

# Media Education Practices in Portugal

## *A Panoramic View*

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Portugal has witnessed an increased dynamism in the field of media education in recent years, as a result of incentives from international bodies such as UNESCO, and more especially European ones, not only through the Recommendation of the European Council in 2009 and the European Parliament, but also as a result of a strong impetus from both civil society and academia<sup>1</sup>.

Several relevant initiatives, launched by public, private and civil bodies including the academic world (Pinto, Pereira, Pereira & Ferreira, 2011; Ponte & Jorge, 2010), have contributed to remarkable progress, especially if we bear in mind the historic delay caused by the dictatorship that lasted until 1974, which was characterized by media censorship as well as low levels of schooling.

In this chapter, we offer a general panoramic view of the field of media education projects in the past two decades, targeted mostly at children and young people. We present some of the projects that have been regarded as good examples, considering the parameters that were defined, namely their longevity and impact, or their innovation in encouraging youth participation, for instance. In this overview, we will report on the different social agents involved in the field of media education, making projects for different audiences and with different philosophies and methodologies, in the context of both formal and informal education; but we will also document the main deficiencies in this field. More than a picture of the Portuguese reality, we present some of the best frames of a movie whose plot has been enriched in recent years, but which is still far from over.

## From school newspapers to digital media

Media companies themselves have been among the pioneers in the field of media education, encouraging the school community to become involved in the produc-

tion of school newspapers. At a time of growth in the media sector, after decades of dictatorship and in the first years of democracy, in the early 1990s the private daily newspaper *Público* launched *Público na Escola* [Público at School], which included a competition for school newspapers and the creation of resources, such as themed pieces, to support media education in schools. However, the project's funding was gradually cut in the late 2000s. After this, the competing daily newspaper *Diário de Notícias* launched the MediaLab project in 2010, with the support of bodies such as UNESCO. This project involves the newspaper inviting schools and youth communities into the newspaper's offices to attend workshops on producing a newspaper front page. An important dimension of MediaLab is the inter-generational connection, which becomes relevant in a society where different generations have had differing access to education: groups of elderly people visit the project and sometimes interact with the youngsters.

The production of school newspapers was also prompted by the academic world and, additionally, was the topic of the research project Media Education in the Castelo Branco Region, which explored the connections between the new technological media and the traditional newspaper, as reported in another chapter of this book. The development of a tool in connection with this field is of particular importance. In fact, in schools, both in classrooms and outside, the Education and Science Ministry (MEC) also supports other initiatives such as "School Newspapers and Broadcasts", devoted to the creative work of young people in the different media. These opportunities were greatly supported by the technological facilitation of the past decade, with both the introduction of computers in schools and the delivery of laptops to students, through the Magalhães and e-escolas programmes.

Also noteworthy is the work at the level of literacies of the Network of School Libraries (Rede de Bibliotecas Escolares – RBE), under MEC, providing support to and underpinning the whole learning project. Created in 1995, today the RBE covers almost the entire state school network, empowering students and teachers to develop reading, information and media literacies.

Acknowledging the importance of digital media in the lives of youngsters, MEC, with other governmental and civil society partners, also promotes SeguraNet, a project focused on educating for the safer use of the Internet. SeguraNet is also notable for its feature of having a youth panel, a dimension that is relevant for the true participation of the targeted audiences in media education programmes.

Media education does not exist in Portugal as a separate subject in the curriculum; it figures only in the field of 'Education for Citizenship', within which are also included financial, road safety and health education, among others, and which takes place in non-curricular spaces such as Accompanied Study or Project Area, which have been losing space in the present curriculum. MEC has scarce resources to develop this educational role, but has associated itself with some

projects that make resources available for this purpose. One such project is MediaSmart, an advertising literacy programme for children aged 6 to 11, imported from Canada and the United Kingdom and launched nationally in 2008 by the Portuguese Advertisers Association (APAN), with support from MEC since 2012. The project distributes materials to primary and secondary schools that request them and promotes competitions in advertising production, as a way to increase literacy among children, particularly regarding commercial communication and marketing through the different media. However, this initiative can be used as an argument against the stricter legislative regulation of advertising for children<sup>2</sup>.

Cinema constitutes a further area for attention within the field of media education in Portugal. After several regional projects promoted by cinema clubs at the end of the 1990s (Viseu, Faro), in 2012 the National Plan for Cinema was launched by academics as a pilot with the intention of integrating this plan into the curriculum of MEC. However, it has faced problems in implementation regarding screening royalties.

In early 2014, several initiatives were created. On the one hand, *RTP*, the public service broadcast operator, launched the *Ensina* portal<sup>3</sup>, with material and resources: 800 pedagogical videos at the time of launching. In *Ensina*, media education is one of the content categories, and several videos related to this theme can be found, for instance excerpts from the “Digital Natives” programme aired on *RTP2* from 2010 to 2012.

At the same time, the Referential for Media Education, targeted at Pre-School and Primary and Secondary Schooling, is also under public discussion. The Referential was produced by Manuel Pinto, Sara Pereira and Eduardo Jorge Madureira, and was commissioned by the General Directorate in Education (under MEC). This document states the Guidelines for Media Education and the competences to be acquired by students in the different stages of compulsory education. The Referential and the process of its validation also represent progress of media education and its official inclusion in the Portuguese schooling system.

## Agents and voices

Associations play an important complementary role in the energetic drive for media education in the country. Besides APAN, since 2009 MEC has been associated with a copyright awareness-raising project for children and young people, promoted by the Association for Private Copy Management (Associação para a Gestão de Cópia Privada – AGECOP). The competitions Pequeno© and Grande© invite children and young people from several school levels to produce lyrics, photography, videos, poetry and prose, for instance, to awaken them to notions of copyright in accordance with the present law, and to work on concepts of media discourses, media and audiences, empowered by support materials.

In fact, motivation through competition has proven to be a popular and flexible way to introduce projects by associations or companies to schools. Besides the school newspaper competition, promoted yearly by *Público na Escola*, the Consumer Defence Association (Associação Portuguesa para a Defesa do Consumidor – DECO) promotes SITESTAR, supported by the body in charge of the technology infra-structures, DNS.pt. Among this competition's goals, we can highlight "promoting digital media literacy among young people of school age"<sup>4</sup>. The challenge "Learn how to navigate before they catch you" ("Aprende a navegar antes que te apanhem"), also active in early 2014, is part of the project "Communicate Safely" ("Comunicar em Segurança"), by the telecommunication company Portugal Telecom. This initiative is intended to prompt the educative community to use the Internet and communication technologies safely, in line with the approach Portugal Telecom has taken since 2005.

If the agenda of these projects is targeted mostly at content creation and media production awareness, but in a sporadic way through the format of competitions, work around media envisaging inclusion and participation has been seen in community associations' projects, with governmental support, for children and young people at risk of exclusion, as in the case of the Escolhas [Choices] Programme. Some of the projects that can be highlighted by their longevity and the quality they have attained are *Claquete e Rádio XL*, television and radio projects, respectively, from the area of Greater Lisbon. *Olhares* and *RadioActive*, with an academic origin (which are also focused on in other chapters of this book), were mostly conducted in partnership with community centres supported by Escolhas, which reflects how ideas from the academic world and civil society can be articulated with support from the State.

In fact, even without a formal connection between research and intervention, the academic world has played a very relevant role in putting the topic of media education on the educational and political agenda. Examples of this at the international level are Mediappro (2005-06, Universidade do Algarve<sup>5</sup>), *Study on the current trends and approaches to media literacy in Europe* (2006-07, Universidade do Minho<sup>6</sup>) and EU Kids Online (2006-14, Universidade Nova de Lisboa<sup>7</sup>); and at the national level Media Education in the Castelo Branco Region (2007-10, Universidade de Lisboa), which we have mentioned, Escolinhas Criativas (2010, Universidade do Porto and Universidade do Minho<sup>8</sup>) and Navegando com o *Magalhães* (2010-12, Universidade do Minho<sup>9</sup>).

However, training in media education is still lacking. It is at post-graduate level (Masters and PhD) that we can find some teaching offered in the new literacies, in seminars such as "Media Education", "Media Pedagogy and Literacy", "Education and Media" or "Digital Transliteracy". The universities and polytechnic institutes in the areas of Education Sciences and Communication Sciences are those that offer the most courses (Costa, Jorge & Pereira, 2014).

After the establishment in 2009 of the Informal Group of Media Literacy (Grupo Informal de Literacia Mediática – GILM)<sup>10</sup>, which brings together stakeholders from several sectors associated with the topic (Ponte & Jorge, 2010), such as governmental bodies in education and communication, academia and the media, two national conferences were organized. At the two events, in Braga (2011) and Lisbon (2013), there was broad participation by researchers, teachers, media professionals and librarians, as well as media education project managers and political agents. Besides this, academia is also involved in conducting initiatives in the field. In 2012 GILM promoted ‘One Day with the Media’ and, in 2013, ‘Seven Days with the Media’, during the week when UNESCO celebrates Press Freedom Day. This event intends to reflect and encourage diversity and cooperation on the ground, and celebrate the efforts of the social agents, including academia, involved in media education.

## Final remarks

The range of activities in media education in Portugal has, thus, been growing and becoming more diverse, thanks to the efforts of several agents, demonstrating the freedom and creativity to design and implement projects with different methodologies and targets. These projects contain dimensions of analysis and empowerment for the use of media, media production and participation – for several media, although the digital media have prevailed in recent years – and several media discourses are looked at. This diversity is celebrated during ‘Seven Days with the Media’ in May each year.

However, the multiplication of projects in the country in the past two decades is the result of a certain lack of coordination, in the face of a non-existent clear public policy on the topic. The civil and private initiatives concealed this absence, but did not ensure sustainable projects and did not guarantee evaluation, accountability or the sharing of methodologies and results. The Media Education Observatory, created after the 1st Congress of Literacy, Media and Citizenship, is also falling short of its promise to document the initiative on the ground.

## Notes

1. This chapter is based on research conducted for the project Media and Information Education Policies in Europe, ANR-Translit/COST, coordinated by the Sorbonne Nouvelle University, Paris, in which Portugal takes part together with 27 other European countries (*vide* Costa, Jorge & Pereira, forthcoming).
2. “Publicidade dirigida a crianças atinge taxa de cumprimento de quase 100%”, <http://www.briefing.pt/publicidade/21167-publicidade-dirigida-a-criancas-atinge-taxa-de-cumprimento-de-quase-100.html>
3. <http://ensina.rtp.pt>
4. At [www.sitestar.pt](http://www.sitestar.pt)

5. Mediappro, 2006.
6. Pérez Tornero, 2007.
7. Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig & Ólafsson, 2011.
8. Cf. <http://info.escolinhas.pt/escolinhas-criativas>
9. Cf. <http://www.lasics.uminho.pt/navmag>
10. Cf. <http://www.literaciamediatuca.pt>

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