Commission currently defines media literacy as

the competence to access the media, to understand and to have a critical approach towards different aspects of media contents, and to create communications in a variety of contexts. Media literacy relates to all media, including television and film, radio and recorded music, print media, the internet, and all other digital communication technologies.[3]

However, a more detailed review of recent European media literacy and media education initiatives reveals a much more eclectic and issue-driven path of development. Within this context, media literacy and media education are not so much framed as useful in their own terms, but rather as important elements in broader policy attempts to deal with a (sheer endless) range of media-related challenges in an information society.

AN ECLECTIC STARTING POINT

In the early 2000s, the European Commission became increasingly involved in media literacy issues. For example, it launched a series of workshops on media literacy and media education with participants from a wide range of European Member States.[4] In parallel with this, from 2002 till 2005, it financed about thirty media educational projects

[3] http://ec.europa.eu/culture/media/literacy/index_en.htm (08.12.2012).
[4] http://ec.europa.eu/culture/media/literacy (08.12.2012).

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within the framework of the European eLearning programme.[5] Both initiatives served to stimulate the exchange of knowledge and experiences amongst media educators from European Union member states. By the end of 2003, the European Commission more formally expressed its growing interest in (young) people's media-related knowledge and skills. In a communication (COM(2003) 784) about the future of the European regulatory audiovisual policy, the Commission argued that "the changing media landscape, resulting from new technologies and media innovation makes it necessary to teach children (and their parents) to use the media effectively. To know where to find information and how to interpret it nowadays represents an essential skill" (COM(2003) 784: 22).

From 2005 on, a number of recommendations, resolutions, and directives from the European Parliament and the European Council continued along diverging lines. For instance, in 2005, the European Parliament and the Council (2005/865/CE in OJ L 323, 09.12.2005) recommended Member States to improve preservation and exploitation of the European film heritage and to remove obstacles for the development and full competitiveness of the European film industry by, amongst other things, fostering and promoting film studies and media literacy in education at all levels. In 2006, the European Parliament asked the Council and the Commission to develop and implement media literacy programs in order to promote active and aware citizenship in Europe (OJ C 193E, 17.08.2006). That same year, within the context of the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting (OJ C 296E, 06.12.2006), the European Parliament urged the Member States, in the aim to avoid new forms of exclusion, and in particular the digital divide, to ensure that efforts would be made to educate the public about digital technologies and about the possibilities to take advantage of the benefits of the information society. At the same time, it asked the European Commission to produce a communication on media literacy. Again in 2006, in order to encourage the take-up of technological developments the European Parliament and the Council recommended Member States to promote

action to enable minors to make responsible use of audiovisual and on-line information services, notably by improving the level of awareness among parents, teachers and trainers of the potential of the new services and of the means whereby they may be made safe for minors, in particular through media literacy or media education programs and, for instance, by continuous training within school education (2006/952/EC in OJ L 378, 27.12.2006: 74).

Finally, late 2007 in Directive 2007/65/EC the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union asked the European Commission to submit a report on the levels of media literacy in all Member States no later than December 2011, and every three years thereafter (OJ L 332, 18.12.2007, later codified in Directive 2010/13/EU the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, OJ L 95, 15.04.2010).

STREAMLINING THE EU STRATEGY

As should be clear at this point, European Union policymaking on media literacy and media education has from the start been rather eclectic, covering a wide range of issues

[5] http://ec.europa.eu/education/archive/elearning (08.12.2012).

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ranging from eLearning, film heritage, and the competitiveness of the European film industry, to active citizenship in a European information society, the digital divide, and minors' ability to make responsible use of audiovisual and online information services.

While each of these issues is still relevant today, the European Commission eventually sought to prioritise (and streamline) some of its activities. In a 2007 communication (COM(2007) 833), the European Commission set out the contours of a European approach to media literacy in the digital environment. Much more in line with the academic literature, media literacy was now defined as "the ability to access the media, to understand and to critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media contents and to create communication in a variety of contexts" (COM(2007) 833: 3). In addition, it is argued that a European approach to media literacy should relate to all media. Thus, the various levels of media literacy not only include "feeling comfortable with all existing media from newspapers to virtual communities", but also "better exploiting the potential of media for entertainment, access to culture, intercultural dialogue, learning and daily-life applications", "having a critical approach to media as regards both quality and accuracy of content", and "using media creatively, as the evolution of media technologies and the increasing presence of the Internet as a distribution channel allow an ever growing number of Europeans to create and disseminate images, information and content" (COM(2007) 833: 3).[6]

Arguably, this framework is still quite vague. Nonetheless, in its media literacy communication, the European Commission also assembled (most of) these media literacy levels into two diverging types of best practices. On the one hand, media literacy education is explicitly framed as an effective means to provide better awareness and knowledge about European film heritage, especially to young European audiences, and to increase interest in these and more recent European films. Within this context, media literacy initiatives should promote the acquisition of audiovisual media production and creativity skills, and help European citizens understand the importance of copyright, which in turn should further strengthen the quality and the competitiveness of the European audiovisual industry.[7] On the other hand, media literacy is proposed as an important tool to increase inclusion and awareness in a rapidly evolving information society. Here, media literacy education should empower (young) audiences to critically assess (online) commercial content and make informed decisions. At the same time, it should ensure that the information society benefits (such as the efficient use of search engines, internet radio, multimedia digital libraries, and so forth) can be enjoyed by everyone, especially by people who are already disadvantaged economically or physically.[8]

[6] See also the Council conclusions on a European approach to media literacy in a digital environment (OJ C 140, 06.06.2008) and the opinion of the Committee of the Regions (OJ C 325, 19.12.2008).

[7] Again see the recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on film heritage and the competitiveness of related industrial activities (OJ L 323, 09.12.2005), the MEDIA 2007 programme (OJ L 327, 24.11.2006), as well as a more recent report (to be finished in December 2012) launched by the European Commission which should identify and analyse the existing situation concerning film literacy in Europe http://ec.europa.eu/culture/media/literacy/studies).

[8] Again see the Television without Frontiers directive (OJ C 193 E, 17.08.2006), the resolution on the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting (OJ C 296 E, 6.12.2006), the recommendation on the protection of minors and human dignity (OJ L 378, 27.12.2006), and the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (OJ L 95, 15.04.2010), but also the Safer Internet (COM(2006) 663) and the Safer Internet Plus Program (COM(2009) 64).

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This twofold approach was again affirmed in the most recent Commission recommendation (C(2009) 6464) which mainly focused on how media literacy in a digital environment may contribute to both a competitive audiovisual industry and an inclusive knowledge society. Here, the Commission on one hand recommends that Member States enhance their efforts to improve awareness of national and European audiovisual heritage through national awareness-raising campaigns aimed at citizens. On the other hand, trainings, information days, and the distribution of information packs should ensure an increased awareness of online opportunities and risks in today's information society, especially amongst children, adolescents, parents, teachers, media professionals, and the elderly (see also European Parliament resolution 2010/C 45 E/02 on media literacy in a digital world (OJ C 45E, 23.02.2010) and the Council conclusions OJ C 301/09 on media literacy in the digital environment (OJ C 301, 11.12.2009).

TEACHING AND LEARNING ABOUT MEDIA IN THE FLEMISH COMMUNITY

Trends in European media education research and European Union policymaking are certainly useful to understand the state of media education across European countries and regions. However, how media education looks in practice is also largely determined by contextual and idiosyncratic factors which are likely to be different amongst different European Member States. To substantiate this point, we will describe in more detail three dominant strands of Flemish media literacy practice. While each of them partly resembles broader trends at the European level, these cases also illustrate how the appropriation of European policymaking is conditional on the specificity of the national or regional context.

Film Education

Within the Flemish Community, a large number of non-profit initiatives aim to make art house films accessible to young people. In terms of instructional methods, they provide opportunities for schools to attend a variety of film screenings. They also develop pedagogical film dossiers on film content and film style which can easily be used in a classroom context. In the main, these non-profit organisations are subsidised by the Flemish Government as audiovisual arts or arts educational organisation under the Arts Decree[9] or as youth work organisation under the Decree on conducting a Flemish policy on youth and children's rights[10].

To give one notable example, *Lessen in het Donker (Lessons in the Dark)* compiles a yearly list of non-mainstream films which are considered relevant (by the organisation's programming team) for discussion in a classroom context, for both reasons of content and style. As indicated by the programme coordinator, "our main purpose is to make children familiar with various aspects of the medium film, and to introduce them to a type of film that is somewhat distinct from their everyday media consumption patterns" (Tine Van

[9] See Belgian Official Journal - BS 06.07.2004: 54065 and BS 14.08.2008: 43407.
[10] See Belgian Official Journal - BS 26.09.2008: 50149 and BS 17.01.2011: 3043.

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Dycke, personal communication, May 8, 2007). To organise its film education activities, *Lessen in het Donker* has build up a network of over 50 local film exhibitors (varying from commercial and art house cinemas, to cultural, arts and community centres). This enables schools all over the Flemish Community to attend a film screening nearby. In collaboration with akin organisations such as *Jekino Educatie (Jekino Education)* and *Open Doek Filmfestiva (Open Curtain Film Festival),* an educational dossier is prepared for each of these films. Teachers who wish to participate in the programme are expected to use this material to briefly introduce the film to the pupils beforehand, and to discuss a variety of issues of both content and style afterwards. Every year, about 80,000 pupils from Flemish primary (age 6 to 12) and secondary education (age 12 to 18) participate in a *Lesson in the Dark* film activity[11]. According to a Flemish policy report, 66% of schools participate in this (or a similar) type of film educational activity two or three times a year (Goegebuer, 2004).

From a historical point of view, the existence of Flemish (and Belgian) film education has long been informed by concerns about (alleged) negative effects of mass media in general and Hollywood cinema in particular, because of a perceived lack of aesthetic value or the depiction of violent or sexual content. For instance, in 1947, the Belgian *Katholieke Filmaktie (Open Curtain Film Festival)* founded CEDOC, the *Centrale Dienst voor Onderwijs- en Cultuurfilm (Central Service of Educational and Cultural Film)*. Together with the *Katholiek Filmcentrum (Catholic Film Centre)*, the *Katholieke Filmkeuring (Catholic Film Censorship Board)*, the *Documentatiecentrum voor de Cinematografische Pers (Documentation Center for the Cinematographic Press)* and the *Katholieke Filmliga (Catholic Film League)*, this film educational service was part of a much broader struggle of the Catholic Church against the 'moral decline' in 'bad' cinema (Biltereyst, 2007). In these early days, motion pictures were mainly perceived as symbolising the excrescences of modern society. Therefore, CEDOC invested heavily in developing alternative film programmes, providing schools with up-to-date projection material, organising workshops for teachers and courses for pupils, and publishing film educational brochures, articles, and books, which could all help "to prevent the passive and uncritical subordination to film viewing" (CEDOC, 1956: 61). Moreover, it was thought to be "irrefutable that children and adults who are not warned, and who lack the ability to make an informed judgment, will imitate the habits of their heroes on the silver screen. Their unprotected soul will often be not capable to discriminate between true and false, between good and bad, which tend to mix up in motion pictures" (CEDOC, 1955).

As we have suggested, European media education gradually moved beyond this type of cultural or moral defensiveness, and teaching about media became less a matter of resistance against popular culture (Buckingham, 1996, 1998a, 2003). However, in the Flemish Community at least, the notion that young people should be introduced to a film culture which differs from their everyday exposure to commercial Hollywood blockbusters has lost very little of its initial relevance (Bergala, 2006; Martens, 2009). Of course, over all these years, the early moral panics about film have largely faded away. As noted by the *Lessen in het Donker* programme coordinator, "it is not our aim to warn pupils

[11] In total, roughly 800,000 children and adolescents are officially registered in Flemish primary and secondary education. Thus, *Lesson in the Donker* reaches approximately 10% of the total student population.

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about the negative effects of motion pictures. We just consider film as a medium which is omnipresent in young peoples' everyday life. Therefore, they should learn to better understand its different facets."[12] Yet still, as suggested by the head of education at *Open Doek Filmfestival*, "for us, it is important to introduce pupils to a different type of films than the mainstream Hollywood cinema they typically know from television or from going to the movie theatre."[13] Or, to quote a former media educator at *Jekino Educatie*, "in many ways, the films we programme are American blockbuster's counterpart. In principle, we have no problem with the entertaining value of commercial films. However, we consider it useful to provide pupils with opportunities to get to know other films which have more difficulties to reach a large audience. Because most pupils are not used to see this type of films, it is also important to give them some background information, and to teach them about the different components of audiovisual language."[14]

In other words Flemish media education, mirroring European policy, is still partly conceived as a tool to increase young people's awareness of participation in a (European) film culture which largely differs from their everyday media experiences. This not only indicates that the Flemish Community partly differs from European countries and regions with a more developed tradition in media education. It also points to the continuing importance of contextual specificities. In particular, Flemish media educational activities have yet to find a strong foothold in the formal school curriculum. Therefore, the field is largely dominated by audiovisual arts or arts educational organisations which tend to have other priorities than teaching about the many facets of the full range of mass media. In particular, the legitimacy (and financial resources) for these kinds of organisations largely depends on the assumption that it is indeed useful to increase these pupils' enthusiasm for *another* type of (less commercial) cinema or audiovisual culture. Therefore, it seems rather unlikely that these initiatives will broaden their scope to include all kinds of popular culture.

Youth Media Production

While arts educational approaches to media education remain relatively important in the Flemish Community, the increasing availability of cheap multimedia technologies has gradually made it possible to complement traditional film analytical programmes with youth media production activities. This education strategy is well documented in the European media education literature; its aim typically is to design more practical audiovisual exercises which stimulate pupils to think in conceptual terms about the many decisions which have to be taken when using a particular media language to produce a media messages for a particular target audience (Hart, 2001; Buckingham, 2003; Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 1994).

One exemplary Flemish initiative with a media production component is *INgeBEELD* (*In pictures*), which was launched by *CANON Cultuurcel*, the cultural unit of the Flemish Department of Education. Within this four-part project, developed in collaboration

[12] Tine Van Dycke, personal communication, May 8, 2007.
[13] Greet Stevens, personal communication, April 23, 2007.
[14] Nele Gulinck, personal communication, May 2007.

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with several audiovisual arts, arts educational, and youth work organisations, *CANON* aimed to develop a programme on audiovisual training that was integrated horizontally (across curriculum) and vertically (from kindergarten to teacher training). *INgeBEELD 1* is an introductory media educational tool box for preschoolers and children in the first degree of primary education (age 4 to 8), the result of a close collaboration with *Jekino Educatie*. The package consists of a DVD with five short films and a booklet with audiovisual exercises and teaching tips. The main purpose is to actively introduce young children to the basic components of audiovisual language in a playful manner. These learning goals are explicitly tied to the expressive arts learning objectives (the so-called 'muzische vorming') in kindergarten and primary education[15]. In *INgeBEELD 2* several other social-cultural organisations joined *CANON Cultuurcel* and *Jekino* to develop a teaching module which is an in-depth study of the five basic components of audiovisual language: the shot, lighting, editing, sound, and graphic design. In the first phase (for children age 6 to 10), pupils actively experiment with each of these components separately in short audiovisual exercises. In the second phase (for children and adolescents age 10 to 14), these components are brought together in more elaborate audiovisual production activities[16]. *INgeBEELD 3* is an online module for pupils age 12 to 18. It offers a broad perspective on audiovisual channels and messages, focusing on, among other things, graphic design, sound and special effects, chat programs, VJing, video, photography, new media arts, and so forth. The website is structured around four modules (shopping centre, image chat, an image of the world, and mix and trix) and an Emergence Game. Each of the online assignments is linked to developmental objectives and attainment targets across the curriculum[17]. Lastly, *INgeBEELD 4* is an online learning environment for students in teachers training and for teachers. It includes both text and audiovisual materials and consists of four interlinked worlds: the world of neighbourhood TV, the world of inspiration, the world of perception, and the world of learning. The platform also showcases prior media trajectories in neighbourhoods and schools so that it can be used as a source of inspiration[18].

To some extent, this approach can again be linked to recent European policy discourse. As we have seen, media literacy initiatives are thought to be particularly suitable to promote the acquisition of audiovisual media production and creativity skills. Yet, while this viewpoint is indeed partly reflected in Flemish media educational practice, here again, the rationale behind the *INgeBEELD* project is more easily explained by contextual dynamics at the community level. Like most film education organisations, *INgeBEELD* and other similar initiatives tend to frame their aim and methods within broader frameworks of audiovisual arts, arts education, or youth work. Therefore, it is not surprising that these activities typically focus on the components of audiovisual language, rather than on various other relevant facets, such as the economy of mass media production or the individual and social determinants of mass media audiences. Within this context, the importance of forging creative expression as distinct from everyday experiences of the media is continuously emphasised. In other words, similar to the film analytical programmes,

[15] See http://www.platformrondmediawijsheid.be/ingebeeld1/.
[16] See http://www.platformrondmediawijsheid.be/ingebeeld2/
[17] See www.ingebeeld3.be.
[18] See www.ingebeeld.be (16.12.2012).

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media production strategies are seldom used to stimulate a more reflective usage of popular media messages. Rather, they serve to familiarise children and adolescents with *other* kinds of audiovisual culture.

Online Risks and Opportunities

In line with more general developments in European media education research and policymaking, recent Flemish policy documents reveal that current media literacy debates tend to focus on digital inclusion and safer internet issues. It is important to note that Flemish policy makers and practitioners have been rather late to pick up on this trend. Moreover, it is not yet clear if this recent enthusiasm will eventually translate into long-term policy engagements. Nonetheless, here again, we are able to identify some tendencies which reveal the complex interplay between a top-down European policy agenda and a bottom-up response driven by national and regional customs.

From a Flemish point of view, the dominant approach to *digital* media education is best illustrated by a recent policy note jointly published by the Flemish Minister of Media and Poverty Reduction and the Flemish Minster of Education, Youth, and Equal Opportunities (Lieten and Smet, 2012)[19]. As might be expected, in this particular context, media education comes primarily in a framework on online risks and opportunities. In particular, three key objectives are put forward. First of all, the document emphasises that our society is gradually evolving into "an information society in which handling technology and digital media is a basic competence. In addition, digital media offer a variety of opportunities to participate in society: from getting to know a varied and accessible media offer to the possibility to add (creative) content. Being able to autonomously function thus becomes a fundamental requirement to participate in society" (Lieten and Smet, 2012: 27). Secondly, an important aim of the Flemish media literacy policy is "to create an inclusive digital society. Equal opportunities for all citizens in an information society is an absolute priority. Because it is obvious that the increasing omnipresence and impact of technology and media not only brings along opportunities, but also risks. And third, the Flemish media literacy policy needs to create a safe online environment. "Nowadays, dealing with privacy issues is one of the main challenges, because technology makes it possible to make available private issues on a large scale on social network sites and databases. Cyber bullying is also a problem which requires engagement from all parties involved. New media channels bring along a number of requirements and questions relating to author's rights because they make it possible to easily download music, video, and e-books. Finally, parents are concerned about their children's video game use or have difficulties finding correct information" (Lieten and Smet, 2012: 28).

In Flanders, the organisation which perhaps most clearly subscribes to these objectives is *Child Focus*, the Belgian foundation for missing and sexually exploited children. With its *Clicksafe.be* services, it operates as the Belgian Safer Internet Centre

[19] See also Minister Lieten's 2009 policy note on Media (Parl. St. Vl. Parl., 2009-2010, nr. 209/1), the Flemish policy plan for Seniors (Parl. St. Vl. Parl. 2010-2011, nr. 686/1), the Flemish action plan on Poverty (Parl. St. Vl. Parl. 2009-2010, nr. 637/1), and the progress report of the Flemish action plan on Poverty (Parl. St. Vl. Parl. 2010-2011, nr. 1110/1) and Minister Smet's 2009 policy note Education (Parl. St. Vl. Parl. 2009-2010, nr. 202/1: 21) and on Youth (Parl. St. Vl. Parl. 2009-2010, nr. 203/1: 23).

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within the European Insafe/INHOPE network, which is funded under the framework of the European Commission's Safer Inter Programme.[20] All across Europe, these Safer Internet Centres have the responsibility to promote safe, responsible use of the internet and mobile devices to children, young people and their families and to identify and remove illegal content online. On one hand, this again illustrates how European policy makers are eager to streamline the media education field. On the other hand, each of these national Safer Internet Centres has to operate with diverging national and regional context, with different types of partners at their disposal. For instance, to achieve its goal to reach Flemish children and adolescents, *Child Focus* not only directly targets teachers in schools, but also closely collaborates with a number of youth work organisations which have a more established tradition in working with young people on (online) media. In parallel with this, *Child Focus* also participated in the development of the safe online environment launched by *Ketnet*, the Flemish public broadcast channel for children. Needless to say, the specific context in which these particular media literacy partnerships unfold, heavily shape the nature of Flemish media education as a whole. That is, while formal education may be in a good position to develop pupils' media-related knowledge skills, and attitudes, Flemish media literacy players such as *Child Focus* or *Ketnet* are more likely to focus on more basic awareness raising or on setting up an informal learning environment where children and adolescents can safely experiment which new media and social networks. In other words, as argued before, the aims and methods of media education are highly conditional on its particular context.

DISCUSSION

Throughout most of this article, we have described in much detail the current state of media education in the Flemish Community. Based on these findings, it becomes possible to pinpoint a number of key determinants which not only affect the state of European media education as a whole, but also how Member States give differential meaning to its core aims and methods.

First of all, as elsewhere in the world, European media education has closely followed historical media trends. As we have shown, its roots were closely associated with the early success of American narrative film as a global mass medium. However, during the last decades, cheap multimedia technologies increased possibilities to complement media analysis strategies with youth media production activities. More recently, the steep rise of internet and mobile access forced media educators to further reconsider their initial aims and methods. Furthermore, what originally started as a moral crusade readily turned into a less protectionist movement which focused on the various facets of all kinds of offline and online media. In this way, European media education can partly be distinguished from its North American counterpart, with its more defensive intentions to safeguard children and adolescents from potential negative effects of undue exposure to audiovisual media messages. To some extent, this relates to particular characteristics of the European media system, with its strong public broadcast tradition. Put somewhat differently, within the

[20] See www.saferinternet.eu (16.12.2012).

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hyper-commercial US media environment, there is perhaps more reason for panics about morals (Kubey, 1998, 2003). In any case, the relative importance of public institutions in the European public sphere is also felt in the wide range of non-profit and social-cultural organisations which are – each in their own way – involved in helping individuals to develop a more nuanced understanding of various facets of the media. To be sure, in a global media environment, the distinction between American and European media culture has become somewhat problematic. Yet still, even then, these types of historical and structural tendencies are likely to be of continuing importance.

Secondly, while trends in European research and policy agendas enable us to come up with a number of key characteristics of European media education as a whole, we have also identified a number of contextual specificities at the Flemish Community level which point to the many potential sources of variation within the European Union. At the most basic level, the relationship between European media education research and European policymaking seems somewhat problematic. For instance, we started by identifying a comprehensive set of media literacy skills which should help individuals to access, analyse, evaluate, and create the full variety of offline and online media messages. In contrast with this, European media literacy policies seemed much more eclectic and issue-driven, whereby media literacy and media education are seen as a means to raise awareness about the European film heritage on the one hand, and about safe and effective internet use on the other. It is probably fair to say that European countries with a more developed tradition in media education are more likely to fall on the former side of the education vs. awareness raising continuum. Most notably, in the UK, media education has found a strong foothold in secondary (and primary) schools with specialist examined courses in Media Studies and media education as an established dimension of mother language teaching (subject: English). Given its educational institutionalisation, questions about why media should be taught have become somewhat superfluous. Rather, media educators focus on more pressing pedagogical concerns, for instance about the horizontal or vertical integration of different aspects of media education across the curriculum.[21] Something similar holds for the Nordic countries, which not only play a leading role in the digital switchover, but are also on the forefront of media education developments.[22] By contrast, in the Flemish Community, a majority of teachers still point to the lack of financial means, the limited time in the teaching package, and the need for clear guidelines in the curriculum on how to teach about media and technology. In other words, Flemish media education has yet to make the transition from awareness-raising activities to more in-depth forms of media literacy education (Goegebuer, 2004, Bamford, 2007, Steyaert, Van Gompel, and Samyn, 2009). Furthermore, even within the structural limitations of Flemish media education, it is important to point to the variability in aims and methods depending on the particular frameworks under which specific media educational activities are funded. In particular, we have identified three divergent strands of Flemish media education practice. As we have seen, each of them embody different research and policy agendas, which in turn entails diverging expectations in terms of cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioural learning outcomes.

[21] See Buckingham, 2003; Burn and Durran, 2007.
[22] See Kotilainen and Arnolds-Grandlund, 2010, Livingstone et al. 2011.

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Thirdly, it is important to add that European media education in general, and Flemish media education in particular, have a rather choppy history. While we have traced the roots of media education far back in the previous century, its prominence on European policy agendas is a relatively recent phenomenon. On the positive side, this implies that the media education movement is still in a flexible phase, where aims and methods can easily be tailored to emerging challenges in a rapidly evolving digital environment. However, the obvious downside is that this puts recent media education initiatives in a relatively precarious position, because their near future is highly dependent on a limited number of political decisions. Needless to say, this makes it difficult (if not impossible) to develop a long term vision on how to prepare children and adolescents to be active citizens. Again, the Flemish Community is a good case in point. Until fairly recently, media literacy was fully absent from Flemish policy discourse and, at best was one of many ways to analyse the work of various social-cultural organisations that integrate media messages in their everyday activities. In a relatively short span of time, however, this has substantially changed. As we have suggested, this was partly due to a recent decision from the current Flemish government to put media literacy more clearly at the forefront of media-related policies. Yet still, given the limited amount of structural support, it is mostly through the (often idiosyncratic) commitments and activities of a (limited) number of non-governmental stakeholders that the Flemish media educational landscape will gradually have to unfold.

Regardless of the importance of these contingent elements, we have sought to disentangle a number of historical and contextual factors which may help to better understand these often unpredictable patterns. In our view, the European media education field is in need of much more detailed empirical descriptions. Clearly, policy research provides a good starting point to get a better grip of the various types of media education practice. Therefore, it would be useful to supplement our empirical work with similar research projects in other European countries and regions. In addition, there is an obvious need to replete this interpretive work with representative surveys which more systematically record expectations and experiences from media educational organisations, teachers, and parents. Finally, attempts to describe these aims and methods would ideally be complemented with research programmes which analyse and evaluate the learning outcomes associated with various types of media education. Only then it becomes possible to develop a nuanced view on the real-life importance of the so-called European media education movement.

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KONTEKSTUALNI PRISTUP ISTRAŽIVANJIMA O MEDIJSKOM OBRAZOVANJU U EUROPI

Hans Martens

SAŽETAK *U ovom radu autor je fokusiran na to kako različiti povijesni, kontekstualni i idiosinkrastički faktori oblikuju ciljeve i metode sadašnje europske prakse u medijskom obrazovanju. Na početku je ukratko izložena povijest istraživanja medijskog obrazovanja u Europi te stvaranje politike obrazovanja. Potom se detaljnije raspravlja o trima različitim pristupima medijskoj pismenosti u flamanskoj zajednici (Belgija). Svaki od tih pristupa u medijskom obrazovanju djelomice odražava šire trendove u europskim medijskim istraživanjima te u kreiranju politika. Zadani ciljevi i obrazovne metode u flamanskoj zajednici također otkrivaju specifičnosti njihova medijskog opismenjavanja. Autor na kraju povezuje nalaze o medijskom obrazovanju kako bi istaknuo ključne odrednice koje mogu pomoći pri boljem razumijevanju sličnosti i razlika unutar Europske unije.*

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

MEDIJSKO OBRAZOVANJE, MEDIJSKA PISMENOST, FILMSKO OBRAZOVANJE, MLADI I MEDIJSKA PRODUKCIJA, *ONLINE* RIZICI I MOGUĆNOSTI

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