

CONNECTIONS 2019 MediaLit moments

Media Literacy and Media Businesses in the Post-Soviet Baltics: A Strategic Defense Priority

Introduction

Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia: these are the Baltic States, now part of the European Union after many years as part of the Soviet Union. Freedom and democracy are highly valued here, in a place where stories still abound of family or friends disappearing in the middle of the night, after being shipped to Siberian work camps.

"I spoke with one student before class at the university began last week," Tessa Jolls, CML's director, reported from Riga, Latvia. "He told me how he was very happy to learn about media literacy, and to see how freedom of expression was so central to the ideas behind media literacy. He told me that his grandfather had been sent to Siberia and lived to tell him about his experiences, and he realized that independence for his country and independence of thinking were closely related. Teaching media literacy here brings a real sense of mission with it."

So what does this have to do with media literacy? With media businesses? With Baltic youth today? More than one might imagine: Media literacy is actually a strategic defense priority by governments in the Baltics, where disinformation campaigns from Russia are influencing populations that, because of dislocations and relocations during the Soviet era, are Russian-speaking and of Russian descent. The NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence has made disinformation/misinformation a priority; the EU publishes a monthly newsletter called "The Disinformation Review" that focuses on Russian campaigns, calling out errors.

At the same time, like the rest of the world, Baltic States have prioritized the development of digital technologies and broadband, with Estonia being recognized as a leader in the development of governmental systems using distributed ledger technology, for example. Estonia, too, has incorporated digital and media literacy in its education policies, which is a new direction for the country. In Latvia, the Ministry of Culture sponsored extensive research on media literacy for the general population and for youth, and also incorporated media literacy in its policy planning, as well as conducting thoughtful campaigns. Kaunas, Lithuania was the site for the 2018 UNESCO Media Literacy Week Feature Conference on Media and Information Literacy, and both Latvia and Lithuania hold two of the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Chairs, who develop and direct many MIL initiatives during their three-year tenures.

Yet these promising developments must co-exist with other threatening trends that are being felt throughout the world: as the media ecosystem shifts with the success of major digital platforms garnering more and more advertising revenue, local media

struggle more and more to compete and to even survive. A thriving and independent media sector has long been seen as a necessary ingredient for a successful democracy - but in the Baltics, media is fragile, as is the young democracy born of the independence gained from Russia 30 years ago. At the same time, it is essential that youth - the children of those oppressed and denied freedom for so long - learn to strive for success and to participate in the new economies and the new participatory media culture. Their ability to serve as the first line of defense against misinformation and disinformation, their understanding of business and how to succeed in a free market environment, is essential to the freedom and success of their countries.

The stakes are high. And the determination is great, with freedom being hard-won. But what is interesting is that the stakes are high in democratic countries the world over - it's just that in the Baltics, there is a more acute awareness of just how important media literacy education is for preparing young people to live in this powerful world of images, words and sounds.

To explore some of these issues, CML's Tessa Jolls interviewed Guna Spurava, Head of UNESCO MIL Chair, University of Latvia, for a podcast. This is CML's first podcast - we welcome your thoughts and comments. Next month, we will return to our newsletter format, featuring transcripts of interviews, and then alternate that format with podcasts. But in the meanwhile, we invite you to tune into our voices from the Baltics, from Riga, Latvia in this year of 2019.

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[Go to Podcast](#): Guna Spurava, Head of UNESCO Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Chair, University of Latvia, Interviewed by Tessa Jolls, CML's Director.

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Biography



Guna Spurava is a researcher and lecturer at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Communication Studies at the University of Latvia, where she serves as the Head of the UNESCO MIL Chair. Guna is responsible for the development of MIL research focusing on practices of young people's media use. Guna has also been teaching media literacy, media research methods and media economy at the University of Latvia. She is doctoral student at University of Tampere, Finland, Faculty of Communication Sciences in the field of MIL. Over the course of her professional career, she has been involved in different aspects of the Latvian media landscape, with a focus on magazine publishing management.

Resources

Children and Media Use/Disinformation Digest

- Research on Latvian Youth Media Usage, conducted by UNESCO MIL Head of Chair for University of Latvia, sponsored by Latvian Ministry of Culture, 2017 [pdf](#)
- Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report, conducted by OfCom, 2017 [pdf](#)
- Media Use by Children Age 0-8, the Common Sense Census, 2017: [pdf](#)
- Disinformation Review (Weekly e-subscription). Updates on Pro-Kremlin Disinformation. EU East Stratcom Task Force. [link](#)

Global MIL Week 2018 Feature Conference and Youth Agenda Forum 2018

The Global MIL Week 2018 Feature Conference and Youth Agenda Forum were co-organized by UNESCO, University of Latvia (Latvia) and Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania). The two universities are both members of the UNESCO-UNAOC UNITWIN Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue (MILID) University Network; Kristina Juraite holds the UNESCO MIL Chair at Vytautas Magnus University.

Special emphasis was placed young people at the Global MIL Week Youth Agenda Forum, organized by Spurava, which took place on 26 October, 2018, at the University of Latvia, in Riga, Latvia. Young people's voices resonated loudly in the global commemoration of MIL Week. Youth were engaged not just as target groups for MIL training but also as actors and as part of the solution to achieve media and information literate societies. See these videos:

- [Scenes from Global MIL Week Youth Agenda Forum](#)
- [Discussion of Youth Agency at UNESCO Youth Agenda Forum, featuring Henry Jenkins \(University of Southern California\) and Rachel Schnalzer \(Buzzfeed\)](#)
- [Reactions and Questions from UNESCO Youth Agenda Forum following Henry Jenkins Interview, with Jenkins' Responses](#)
- [Practitioner Views on Why MIL is Important, from UNESCO 2018 Feature Conference in Kaunas, Lithuania](#)

Also check out:

- [Henry Jenkins Blog](#)
- [Jenkins, H., Clinton, K., Purushotma, R., Robison, A.J. & Weigel, M. \(2006\). Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education For the 21st Century. Chicago: The MacArthur Foundation](#)
- [Jenkins, H. & Jolls, T. \(2014\). How Do Digital Media & Learning \(DML\) and Media Literacy Communities Connect? Why is it important that these communities work together towards common goals?](#)
- [Jenkins, H. & Jolls, T. \(2018\). Empowerment: From Theory to Practice to Activism. Exploring David Bordwell.](#)

Education Development Center (IAC) is a Latvian nonprofit organization that is advocating for media literacy, and conducting teacher training and media literacy/critical thinking education programs in schools throughout Latvia. IAC invited Tessa Jolls, CML's Director, to keynote two conferences in the region, one sponsored by the British Council in January and the other by the U.S. Embassy in February, to address media literacy and CML's methodology for teaching and learning. IAC introduced new teaching materials and an overview of a two-year implementation program conducted in Latvia: [link](#)

Below: Tessa Jolls addresses IAC conference and talks with students during a break.



Infographics

This new CML Infographic shows the three pillars that media literacy rest upon: Deconstruction, Construction and Participation. With new media, participation is a constant, where reading, writing and sharing and contributing and yes - participating - are all part of the equation, whether through visual, aural, digital or print media.



The Pillars of Media Literacy

FREE YOUR MIND

DECONSTRUCT
THINK CRITICALLY!

EXPRESS YOUR VIEWS

CONSTRUCT
BE RESPONSIBLE!

PARTICIPATE

TAKE ACTION
CONNECT!



About Us

The Consortium for Media Literacy addresses the role of global media through the advocacy, research and design of media literacy education for youth, educators and parents.

The Consortium focuses on K-12 grade youth and their parents and communities. The research efforts include health education, body image/sexuality, safety and responsibility in media by consumers and creators of products. The Consortium is building a body of research, interventions and communications that demonstrate scientifically that media literacy is an effective intervention strategy in addressing critical issues for democracy: <http://www.consortiumformedialiteracy.org>

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