Media and Information Literacy - Policies and Practices

Introduction to the research report – Montenegro

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Experience and prospects of MIL in educational system of Montenegro

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1. Introduction

Paths of development in the activities aimed at promoting and improving the state of media and information literacy in Montenegro can be observed in relation to the actors who implemented the initiatives in this field. Within the time span between two reforms - the reform of preschool, primary and secondary education which was completed in 2008, and the reform of higher education completed in 2017, numerous activities in the field of media and information literacy were carried out at state institutional level as well as through the activities of the civil sector.

1.1. Education reforms and the introduction of media literacy subject in the curricula

The aforementioned reform from 2008 introduced the elective course media literacy in the secondary education curriculum, thus Montenegro, alongside Slovenia became the only country (from the former Yugoslavia), which implemented the course "relatively early" in this way.[1] Namely, in the time period between 2000 and 2008, the reforms of pre-school, primary and secondary education made significant changes in terms of decentralization of the education system and improvement in the quality of education.[2] The reform was developed with the aim of "shaping of such education system that would result in the creation of knowledge for both personal and social development",[3] and it included cooperation between the civil sector and international organizations and the representatives of state institutions. The purpose of introducing elective courses is to develop students' participation through the expansion of their own capacities and interests in order to promote a democratic environment in the field of education: "In addition to their functional objectives for acquiring knowledge in areas of individual interest of students and parents, elective courses contain a democratic component as well. By offering them the option to choose, we will achieve that the students participate in the change of traditional climate in both the school and the society itself. (...) Through elective courses the school to a large extent enables students to develop their potentials, knowledge, skills, abilities, as well as to learn about roles in a democratic society."[4]

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[1] In Slovenia, media education course („medijska vzgoja") was introduced as an elective subject in 1994. With the education reform from 2003, when a nine-year system of primary education was introduced, the course was organized for the seventh, eight, and nineth grade of primary school.
[22] The reform of the education system and the implementation of new educational curriculums and programs commenced in 2006/2007 in general secondary schools. With the issuing of strategic documents *The Book of Changes* from 2001. and the *Basis for the Revision of Curricula*, as well as the accompanying legislative changes in the field of education, new plans and programs were produced for the following reform (Available at: http://www.zzs.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rid=70145&rType=2&file=PREPORUKE%20za%20stampu.pdf).
[3] Bešić, M. & Reškovec, T., 2012. *Evaluacija reforme obrazovanja u Crnoj Gori*. [Online] Available at: http://www.zzs.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rId=119598&rType=2, p. 7.
[4] Zavod za školstvo, 2011. *Predmetni program - Crnogorski jezik i književnost*. [Online]

The introduction of the media literacy course as an elective subject in general grammar schools was initiated by the professor of literature Božena Jelušić, and supported by the Foundation Open Society Institute (FOSI). With the development of a curriculum authored by Božena Jelušić and Tomislav Reškovac,[5] the initial requirements that the Ministry of Education had set before this initiative were satisfied. At a meeting held on April 4, 2008, the Council of General Education of Montenegro approved the introduction of the aforementioned course into the education system.[6] The pilot project was launched in Budva and Kotor, and in the following year it was offered to all schools of general secondary education (gymnasium) as an elective course.[7] It is a one-year course and the program is intended for second- and third-grade classes, and held twice a week. The condition for forming a class at a school is a minimum of 20 attendees. However, due to teaching continuity of this course, the classes were often held with a smaller number of students. For the needs of the course, several materials were issued by media experts Dragoljub Vuković and Janko Ljumović (director of the National Theater of Montenegro at the time);[8] on the other hand, it is advised that the teachers use teaching strategy "MediLit Kit".[9]

The classes according to the new curriculum were introduced in the current academic year (2018/2019), including media literacy subject at the Faculty of Political Science.[10] Trainings in higher education in the field of media literacy were possible to introduce only after the implementation of the higher education reform. The reorganization of the University in response to re-accreditation (2015-2017) has allowed for a number of changes which facilitated a more efficient operation of the university units, an improved quality of teaching, management problem solving, connection with the labor market, up-to-date business and sustainability control.[11] The reform has put emphasis on the application of practical skills and knowledge.

The Faculty of Political Science has undergone significant changes since the reorganization of the previous study program *Journalism* had resulted in a new program of *Media Studies and Journalism*. Media literacy subject is hereby attended on the second year of this faculty.

Available at: http://www.zzs.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rId=79595&rType=2. p. 16.

[5] Božena Jelušić is a literature professor and literary critic whose field of scientific interest includes the theory of literature, literary criticism and teaching methodology; Tomislav Reškovac is a professor of philosophy, logic and literature in Zagreb. He is a contributor to several institutions which deal with education and an author of a significant number of scientific articles. He is the author of *Ethics* textbook for the third grade of high school.

[6] Ružić, N., 2016. Challenges in the implementation of the subject of Media Literacy in the educational system in Montenegro. *Nova prisutnost*, 14 (2016)(1), pp. 69-89.

[7] The course was also offered to mixed secondary schools that implement the programs of general secondary education. Of the total of 20 schools of general secondary education, media literacy course was instituted in 11 schools. In the previous school year (2017/2018) the course was realized in 4 schools.

[8] Ibid.

[9] MediaLit Kit is a teaching strategy that provides schools and teachers with the organization and structure of classroom activities in the field of media literacy (Avalilable at: http://www.medialit.org/cml-medialit-kit). For teaching purposes in Montenegrin grammar schools, the Pedagogical Center of Montenegro has provided translation of the textbook *5 key questions that can change the world - Student activities that can change the world* by authors Jeff Share and Elizabeth Thoman

[10] Fakultet političkih nauka, 2017. Novi nastavni plan i program Fakulteta političkih nauka Univerziteta Crne Gore. [Online], Available at: http://www.ucg.ac.me/skladiste/blog_18551/objava_3556/fajlovi/Nastavni%20plan%20i%20program%20za%20akademske%20osnovne%20studije%20_%20Medijske%20studije%20i%20novinarstvo.docx.

[11] Univerzitet Crne Gore, 2015. *Analiza stanja i strateška opredjeljenja za reorganizaciju i integraciju Univerziteta Crne Gore.* [Online], Available at: http://www.ucg.ac.me/skladiste/blog_4/objava_40/fajlovi/UCG%20Analiza%20stanja.pdf.

Furthermore, in the current academic year, the media and information literacy course was introduced at the doctoral studies level as well, which gave a certain scientific perspective to this field in Montenegro.

The reform failed to provide the introduction of the course in other university units. Thus, the faculties that train teaching staff and provide degrees in education were deprived of the implementation of media literacy course.

1.2. Teaching staff training

In order to administer media literacy in secondary schools, it was necessary to train teaching staff, and help them acquire knowledge in this field, as teachers employed in general secondary schools had not had the opportunity to acquire knowledge in media literacy in the course of their studies.[12] This created the need for the initiation of project activities intended for education and training of teachers for holding classes on this subject. Through the project "Media and Education - Media Literacy", created by the Pedagogical Center of Montenegro, 28 teachers were trained for the purpose of conducting lectures on the subject, through two seminars held in April and June of 2009, both lasting two and a half day. Bureau for Education Services started offering the programs for professional development of teachers in the field of media literacy from 2015. From 2015 to 2018, this institution carried out trainings for 137 teachers, through three modules: utilization of media in a democratic society, secure communication with the media and media literacy.

Staff training was also conducted through the activities of the National Library "Đurđe Crnojević". Through the UNESCO Participation Programme this institution conducted numerous activities in the field of information and media literacy.[13] Two projects implemented under this program (in the time period from 2014 to 2017) aimed to formulate a national strategy in the field of information and media literacy as well as the education of library staff. The final outcome of the project was a proposal of the Strategy for Information and Media Literacy, which was officially submitted to the Ministry of Culture in 2017. Through two accredited training programs, the National Library implemented the training and thereby strengthened the personnel capacities (with a total of 169 participants in training) in the field of information and media literacy. For the purpose of education, four UNESCO manuals were translated and issued (in digital or printed form) in order to promote the importance of information and media literacy as well as guidelines for its implementation.[14]

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[12] The curriculum for media literacy course specifies the profile and professional qualification of teachers who can teach in this course. They can be professors of language and literature, psychology, sociology or philosophy with additional professional training. Professional education includes topics from the sociology of culture and media, political philosophy, media theory, media psychology, media aesthetics, semiology and media technology (Available at: http://www.zzs.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rId=82431&rType=2).

[13] The UNESCO Participation Program provides support to the national, subregional and regional activities of the Member States in accordance with the priorities for the five major organizational areas in agreement with Resolution 37 C/35 (Available at: https://www.unescomontenegro.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=45&layout=blog&Itemid=93&lang=sr).

[14] The following manuals were issued: Information and Media Literacy - Policy and Strategy Guidelines, Teacher Training Curricula for Information and Media Literacy, Introduction to Open Access and Open Access Infrastructure (handbooks can be downloaded on the official website of the National Library (https://nb-cg.me).

1.3. Strategies in the field of media and information literacy

The Law on Electronic Media has established the Agency for Electronic Media as an independent regulatory body in charge of audiovisual media services.[15] Since 2018, the Agency has been implementing a three-year project for the development of media literacy, including the strategy "Let's Choose What We Watch" in cooperation with UNICEF, in order to raise the awareness of the importance of media literacy for parents, children and caregivers.[16] The project will also include the first quantitative measuring of media literacy among the citizens of Montenegro as well as education of the employees in the Agency.[17]

Due to its commercial interests, the media and information technology and services industry also offers activities which contribute to the development of media literacy. Since 2014, within the campaign "For All Good", Montenegrin operator Telekom has supported projects aimed at implementing media literacy activities.[18] In 2018, this strategy supported the „Teachtoday" project aimed at raising the awareness of children and parents on avoiding threats and taking advantage of all the benefits that digital technologies provide.

1.4. Scientific research

As in other fields, scientific research and academic work is also scarce in the field of media literacy. The journal of media and society research, Media Dialogues dedicated its edition No. 22/2015 to the topic of media literacy.[19]
Nevertheless, it is necessary to emphasize the interest of the academic public for this topic, which is evident from a number of published academic papers on media literacy in education. The first evaluation of the education process can be found in Igor Varga's undergraduate dissertation, published in 2009. The author points out the positive effects of teaching of this subject to media awareness as well as critical approach to media content by the students who attended the classes.[20] Jelena Perović explored the role of the staff in educational institutions in raising awareness about the importance of instituting media literacy as an academic course. The author concludes that the improvement of the status of teaching staff, cooperation with the local community and the media, regular trainings and implementation of media literacy course to other levels of education are measures which would improve the teaching on this subject.[21] Analyses of the present state of media literacy in Montenegro can also be found in the work of the professor of the Faculty of Political Science Nataša Ružić, where the author deals with the challenges of implementing the course of media literacy in the Montenegrin educational system.[22]

[15] Skupština Crne Gore, 2010. *Zakon o elektronskim medijima.* [Online], Available at:
http://www.mek.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rid=260125&rType=2&file=Zakon%20o%20elektronskim%20medijima.pdf.

[16] Agencija za elektronske medije, 2017. *Medijska pismenost.* [Online],
Available at: http://www.medijskapismenost.me/o-nama/.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Telekom , 2018. Za svako dobro. [Online] , Available at: https://www.telekom.me/za-svako-dobro-2017.nspx.
[19] Istraživački medijski centar, 2015. *Medijski dijalozi.* [Online], Available at:
https://medijskidijalozi.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/medijski-dijalozi-22.pdf.
[20] Varga, I., 2009. *Implementacija medijske pismenosti u obrazovni sistem.* [Online], Available at:
https://vdocuments.site/implementacija-medijske-pismenosti-u-obrazovni-sistem-igor-varga.html.
[21] Perović, J., 2015. *Media Literacy in Montenegro.* [Online], Available at:
https://www.cogitatiopress.com/mediaandcommunication/article/view/335.
[22] Ibid.

Ružić identifies four problems behind the poor implementation of media literacy: the elective nature of the course; the implementation of the course in secondary schools of general education exclusively; insufficient teachers' commitment to raising students' interest for the course.[23]

1.5. Observed limitations

Although the concept of introducing media literacy primarily through the establishment of media literacy course in secondary education received great support from the Ministry of Education, the institutions cannot boast of an expansive strategic and legislative framework in relation to this field. The lack of strategy in the field of media and information literacy places Montenegro among the countries that are still in the primary stage of development in media and information literacy field.[24] The laws of Montenegro protect freedom of expression and advocate the development of professionalism and democracy, as well as the protection of children and youth from the harmful influence of media content. However, apart from indirect identification of the topic and its connection to the concept of media literacy, a more substantial, systematic work in this field is lacking.

The proposed initiatives and work in the field of media literacy show different dynamics and intensity. Taking into account the originality, the number of actors and their importance, we have realized that it would be useful to examine the media literacy in education more closely, i.e. the ways in which the subject of media literacy in the schools of general secondary education is being implemented. The importance of this topic is also supported by the alarming results of PISA testing in Montenegro.[25] Namely, the below-average results of tests in practical knowledge, competencies and skills which students acquire during their education, as well as a tendency of decline are the main impressions from this testing conducted in 2016. The results of PISA testing have positioned the fifteen-year-olds from Montenegro in 56th place out of 70 countries that participated in the testing.[26]

A decrease in attendance in media literacy classes is also an indicator of the situation in this field. In the previous academic year (2017/2018), only 60 students attended classes in this course.[27] This fact should also be associated with the research of the Open Society Institute from Sofia, which points to the subpar position of Montenegro in the Media Literacy Index. Of the 35 ranked countries, Montenegro is at the 31st position, which is a drop of two spots compared to 2017.[28] The report states that the reasons for poor results are low performance in the educational process as well as controlled media - in such circumstances the impact of fake news is considerably higher.[29]

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid. p. 103.

[25] Roditelji.me, 2017. PISA testiranje nalaže promjene u sistemu obrazovanja. [Online], Available at: https://www.roditelji.me/blog/2017/01/08/pisa-testiranje-nalaze-promjene-u-sistemu-obrazovanja/.

[26] Dmitrović, D., 2015. PISA 2015. u Crnoj Gori - Rezultati. [Online], Available at: http://www.iccg.co.me/1/images/dok/medjunarodno/PISA%202015%20rezultati.pdf.

[27] In the time period from 2011 to 2017, student attendance at the media literacy course was between 257 and 154 students, with a tendency of decline.

[28] Lessenski, M., 2018. Common Sence Wanted - Resilience to "post-truth" and its Predictors in New Media Literacy Index 2018. [Online], Available at: http://osi.bg/downloads/File/2018/MediaLiteracyIndex2018_publishENG.pdf.

[29] Ibid. p. 2.

1.6. Thematic focus of the country research: Implementation of media literacy course in general secondary education

Previously presented data indicate the need for the analysis of the implementation of the media literacy program in formal education. Lack of institutional and strategic frameworks, drop in course attendance, quality of teaching staff training, elective character of the subject, its exclusivity to secondary schools of general education, alarming results of Montenegrin high-school students on PISA testing and poor index of media literacy indicate the need and the direction of further action.

Evaluation of the needs and the efficiency of the implementation of media literacy course in general secondary education in Montenegro has been in the focus of our research within the regional project *Media for Citizens, Citizens for Media*.

In the next chapters of the research report we present the findings of the research. The decennial gap between educational system reforms indicates the need for analyzing the conceptual differences that have occurred in this field, and whose understanding is crucial for a quality implementation. However, our main focus is the analysis of the current state in this field. We also present the recommendations that stem from the experience in researching of this field.