Editor's introduction
Media and information literacy research in countries around the Baltic Sea

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This special issue of the *Central European Journal of Communication* (CEJC) collects studies on media literacy from countries around the Baltic Sea. The focus of the issue is on media literacy and related research in Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Sweden, and Russia. The main objective is to inquire into media education and literacy in local conditions within a specific geo-cultural area. This study of the applications of media literacy in its local variants is intended to contribute to our understanding of media literacy in diverse cultural contexts (Frau-Meigs, 2007). The inquiry is also pertinent to the ongoing project of contesting the western epistemic center of media studies (Park & Curran, 2000), by focusing on the northeastern corner of Europe, which is characterized by countries with small media markets and a limited number of users of national languages.

Indeed, the area around the Baltic Sea is an interesting border zone because countries in immediate vicinity to each other show very different and asynchronous development when it comes to the development of media literacy. In some countries, such as Finland, Sweden, and Poland, raising citizens' awareness and competence in terms of media and communication has been a public concern for a relatively long time, whereas the Baltic countries have been subjected to propaganda and other restricting conditions that have hindered the systematic advancement of critical media literacy and related agency until recently (del Mar Grandío, Dilli, & O'Neill, 2017; Frau-Meigs, Velez, & Michel, 2017; Frau-Meigs & Torrent, 2009). According to the Media Literacy Index 2019, compiled by the European Policies Initiative of the Open Society Institute in Sofia, which assesses the resilience potential to disinformation in 35 European countries, using the level of media freedom, education, and trust in people as indicators, Finland (#1), Sweden (#4), and Estonia

(#5) are considered the countries best equipped to withstand the impact of "post-truth" and "fake news." Latvia (#17), Poland (#18), and Lithuania (#19) are rated as less resilient and even show trends of deterioration when it comes to corruption and citizens' trust in journalists and experts (Lessenski, 2019).

The ambition of this issue is that we turn these differences into an opportunity and endorse the uneven development as something that provides the conditions for learning from each other and exchanging ideas and practices. Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that media literacy issues are typically embedded to a high degree in local — that is, national or regional — conditions. Policies are prepared as part of the national political agenda, and best practices, whether in formal education or civil society activities, are typically exchanged at national or regional forums where authorities, associations, and local committees tend to operate. Not the least, media literacy is, to a large degree, related to questions of language. The mix of different national and minority languages, as well as different societal and media systems, have made it relatively difficult for the countries around the Baltic Sea to find a common framework for mutual cooperation and exchange. Neither West nor East has turned out to be successful concepts in this regard. The Western point of view has perhaps had the tendency of seeing the Eastern countries as apprentices, overshadowing the characteristics of the post-Soviet countries that might cause them to draw on resources and capacities that make them globally interesting and unique. Accordingly, post-Soviet frame in Eastern European countries, or countries in transition, may sometimes be experienced as rather obsolete or uncomfortable, bringing forth internal tensions and questioning the value of looking at the past versus looking to the future.

In this issue, we seek to examine, with the help of recent research, how media literacy is and has been formed in the Baltic Sea region in terms of policy, implementation, and pedagogy. As media literacy pedagogy is being richly advanced in different contexts, not the least in teachers' and adult education, our focus lies on policy and its implementation in the countries in question. By doing this, we hope to provide perspectives into media literacy research from the Eastern European countries, both to researchers themselves and beyond this relatively limited research community. As the very concept of "media literacy" is only a couple of decades old, media literacy studies still constitute a young area of inquiry within the academy, both in research (see e.g., De Abreu, Mihailidis, Lee, Melki, & McDougall, 2017) and education (see e.g., the Swedish Media Council, 2019; Salomaa, Palsa, & Malinen, 2017). Media literacy research has the important task of developing the theoretical ground for addressing media literacy as an epistemological and discursive construct and of discovering patterns and models that cannot be easily observed from policy and pedagogy areas. As an interdisciplinary object of inquiry, drawing the most strongly on media, journalism, and communication studies; pedagogical studies; and many interdisciplinary fields, such as youth, cultural, and game studies, media literacy studies are scattered across different institutional settings within the academy. Clusters of media literacy research typically

emerge at teacher education institutions within pedagogical studies, and in media, communication, and journalism studies, as well as in the disciplines of psychology and sociology.

Still, given the many entries into the academic sphere of questions related to media literacy, it might often be difficult to determine who actually is a "media literacy researcher." Researchers typically have other primary research interests growing from the foundations of their disciplines than the object of literacy, and media literacy only presents a temporary stop on their path towards some other knowledge. Another, slightly sensitive, dimension of media literacy research is that the fine line between researcher and policymaker has been sometimes drawn in the sand. When researchers have been open to giving guidance, consulting is what has been expected from them. However, by advancing (critical) media literacy research within the academy as an endeavor separated from policy and pedagogy, we add to the body of evidence-based knowledge that benefits society at large. Investing in media literacy research protects public discussions on this richly addressed topic from being opportunistic and led by personal opinions and tastes, or from being overdramatized, overgeneralized, or seen as the "magical panacea" to everything that Buckingham (2019) aptly diagnoses "solutionism." While raising media literacy in the population may have long-term benefits in societies, media literacy cannot be the sole solution to the erosion of democracy or similar large-scale problems.

A BOUNDARY OBJECT

A Swedish and Finnish proverb says that a beloved child has many names. This is entirely true, at a general level, in relation to media literacy, which has in recent decades developed into an area in which a diversity of parallel, concurring, and even contradictory vocabulary is flourishing. Whenever we address the question of media literacy, or media education, we encounter a perplexing complexity. In this text, I use "media education", "media literacy" and "media and information literacy (MIL)" as the overarching terms, reflecting the diversity of the vocabulary in use, while aware of the effects of the different nuances that the choices of terms have.

Indeed, the terms "media education" and "media literacy" are often used in parallel ways and even interchangeably. At the same time, parallel concepts related to "competence" or "skill" occur, resonating with international discussions on terms with varying epithets, such as "critical," "digital," "multimodal," "dynamic," "trans-," "multi-," and so on. In many cases, the adopted term may represent a change from how media education or literacy has been defined earlier, as in the "new," "augmented," or "extended" literacies. Indeed, in many cases, the new terminology has resulted from a scholarly discontent with the existing terminology to describe the complexity of today's media landscape, and, in this respect, the chameleonic terminology testifies to the changes in the environment in which we

are living. Scholars have attempted to extend the media literacy concept in order to detach it from the individual skills perspective to cover groups, communities, and organizations (Grizzle & Hamada, 2019), or from written texts to cover multiple media channels and modes (the New London Group, 1996; Frau-Meigs, 2012). At the same time, there are more limited terms referring to a specific subtype of media — for example, film literacy, visual literacy, or technology literacy (Stordy, 2015; Tyner, 1998; Carlsson, 2019). Different sectors of governance and practice have adopted concepts that best suit their purposes, thus accentuating different dimensions of media- and information-related literacy. For example, in Finland, the formal education policy has recently adopted the term "multiliteracies" to the school curricula (Rasi, Kangas & Ruokamo, 2019), and youth work has endorsed "digital skills" or "competencies" related to the overarching concept of "digital youth work" (*digitaalinen nuorisotyö*) (Lauha & Tuominen, 2018), while the national policies are still connected to the terms "media literacy" and "media education" (Ministry of Culture and Education in Finland, 2019; 2013). In Estonia, the youth work sector has been introduced to the very specific concept "smart youth work" (*nutikas noorsootöö*) (Estonian Youth Work Centre, 2013), with a focus on the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and promoting digital skills and solutions related to this area.

One might trivialize the question of vocabulary by saying that words are only words; however, it cannot be overlooked that terms can carry strong connotations and guide the actions of agents, even though they may be unconscious of their impact. Thus, the dominant terms that have been established as core concepts in any given sphere of action may play a crucial role towards determining what dimensions of media literacy are seen as substantial in implementing goals and how media literacy activities are shaped. On the other hand, what is interesting about the concept of media literacy as constituting a basis for action is that it presents an irresistibly multi-functioning concept to be harnessed in societal debate — the importance of which is relatively hard to question. Media literacy, in all its variations, can aptly be described as a "boundary object" (Star & Griesemer, 1989), a concept shared by different communities in discourse but understood differently in each of them. Boundary objects are seen as particularly valuable as they link different communities and allow different groups to collaborate (Wenger, 1998; Ilomäki et al, 2016). Despite its emptiness and inaccuracy, "media and information literacy," or any of its variants, thus seems to work as an entry point for cooperation in the complex multi-stakeholder field in which media education unfolds.

Furthermore, what is particularly interesting about the boundary object that media literacy has formed into is its resilience to the rapidly changing media landscape. It is true that different processes of media reception and production, and mixed forms of them, have become more diverse and complex. Receiving content is no longer a question of analyzing it according to fixed, relatively stable structures, such as by understanding the genres and styles of an institutionally

pre-made order, and, thus, the former, solid epistemological basis of all content has started crumbling. Working with content includes the processes of archiving, organizing, sharing, curating, moderating, commenting, editing, and modifying, in different positionings of produsage (Bruns, 2016) or prosumption (Toffler, 1980), in which the skills related to the creation of content and entire media play an increasingly significant role. Or, to state it more dramatically, we could suggest that we are, in fact, undergoing a radical change that affects the essence of how the essential *preconditions* for media literacy are being re-configured. First, there are changes in the environments in which media "happens," namely in the production spaces; second, the agency connected to receiving and producing media content, the agency of acting and producing content in mediated environments, is changing; and, third, the contents of different media are being mashed up and blurred, and the boundaries between commercial and non-commercial messages and intentions are becoming hard to maintain, which is described by Einstein (2016) as "content confusion."

Still, despite these fundamental developments, the early definitions of the umbrella terms "media literacy" and "media education" are still pretty much valid, even if the terms "media" and "literacy," as well as the many other terms designed to replace literacy, have been sometimes experienced as highly problematic, due to, for example, ignoring users' popular culture pleasures or being too optimistically connected to democratic and egalitarian aims (see e.g., McDougall, 2017; Merrin, 2014, Buckingham, 1990). The basic definition of media literacy as the "ability to access, (evaluate), analyse and create media" (UNESCO, 2013; Livingstone, 2004; Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993) more or less persists, identifying the access to, evaluation, and analysis, as well as (content) creation of media, as key ingredients of media literacy and education (see also NAMLE, 2020). The objective of media education can still, to a great extent, be found in "developing greater critical awareness among listeners, viewers and readers" and consequently, "greater competence" among them (UNESCO, 1983) when contacting media of any kind. Fundamentally, the mediatic processes of encoding and decoding that constitute people's relationship to media are still present (see e.g., Masterman, 1985).

Therefore, media literacy can essentially be seen as an instrument to assist people in creating agency that helps them to be informed and capable of acting in constantly changing and increasingly mediated environments. This is the definition taken as the starting point of this special issue, in which the focus is not so much on changes in media and the effects of these changes on media literacy than on continuities in policy and pedagogical practice viewed over time.

MEDIA LITERACY IN NORTHEASTERN EUROPE

Media literacy research is formed in accordance with the national policies, implementation practices, and pedagogical models in the country in question. The core

concepts in the Baltic Sea region vary, and have varied over time, in alignment with changes in media and education environments. Table 1 shows the most common terms used in the countries around the Baltic Sea, showing both the English and original language terms. The table is not exhausting and does not capture the de facto diversity in each country but, instead, attempts to identify the dominant terms used in the sectors of governance (national policies closest to "media literacy"), schools (as an example of the implementation of national policy), and civil societies (understood as the field of associations and non-formal education). In each of these spheres, there is naturally a great variation of concepts.

Table 1. Central terms used in Baltic Sea countries to refer to media education/literacy

Country	Official language	Government	School	Civil society
Estonia	Estonian	Media (and communication) education (*meedia[- ja kommunikatsiooni-]haritus*, *meediakasvatus*)[1]	Communication competence (*suhtluspädevus*) and digital competence (*digitaalne pädevus*), information environment (*teabekeskkond*) as cross-curricular topic[2]	Media competence (*meediapädevus*), media (and information) literacy (*meedia-[ja info]kirjaoskus*)[3]
Finland	Finnish (F), Swedish (S)	Media education (F: *mediakasvatus*, S: *mediefostran*), media literacy (F: *medialukutaito*, S: *mediekunnighet*)[4]	Multiliteracy (*monilukutaito*)[5]	Media education (*mediakasvatus*), media competence (*mediataidot*)[6]
Latvia	Latvian	Media literacy (*medijpratība, mediju pratība*)[7]	Digital literacy (*digitālā pratība*)[8]	Media literacy (*medijpratība*)[9]
Lithuania	Lithuanian	Media and information literacy (*medijų ir informacinis raštingumas*)[10]	Media and information literacy (*medijų ir informacinis raštingumas*)[11]	Media and information literacy (*medijų ir informacinis raštingumas)*, media literacy (*medijų raštingumas*)[12]
Poland	Polish	Digital competence (*kompetencje cyfrowe*)	No core concept; attached to use of information and problem solving[14]	Media education (*edukacja medialna*)[15]
Russia	Russian	Media literacy (*медиаграмотность*)[16]	No core concept; media education (*медиаобразование*)[17]	Media education (*медиаобразование*)[18]

Sweden	Swedish	Media and information literacy (*medie- och informationskunnighet, MIK)*[19]	Digital competence (*digital kompetens)*[20]	Media (and information) literacy (*medie-[och informations]-kunnighet, MIK),* digital competence *(digital kompetens)*[21]

[1] Kõuts-Klemm et al. (2019).
[2] Ministry of Education and Research in Estonia (2014).
[3] See e.g., Ministry of Education and Research in Estonia (2020).
[4] Ministry of Culture and Education in Finland (2019; 2013).
[5] Finnish National Agency for Education (2019, 2018, 2014).
[6] See e.g., Palsa et al. (2014).
[7] Ministry of Culture in Latvia (2016).
[8] Cabinet of Ministers of Latvia (2018).
[9] See e.g., State Police of Latvia et al. (2018).
[10] Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania (2019).
[11] Ministry of Education and Science in Lithuania (2017)
[12] See e.g., Lithuanian Journalism Centre (2019).
[13] Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy in Poland (2014)
[14] Ministry of National Education in Poland (2017).
[15] See e.g., Modern Poland Foundation (2020).
[16] Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media of the Russian Federation (2019).
[17] Fedorov (2008); Pedtehno (2016); Fedorov (2002).
[18] Government Offices of Sweden (2018); Carlsson (2019).
[19] Government Offices of Sweden (2018); Carlsson (2019).
[20] Swedish National Agency for Education (2018, 2019).
[21] See e.g., The Swedish Press and Broadcasting Authority and the Swedish Media Council (2017).

The most significant difference in terminology is between individual- or competence-based and activity-based concepts. Individual-based terms, such as competence, skill, and literacy, set the focus on the characteristics to be acquired, while activity-based terms, such as education, emphasize the processual nature of media literacy, or the activity of pursuing these competencies, which are often defined top-down. While the term "media education" has, for a long time, played a central role in countries with a longer tradition, such as in Finland (*mediakasvatus*), Estonia (*meediakasvatus, meediaharidus*), Poland (*edukacja medialna*), and Russia (*mediaobrazovanie*), the UNESCO-led concepts of "media literacy" and "media and information literacy" have gained a stronger foothold in Sweden (*mediekunnighet*, *medie- och informationskunnighet*), Latvia (*medijpratība, mediju un informācijas pratība*), and Lithuania (*medijų ir informacinis raštingumas*) as the core terms permeating different societal spheres. Recent developments have also established the literacy concept as a parallel notion (*medialukutaito, media- ja informaatiolukutaito* in Finland; *meediapädevus*, *meedia- ja infopädevus* in Estonia; *mediagramotnost'*, *media-informatsionnaya gramotnost'* in Russia).

International actors, such as UNESCO (see e.g., 1983, 2013, 2015) and the European Union, have repeatedly underlined the importance of media literacy (see e.g., European Parliament, 2008; European Parliament and the European Council, 2018), giving member states an impetus to form national strategies. Typically, media literacy issues are scattered around the different sectors of governance and seen as cross-sectoral issues. National policies focused on media literacy, therefore, have the advantage of unifying the conceptual thinking on media literacy and education, and they are also apparently expected to lead the implementation of that concept. We might suggest that ideally the spheres addressed in Table 1 would be aligned with each other and point to the same direction, different areas of action complementing each other, but as media literacy is often not centrally governed and coordinated, this is typically not the case.

In the Baltic Sea region, Finland and Latvia have included media literacy in their ministerial-level policies the most powerfully. In Finland, the first policy document was published in 2013 by the Ministry of Culture and Education and updated in 2019, after a dialogical process with stakeholders. The new policy sets three primary objectives related to the scope, content, and character of media education: the media education provided in Finland shall be "comprehensive in terms of its content, perspectives, target groups and geographic distribution" (p. 14), "high-quality, meaningful and non-discriminatory" (p. 16), and "systematic and consistent" (p. 18) (Ministry of Culture and Education in Finland, 2019). These elements were already present in the previous policy, in which the objectives of sustainable and cooperation-based child- and youth-centered media education were recorded, together with the explicit aim of assigning Finland a role as an active global promoter of media literacy (Ministry of Culture and Education in Finland, 2013). In Latvia, the first media policy document foreseeing activities in media literacy was published in 2016 by the Ministry of Culture. The mass media policy guidelines (Ministry of Culture in Latvia, 2016) set down the objectives for a well-informed audience: media literacy skills among the audience should "promote the creative activity of an individual, as well as reduce one-direction influence of mass media communication, allowing to identify and prevent the distribution of biased information" (Ministry of Culture in Latvia, 2016, n.p.). The promotion of media literacy is not yet explicitly supported by school curricula, in which "digital literacy" constitutes the core concept, which may undermine the efficiency of promotion activities (Ločmele, 2019).

At the point of writing this text, Sweden and Russia are re-working on their media literacy policies. In Sweden, after the government's democracy strategy had addressed the problem of factors threatening democracy, such as disinformation, propaganda, and online hate (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018), the Ministry of Culture launched a national investment in media and information literacy at the national level (Ministry of Culture in Sweden, 2018). The process is ongoing and is expected to result in a clearer profiling of the Swedish Media Council as

the coordinating media authority of media literacy stakeholders. Consequently, media and information literacy is closely attached to the discourse on democracy and citizenship (see also Carlsson, 2019). In Russia, the current Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media has made media literacy to one of the priority areas for the development of the media industry (Ministry of Communications and Mass Media of the Russian Federation, 2014), and these criteria are currently being updated. In addition, a program has been launched to introduce the basics of media literacy into training courses and programs higher education institutions, universities, and pedagogical institutes. (Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media of the Russian Federation, 2019.)

In comparison, media literacy seems less integrated in the national media policy frameworks in Estonia and Poland. A recent panel assessing the media policy in Estonia suggested that the improvement of media and language education should be a better-prioritized aspect in media policy (Kõuts-Klemm et al., 2019). According to the panel's assessments, the "strategy documents should pay much more attention to the media and media communication education." They viewed media education as primarily related to strategic communication and advocacy, marketing communication, and general information literacy (Kõuts-Klemm et al., p. 25). Poland powerfully subscribes to a digital competence framework, supported by the Digital Poland Programme 2014–2020, which is financed by the European Commission and public or private funds (Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy in Poland, 2014). This program connects digital skills to the development of public e-services and e-governance, coupled with the development of civil society through individuals' digital skills and the digitalization of social life and public services.

In formal school curricula, media literacy has established its position as a cross-curricular theme instead of a special, isolated subject in the Baltic Sea region. In Finland, "multiliteracy" was introduced as a component of transversal competence in the national core curriculum for yearly childhood education (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018), basic education (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014), and upper secondary school education (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2019). Multiliteracy replaced the term "communication and media competence" (*viestintä- ja mediataito*) in the previous core curriculum (for basic education, see Finnish National Agency for Education, 2004). In the new curriculum, multiliteracy is one of the seven cross-curricular topics, along with "thinking and learning to learn," "cultural competence, interaction and expression," "taking care of oneself and everyday skills," "ICT competence," "work-life skills and entrepreneurship," and "participation, influence and building a sustainable future." It is defined as "the skills needed to interpret, produce and evaluate different texts," based on a broad definition of a text, in order to "help pupils understand the diverse cultural forms of communication as well as build their own identity" (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014; translation by the author). (Rasi, Kangas & Ruokamo, 2019; see also the New London Group, 1996.)

In the Baltic countries, media education was first introduced in the Estonian national curriculum in 2002 (Ugur & Harro-Loit, 2010). The national curricula for basic and upper secondary schools (2014) include "communication competence" and "digital competence," among eight general competencies, the other six being "cultural and value competence," "social and citizen competence," "self-management competence," "learning to learn competence," "mathematics, natural sciences and technology competence," and "entrepreneurship competence." "Information environment" is one of the eight cross-curricular topics, the aim of which is "for the pupil to develop into an information-conscious person who senses and is aware of the surrounding information environment, is able to analyse it critically and acts according to his or her aims and society's communication ethics." Reflecting the ideas of critical media literacy and digital competencies, the underlying concept is information society.

Poland does not employ any single core concept in the school curricula to explicitly refer to media literacy or education (see also Brosch, 2017; Ptaszek & Lysik, 2018). In the primary school curriculum, among the seven most important skills mentioned are "search, structuring, critical analysis and use of information from various sources" and "creative problem solving in various fields by consciously using methods and tools derived from the computer science, including programming" (Ministry of National Education in Poland, 2017, p. 12). These skills can be described as closest to information literacy skills, connected to the source criticism and use of information and communication technology (ICT). The understanding of media literacy is thus limited to information literacy and crystallized as the skills of "information use" (*wykorzystanie informacji*) and "problem-solving" (*rozwiązywanie problemów*). Information and digital competences clearly reflect framework put forward by the Digital Poland Programme (Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy in Poland, 2014).

In environments beyond the formal institutions, such as in the market and in civil society, many of the agents practicing media education are not aware of or do not connect their activities to the umbrella terms "media education" or "literacy." This is often the case with journalists who tend not to regard themselves as media educators but are more likely to see media education and literacy activities as part of their overall journalistic mission in the public interest and for the common good (Huovinen, 2019; Kakkola, 2009). In civil society, MIL stakeholders tend to approach the field through more specific and limited, and thus more concrete, concepts, such as source criticism, fact-checking, fake news, child safety, online risks, digital skills for senior citizens, hate speech, filter bubbles, or echo chambers (e.g., in Sweden, see the Swedish Press and Broadcasting Authority and the Swedish Media Council, 2017). The avoidance of terminology connected to academic and political language might be a pragmatic strategy to escape the elusiveness that the term media literacy evokes, and, in this way, to attempt to make the activities more appealing and approachable to the general public.

ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE

This special issue was produced in conjunction to the European Union Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership project "Media and Information Literacy & Innovative Teaching Methods Laboratory" (MIL+LAB). The articles for this special issue were collected via an open call and accepted after an anonymous double-blind review, after the international conference *TransMIL: Crossing boundaries in pedagogy, policies and practices of media and information literacy (MIL)* organized in January 2019 at the Latvian National Library in Riga. The main output of the MIL+LAB project will be a joint master's program in media literacy, launched in fall 2020 between universities in the Baltic countries and Poland — Riga Stradins University, University of Tartu, University of Vilnius, and University of Wroclaw.

As media literacy is always more or less a derivative of the media practices observed in reality, media literacy, as a pedagogical concept, easily lags behind the reality of media practices. Therefore, we will not begin with studies reflecting changes, but rather by revisiting the era of mass media literacy in policies, asking how media literacy and education policies have been constructed over time, with a long-lasting effect on contemporary societies. The issue includes six research articles from Finland, the Baltic countries, Poland, and Russia. At the end of the issue, there are book reviews assessing some recent academic literature on media literacy, aiming to place this literature in global and local contexts. The two first articles of this special issue consider how policies have constructed the discourses around media education in national policy frameworks. In the first article, Lauri Palsa and Saara Salomaa present a frame analysis of policy documents concerning media education in Finland. While Finland has become the forerunner in media education, its neighbor Estonia has taken a world-leading position in e-governance and the information society. In the second article, Kertti Merimaa and Krista Lepik inquire into the concept of information literacy in policy documents in Estonia.

As important as it may be to push media literacy to the political agenda so that it can be embedded in the activities of formal institutions, it is equally important to convince the objects and subjects of media education of the importance of the issue so that they can better inform and educate themselves on the subject. The third article approaches policy by asking how people assess the importance and relevance of media and information literacy in society. Anda Rožukalne, Ilva Skulte, and Alnis Stakle present the results from a survey examining citizens' perceptions of media literacy in the context of Latvia.

The next three articles deal with the mixed modes of communication that have given rise to forms of literacy in which the assessment of credibility and the factual basis of messages stay in focus. Michał Kuś and Paulina Barczyszyn-Madziarz present an exploratory study of the emerging fact-checking scene in Poland, tracing the educational potential of the existing initiatives in the country. Andrius Šuminas and Deimantas Jastramskis examine Lithuanian students' skills to assess credibility

in online news texts as part of news literacy. The last article brings us closer to the digital reality in which mash-up genres, such as memes, require new types of literacy: Svetlana Shomova demonstrates, with the help of Russian students interpreting viral images adopting elements of news discourse, how meme literacy makes an important case in media literacy.

The special issue concludes with an interview with Grzegorz Ptaszek, the current president of the Polish Association of Media Education. The association was launched in 2012 at the initiative of academics and practitioners and in response to a need that was precipitated by political decisions. The establishment of a national association was, more precisely, to counteract the measures by the Ministry of National Education in 2009 in Poland to not integrate media education in the national core curriculum, despite the preceding urges by the European Union to include media literacy in national policy agendas (see e.g., European Parliament, 2008). Brosch (2017, p. 311) concluded that the decision to eliminate media education "drastically limited media education" and restricted it to "IT skills and reception of ICT messages." According to Gzregorz Ptasek, media educators thus have an important mission to promote approaches to media literacy that are more attached to critical thinking.

On behalf of the project group, I want to thank the *European Journal of Communication* and its publisher, the Polish Communication Association, for providing us the possibility to put together a special issue on media literacy. We are grateful for all the constructive support that our partners, reviewers, and experts have provided along the way. In particular, we want to thank Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska for her acknowledgement of the importance and relevance of the topic to the academic community around the Baltic Sea and for opening up the discussion with the publication of this special issue. The editorial team of CEJC, under the lead of Michał Głowacki, also deserves our warmest thanks, in particular, the journal editor Agnieszka Stępińska. We also want to thank the partners, the Latvian News Agency LETA and the National Library of Latvia, for a fruitful collaboration during the MIL+LAB project. Finally, my own affiliation, Nordicom, the Centre for Nordic Media Research at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, is pleased to have been involved as a partner in this project.

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