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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN MEDIA COACH INITIATIVE IN PORTUGAL

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Abstract

The chapter illustrates the implementation of the training activities of the European Media Coach Initiative in Portugal by the project's national partner, the University Institute of Lisbon (ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa). The chapter begins with an introduction about media literacy in Portugal and highlights the European Media Coach Initiative goals in Portugal. Furthermore, it describes the methods used to develop the MediaCoach training in Portugal, including the preparation, implementation and key factors that contributed to its success. The training programs became more engaging by using an immersive approach through continuous learning and researching for up-to-date information and news about digital literacy issues. The project offered 7 courses and training, positively assessing and certifying 104 participants, but there were difficulties due to many dropouts in the training sessions. Overall, there was positive feedback on how the course challenged trainees to think beyond the box and prepared them with knowledge and skills applicable to today's technological society.

Introduction

The introduction of the European MediaCoach Initiative in Portugal has occurred in challenging times and environments. Digital and media literacy initiatives and policies in Portugal are characterised by their political commitment to keep up with European Commission policies, but at the same time, by the lack of consistency and resources to bring initiatives and policies into action. This has been happening amid a global trend that encompasses a paradigm shift towards a new media ecology dominated by digital technologies and platforms and their impact on traditional media.

The main concerns regarding the media sector public policies in Portugal are focused on further legislation and regulation, the revision of the legal framework, the relationship between the state, public service and the market, local and regional media public grants, media ownership and pluralism, in line with the European Commission guidelines for the liberalization of the Telecommunications sector. Notwithstanding, the past thirty years in the country are marked by the growth of privatisation processes, the market orientation of editorial policies and ownership concentration at the national level around a handful of media groups that have adopted cross-media and multimedia strategies with fewer mono-media groups that struggle to endure. This context has had an effect on the restructuring of the press and radio sectors, accompanied by the liberalization of television and telecommunications sectors.

The Internet penetration rate in Portuguese households was 84.5% in 2020 (in 2002, only 15.1%) and we witness a fast rate of mobile broadband adoption. The most frequent users are students and those who have already completed higher education. Unfortunately, considering people media literacy skill needs, the investment in infrastructures and equipment was not matched by an investment in formal education.

Despite the widespread use of internet and a general trend of change in digital literacy in the last decade, many initiatives have arisen primarily as a result of pressure from European legislation and the effort of academia. Schools in Portugal do not dispose of a dedicated budget or autonomy to implement media training. Some gaps were filled by civil society initiatives and private sector programmes, but most media-related projects and public policies followed a model to be able to use Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) equipment and not as much broader digital skills. In any case, those initiatives were small scale in reach and fragmented, as they did not follow a coherent public strategy. Therefore, the situation is typically characterized by resource fragmentation, doubling of efforts, dubious quality standards and a lack of assessment of resources and results. One factor that might explain this state of affairs is the absence of a clearly identifiable public authority or agency chosen to facilitate implementation, monitor and evaluate media literacy initiatives in Portugal.

Besides the absence of an overall strategy and a formal structure for media education in Portugal, another key concern is the lack of continuous training of teachers, educators and other professionals who work with children and youth. Furthermore, there is still much to be done regarding the public awareness of the need for media and digital literacy amid profound changes in the new media and informational ecology towards a networked communication model, with its impact in all facets of individuals' lives. As mentioned, notwithstanding an amorphous nature of the initiatives, the area of media and digital education has been generally growing in Portugal. Here resides the relevance of the implementation of the European MediaCoach Initiative to provide continuous training in the field of digital and informational literacy and to establish a multi-stakeholder network to discuss about the necessary strategies to be adopted in this field.

Media Literacy in Portugal

Portugal has a mixed record across the various dimensions of well-being, with high levels of vertical inequality in life satisfaction and revenue earnings. Internet is used mainly to communicate and access information. However, according to a survey of the National Statistics Agency (INE, 2020), it was mainly activities related to learning that registered the most significant increase: users who communicated with teachers or colleagues through educational portals (from 14.5% in 2019 to 30.8% in 2020) and who attended online courses (from 7.7% to 18.0%). Work at home was associated with the Covid pandemic: in the country 31.1% exercised their profession in telework (in Lisbon 43.2%).

It is only after 1995, that issues related to the information industry and society in Portugal were more steadily mentioned in government policies. The Portuguese initiative for creating an Information Society was based on the Program of the 13th Constitutional Government, which outlined the Government's intentions for the period 1995-1999. The Planning Options for 1996 launched the National Initiative for the Information Society, structured around four main axes: the school (Information Technologies in Education); the computerized company; local and regional public administration; and the availability of knowledge (libraries, museums, databases, research and development institutions). The Council of Ministers resolution, n^o. 16/96, approved on March 21, 1996, created the Mission for the Information Society (MSI) under the Ministry of Science and Technology. The main objectives of MSI were to prepare and support, in collaboration with all Ministries, the global and sectoral measures needed to carry out government programs for the development of the Information Society; and to identify international scenarios, at the technological and societal levels, that may have an impact on the development of the Information Society. In this context, Portugal has been developing policies and strategies for its implementation within the framework of the broader strategy of the European Union. The 'Green Book for the Information Society in Portugal,' published in 1997 by the Ministry of Science and Technology, was a landmark moment in the Portuguese strategy, it was the base to draft the subsequent national plan containing short and long-term steps for the creation of an Information Society in Portugal. It is also important to highlight later public policies, namely those that took place shortly after the passing of the millennium (2005-2011), a period publicly recognized as a “technological shock”. From that period, punctual and circumscribed studies emerged, which proposed to assess the impact of these policies, namely on children and education (Pereira and Melro, 2014). It should be noted that that much remains to be discovered about the effect on the lives of adults, including the consumption of information. Despite policies to promote access and digital inclusion, Pereira and Melro argued about a technocentric tendency supposedly generators of social and educational transformation.

They have duly valued the need of individual and community training to promote media literacy skills, not limited to access and technical skills but also enlarged to encompass “creation/production, interaction, critical thinking, the ability to select and evaluation, the expression and participation of citizens” (2014, p. 34).

Furthermore, due to political changes and structural and economic constraints in the country, it should be noted that the “technological shock”, was not accompanied by comprehensive and systematic assessment processes to allow the collection of information on impacts of the adopted (Lapa and Vieira, 2019). If ongoing programs are noteworthy, many of them with support or European funding, it is not known to what extent the objectives have been achieved. Portugal has still a long way to go to achieve

European standards in the communication sector. It has lower access and internet usage rates than most European societies and shows notable regional disparities. Furthermore, it is expected that there will be more people without any social support to enable them to learn to use ICT and therefore, totally excluded in the digital spectrum. Thus, we can see that the weight of traditional variables of social inequality is still felt in Portuguese society.

In terms of public policy consequences, new levels of inequality have created new problems. An example is the use of digital networks as a form of economic insertion of consumers in the goods and services market. As shown by the INE data for 2017, 34% of the resident population between 16 and 74 years old reported having used the internet to place orders for goods or services. However, with the pandemic, the percentage of e-commerce users registered in 2020, the most significant increase in the series started in 2002. In 2020, 44.5% of people between 16 and 74 years old placed orders on the internet in the 12 months preceding the survey. The number of orders through e-commerce increased significantly: the group of users who placed 3 to 5 orders increased by 4.0 percentage points, those who placed 6 to 10 orders increased by 9.5 percentage points and those who placed more than ten (10) order increased by 6, 9 percentage points (INE, 2017). However, since e-commerce is more common up to the age of 34, these online customers are mostly young. Moreover, despite the apparent increase compared to the beginning of the decade (15%, in 2010), the proportion of individuals who, in Portugal, made purchases via the Internet remains significantly below the EU-28 average. An important fact, since online commerce modalities can contribute to face disadvantages such as insularity, distance from urban centers or large consumer markets, reduce regional disparities in this area and face the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Still in this context, van Duersen and van Dijk (2019) argue that the digital divide of the first order remains a problem even in the Netherland, one of the wealthiest European countries. This is due to common difficulties to gain material access to ICTs, which includes the concrete possibility to use internet over time, such as computer devices, modern laptops and TVs, smartphones, tablets, as well as software (including subscriptions) and peripheral equipment (printers, additional hard drives and so on). New gaps therefore emerge as a result of the rapid technological advances. As the authors point out (2019, p. 372), structural differences appear when specific segments of the population, systematically and for prolonged periods, take advantage of the best devices and peripherals, while others use devices (such as less capable smartphones or outdated) that allow fewer opportunities (for example, of specific applications). But, within the Dutch society, it is predictable that those gaps will be filled while it will be more challenging for Portugal to fight inequalities in material access to digital technologies.

To move Portugal forward and inform strategy policy to reduce intra-societal inequality, a research into fundamental indicators is needed. Besides, it remains to be seen to what extent it is likely or even effective that Portugal follows the same paths as other European countries for the digital inclusion of its citizens. It is expected that further research such as the one carried out within the Europe Media Coach Initiative will serve to identify priorities in terms of promotion of digital media skills. The research by van Duersen and Helsper (2018), once again in the Netherlands, introduces clues about the relationship between informational development and social development. The authors identified and separated "collateral" gains from other people's actions, regardless of their socioeconomic or sociocultural characteristics. Such a result casts hope on society like Portugal. It indicates that informational development does not have to be entirely linked to economic development, nor is it fatally compromised by the weight of the unequal

distribution of resources (particularly cultural and economic). Public policy and digital literacy campaigns can make a difference on concrete online practices, potentially correcting digital disparities. Such a goal can be achieved through targeted skills training initiatives and provision of opportunities so that individuals from different sectors of society can get involved in the digital world in various ways, which, in turn, can bring quality benefits of social activity in other domains (in the labor market, in consumption, in access to culture and knowledge, concerning social capital and subjective well-being, to give some examples). In this way, van Duersen and Helsper (2018) suggest that a semiological approach to thinking about and combating digital inequality could be more effective than a purely economic approach.

The EMCI training programme in Portugal

Aims, rationale and expected outcomes

For the past decades, it has become clear that the use of ICT profoundly transforms the way children and young people, parents and educators, among other adults, live - how they learn, use, occupy their free time and interact, both in personal relationships and in activities. All the possibilities and benefits of using ICT, including access to knowledge, the collaboration and communication between people and organizations, social inclusion and wealth creation, are necessary to ensure, like any other means of interaction, appropriate mechanisms and strategies to minimize risks and damages that might occur with the use of these technologies. Since there is not an extensive and structured media education in formal school curricula and other institutions that host children in Portugal, besides the localized initiatives of agencies like the Safe Internet Centre, MediaCoach was a very good opportunity to train specialized professionals, just as teachers, trainers, youth workers, among others, in the field of media education and coaching in our country.

In terms of preparatory activities, a survey was conducted to determine the institutional and concrete conditions that would enable the project to be implemented in Portugal. The primary way to achieve that was through research (that included researching for available information about previous digital literacy policy and programs in the country, interviews and contacts with professionals). We also search for the ideal national partners. Also, we tried to understand how we could reach teachers, youth workers and other professionals to participate in our MediaCoach training program. To that effect, the environmental assessment was a great tool to systematize and gain an overview of the opportunities and threats to implementing the program in Portugal. We contacted national institutions and specialists to assess the Portuguese context and its conditions to adapt the MediaCoach initiative to Portuguese specificities and collect relevant materials and data offline (mainly from official documents and from academic literature) and online (mainly websites of official agencies and ministries, data banks, academic literature and websites related to media literacy in Portugal) to write an environmental assessment.

Regarding the initial difficulties in preparing for the project, the relative inexperience in implementing initiatives of this nature should be pointed out. It meant from a national managing point of view, a period of learning and researching. Second, at the beginning, it was not clear which institutions we should approach since there is no clear authority or entity designated by law to implement and/or monitor media education in Portugal. Furthermore, media literacy policies in Portugal are marked, on the one hand, by a political desire to follow the European Union policies and, on the other, by inconsistency

and a lack of resources to put those policies into effect. Third, it soon became clear that on our own could not implement and meet the project's requirements. For instance, our institution (ISCTE-IUL) is not qualified to award professional training certificates. We overcame this difficulty by searching for the right partners (in the end, a training centre called CENJOR - Centro Protocolar de Formação Profissional para Jornalistas), that would provide qualified trainers and the possibility to award certificates homologated by the national government agency Institute for Employment and Vocational Training. There were also some delays in getting the protocols finished and agreed upon due to bureaucratic constraints and the negotiation process.

Key stakeholders such as the national agency Foundation for Science and Technology, through its Safe Internet Centre and the training centre CENJOR played a significant role in the development, implementation and exploitation of the project results; it was in ISCTE-IUL but also in the premises of CENJOR that trainees undertook the media literacy seminars. ISCTE-IUL and the project are also represented in the advisory board of the Safe Internet Centre. Through this agency; the project also had strategic access to other stakeholders since the Portuguese Safe Internet Centre is a consortium of various organizations (governmental institutions and agencies, NGOs, private companies, universities, unions and parent associations) and is responsible for nationwide awareness campaigns. As a result, we may advise on the implementation of such campaigns and collaborate with that Center. We also discussed policy recommendations through our participation in that advisory board. Although teachers and youth workers are clearly desirable target groups, we offered the MediaCoach training to all people interested in becoming media coaches or had a specific interest in digital literacy. That includes journalists, media professionals and students, people who work in the security and defense sectors, all sorts of educators, etc.

There were no specific criteria besides a minimum level of education (high school). The working experience was considered but not a requirement. The recruitment process was done by CENJOR and trainers, who contacted interested institutions and prospective trainees. Some trainees passed through a professional requalification process and were directed by the Institute for Employment and Professional Training. Others contacted CENJOR to enroll in the training program and learned about the program through the internet and social media. Participants were post-graduate students, teachers, educators, or people with previous teaching experience, activists and non-profit organization workers. There was an effort to expand the target group and include public or private education teachers.

On the internet, we disseminated the project mainly through a Newsletter, social media (mainly Facebook and Twitter), websites (CenJOR website enrollment and MediaCoach national website) and using targeted information and communication. We also use the internal channels of ISCTE-IUL and CenJOR. We created a national website: <https://mediacoach.pt/> and started producing content published online. We used a varied communication strategy with the aid of a communication officer. This helped the dissemination and visibility of the project and created an authoritative image of the Portuguese MediaCoach initiative. Because of that, we were able to attract prospective trainees. We also used photography and other audio-visual content. Trainers' selfies in class with trainees were helpful in creating cohesiveness and group spirit among trainees. Nevertheless, dissemination took some time to be implemented and should have started earlier. Twitter received less exposure than predicted, but specific events, such as our media literacy conference, were extremely beneficial in terms of creating buzz and visibility. The knowledge, competence and reputation of the national institutions involved

were also used to claim the MediaCoach project's authoritativeness. The same objective was pursued by stressing the following: it is an initiative funded by the Erasmus+ European program; the program replicated a successful ongoing initiative in the Netherlands; and was adopted in other European countries. In addition, we stressed the uniqueness of the program's approach in terms of media training and coaching in Portugal. Furthermore, with certified former trainees in the Portuguese MediaCoach program we made references to the experience and increased the reputation of the program in our country. We also made an effort to complement the authoritativeness of the MediaCoach Training Program by sharing data and knowledge online about media training techniques, pedagogical and educational practices concerning new media use and good practices in Portugal and other European countries, also acknowledging similar initiatives.

Concerning the training program's learning objectives, the general objectives included diagnosing trainees' levels of digital and media literacy skills and designing instructional tools and recommendations for intervention in more relevant areas of digital media education and literacy based on the information generated. Another goal was to train people to act as assertive mediators among young people and their consumption/production of content, information and/or news and about the intentionality of sharing, the search for sources and the legal, ethical and deontological rules governing freedom of speech and copyright in a global world.

The more specific goals included identifying digital and media literacy skills present in different disciplinary areas, taking into account the trainees' perceptions about their skills and training needs. It was also a goal of the training program to assess the level of digital and media skills in the educational and learning communities to identify the needs for further training. In the end the expected impact of the training and learned skills included the ability to train young people for the critical and safe use of the media, improving their understanding of legal and ethical aspects associated with the processes of creating and communicating media content and promoting the appropriate monitoring of the risks and potentials underlying these same processes.

It is also expected that Portuguese media coaches can contribute to redefine educational objectives and methodologies towards the integration of teaching-learning opportunities emerging from new forms of communication and social participation, with simultaneous intervention at functional digital inclusion/exclusion levels. In this way, our trained media coaches can participate in the democratization of digital and media literacy by implementing strategies that promote the capacities of search, selection and analysis of information and that enable its reflexive transformation into knowledge. Nevertheless, also support the production of more critical and informed consumers, capable of producing content and communicating with others creatively and the formation of active citizens, able to contribute to a knowledge society, technologically innovative and competitive and capable of supporting the construction of sustainable, creative, intelligent and life-long learning citizens. In this way, we hope that the program continues to support the development of favorable conditions for active citizenship and, consequently, the increase in civic participation in social dialogue, with a relevant contribution to economic, social and cultural development.

Methodology

Concerning the schedule and structure of the training sessions, one entire training course had the duration of about 3 weeks, with 4-hour sessions in 3 or 4 days per week with a total duration of 40 hours. The training methodology included simulated practice,

role-playing, discovery and self-directed exploration and case studies in the first 20 hours. The other 20 hours included presentations and research by trainees, discussion during sessions about those presentations and the assessment of trainees' work. The topics covered in the training program included: Credibility and reliability of information; Digital influencers, power and territoriality; Fake news and online fact-checking; Authorship, plagiarism and copyright on the internet; Citizenship, gender equality and online inclusion; Privacy vs. phishing, fraud, e-commerce and the internet of things; Cyberbullying, moral and sexual harassment in online platforms; Online advertising, sponsored content and safe browsing; Hate speech on social media and digital literacy for parents, child caregivers and youth, teachers and young workers.

Besides the difficulties of delivering the training during the pandemic crisis, there were some more challenges concerning resources, dissemination and communication. There were also some problems with managing trainees' expectations and work. Nevertheless, trainees integrated the challenges of action research that were proposed. In addition, during the implementation of the project, other challenges emerged, such as considering trainees' expectations and planning sessions and enrolments considering dropouts. There was the need to provide the didactic material in a timely manner (immediately after the session or even before) and avoid dead times. It was also important to invest in the relationship between trainees, stimulate discussion of presentations, share during sessions, coffee breaks and WhatsApp groups to create time for dialogue between trainees and trainers. It became clear that socialization should not be neglected for the exchange of experiences, doubts, etc.

Using an immersive approach, the training programs became more engaging. The continuous learning and researching for up-to-date information and news about digital literacy topics were crucial to maintain the trainees' interest and ensure training sessions had relevance to their daily lives (professional and personal) with topics they cared about. This can be accomplished by introducing current affairs analogies, allowing trainees to equate new material and information with what already resounds and they are aware of. Brainstorming activities and demonstrations also enrich the training experience about an ever-changing media environment.

Evaluation, lessons learned and next steps

The project ended up delivering 7 courses and with 104 people trained, positively assessed and certified, but there were challenges concerning the significant number of dropouts in the training sessions. In terms of impacts of the implementation of the project, there was overall positive feedback in terms of how the course made trainees thinking out of the box and prepared them with knowledge and skills relevant for present-day technological society. At the end of each training and after a successful assessment, the participants received a certificate issued by the training centre (CENJOR) and homologated by the national agency of employment and professional training (IEFP – Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional). The supply of the certificate was crucial to attract trainees and is a certification that they can refer to in their CV and use in the labor market.

Here is one of the comments from the trainees in one of the WhatsApp groups related to the project: "To the trainers and Cenjor team, a huge thanks for the availability, quality of training, professionalism and good disposition that transformed this training into a space where it was possible to learn in a very relaxed and interesting. Thank you. "

A trainee stated the following in one of the courses delivered during the current pandemic crisis: "Dear trainers and colleagues, Once again thank you all for the environment created around this group! I think it has been proved that in even the most adverse contexts, routines can be resumed and create a minimum sense of normality! It was a victory for everyone to complete the training and we have learned so much from each other!"

It is also noteworthy the work and feedback of Chief policeman João M. Cunha, a former trainee that belongs to the Safe School program of the Portuguese police force (PSP). Not only he goes to schools to talk with children about risks, including digital ones but he has also been on national TV to talk about such issues.



Concluding remarks

The main innovation of the implementation of the MediaCoach Initiative in Portugal is related to the project's content and scope regarding media digital literacy. There is particular content regarding current affairs trends (such as fake news or the proliferation of the Internet of Things) that make the MediaCoach training program stand out.

To manage the participants' expectations and the use of resources posed a problem. This is also due to the existence of other competing projects and organisations which may indeed also affect the future deployment of the program together with institutional inertia. Our plan is to create the conditions to develop a training MediaCoach program that will become sustainable with the support of our partners (CENJOR and Safer Internet Centre). For example, we expect CENJOR to promote and give seminars with similar target groups in the future using materials from the project's Portuguese implementation. The national agency Foundation for Science and Technology, through its Safe Internet Centre and the training centre CENJOR has been playing a significant role in the development, implementation and future exploitation of the project results, since they will be responsible for the dissemination of media coaching activities inspired by the Dutch model.

It was of primary importance to plan the schedule, the structure and the training methodology of the course carefully. It was challenging to motivate and recruit prospective trainees when presenting a course with a duration of 40 hours of training. In these circumstances, we felt the need to allow trainees to attend remotely or in person, even before the lockdown restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. It was also essential to invest in an appealing programme logo and materials, use a communication officer

and develop a communication strategy using communication tools such as press releases, conferences, press visits, publications, Website, social media profiles and tolls.

Our recommendations also include the use of photographs of sessions and selfies with trainees (for internal communication purposes – it helped with the cohesiveness of the class but also for external communication purposes) and audio-visual content. An early communication strategy might help with the process of capitalization of the project's expose and visibility. It is also imperative to find the right partners with an invested interest and the motivation and pro-activeness to scale up the project. Moreover, an adequate communication strategy ensures that a project like the MediaCoach Initiative remains visible. The training curriculum must also be renewed and updated on a regular basis to keep the training relevant. In addition, it is highly advisable to start planning actions early and start as soon as possible an assessment of the environment to increase the potential for scaling up successfully. Furthermore, to inform strategic choices to support the scaling up and institutionalization of the initiative, its expansion and replication. It also seems of great importance to find the "right" team structure. Multi-stakeholder alliances involving a diverse range of stakeholders at various levels (local, regional, global, international) and from various sectors (governmental, non-governmental, industry, etc.) appeared to be crucial.

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