

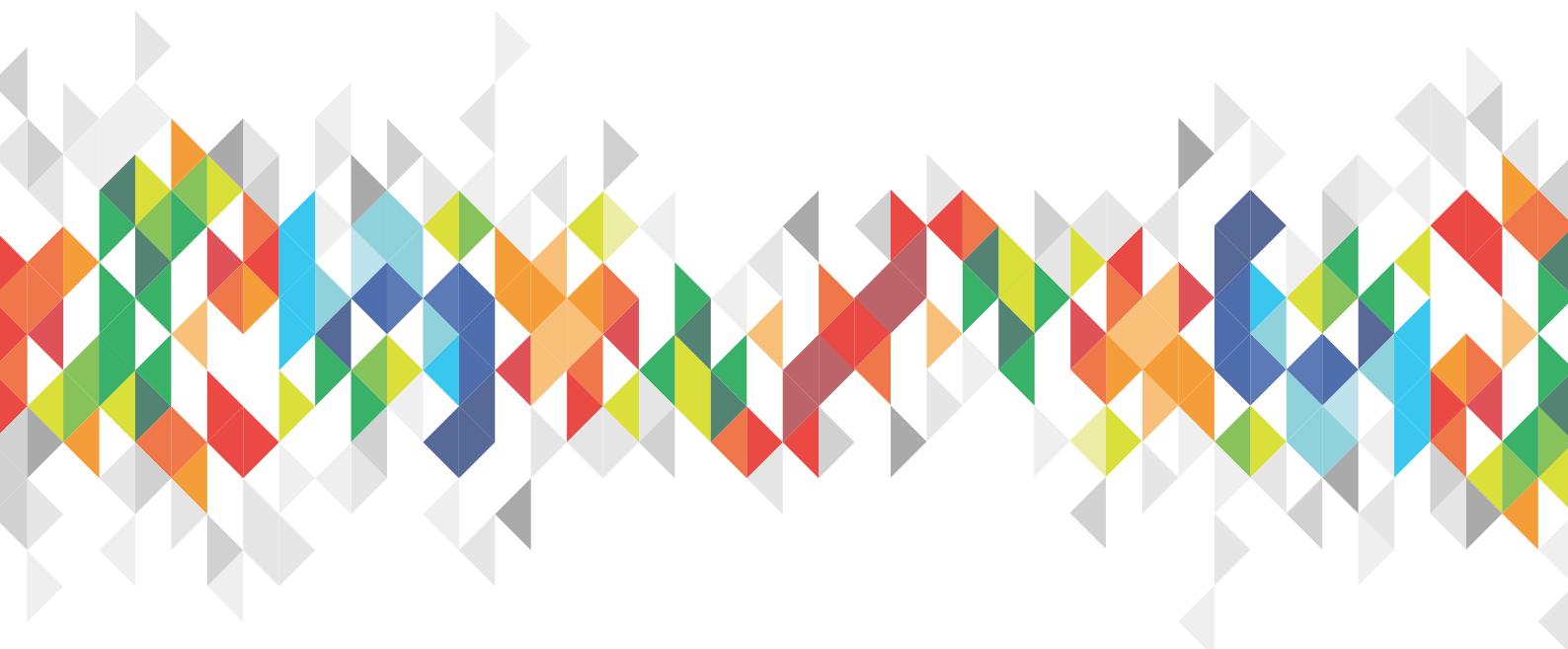
KANSALLINEN AUDIOVISUAALINEN INSTITUUTTI  
NATIONELLA AUDIOVISUELLA INSTITUTET  
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT:  
**PROMOTING MEDIA LITERACY  
AND ITS MANAGEMENT IN  
MUNICIPALITIES**

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## BACKGROUND

In promoting media literacy, the public sector, as a service provider, has an important role to play in implementing, developing and supporting media education. At the local level, municipalities are well placed to provide media literacy opportunities for people of all ages.

The study, carried out co-operatively by the Cultural Policy Research Centre Cupore and the National Audiovisual Institute KAVI, examined the current state of media education in Finnish municipalities, in particular from the perspectives of cross-governance and management of media education.

The aim of the study is to understand municipalities' media education activities, challenges and good practices in promoting media education, and the views of municipal actors regarding media education management. In this study, media education refers to all activities that aim to promote media literacy (i.e. a broad range of media-related competences and skills).

The full report *has been published in Finnish*, and the main findings are summarised in this extended abstract.

## CONDUCTING THE STUDY

For the study, officials in eight municipalities of different sizes and in different parts of Finland were interviewed in groups.

The data for the study were collected through thematic interviews of a representative sample, in terms of content and geography, of the managers and experts in Finnish municipalities who can impact the implementation of media education at a local level. The participating municipalities were Joensuu, Keuruu, Kuopio, Lappeenranta, Pori, Rovaniemi, Tampere and Vaasa.

We approached the municipalities with a request for interviewees from as wide a range of sectors as possible. The priorities for media education activities in each municipality were partly determined by which parts of the municipality felt most relevant for discussing the issue. The selection of interviewees revealed that media education in municipalities is primarily seen as the responsibility of the education sector, especially libraries and basic education. The interviewees held management positions, either as the manager responsible for education, culture or leisure, or as a manager or expert in a certain subdivision of these sectors in their municipalities.

A total of eight interviews were conducted, the majority of which were in groups, for a total of 26 officials and experts. In addition, one interview was conducted by email. All of the interviews were conducted remotely using Microsoft Teams.

The municipalities were of different sizes and located in different parts of Finland, and they had quite different resources for media literacy work. The purpose of the study was not to evaluate the municipalities' media literacy activities qualitatively or quantitatively or to compare the municipalities. Instead, the aim was to highlight practices, challenges and solutions found in the different

municipalities at a level that could benefit municipalities of all types and sizes in their media literacy work and the management that supports it. It was also the aim to guide national authorities and actors in supporting municipalities with promoting media literacy, in line with the objectives of the *national media literacy policy*.

## PROMOTING MEDIA LITERACY IN MUNICIPALITIES

A wide range of media literacy activities are carried out in the studied municipalities. Media education is cross-sectoral in nature and is carried out not only by public sector actors but also by other actors, such as the third sector. In practice, however, the public sector in Finland, as a service provider, has a major responsibility for implementing, developing and supporting media education. Municipalities are particularly well placed to provide opportunities to promote media literacy for people of all ages.

The results of the study showed that municipalities have different practices and resources for promoting media literacy in different sectors. Most commonly, media literacy promotion is seen as the domain of early childhood education, basic education and libraries. In these sectors, activities are based on curricula and statutory tasks, which makes media literacy education the most systematic and clear-cut in terms of responsibilities. However, the method of monitoring the achievement of objectives and consistency of activities varied from municipality to municipality.

The library is a key actor in municipal media education work, and its role was identified in all of the interviews. The interviewees saw media education as an established part of the daily work of the library. This has been facilitated by libraries' media literacy strategies, either developed at the municipal level or in co-operation with libraries in other municipalities. Joint strategic work has been based, inter alia, on the objectives set out in the *national literacy strategy*.

Municipal experts pointed out that there is also media education content in municipal liberal adult education, such as in adult education centres. The work in adult education centres

is similar to that of libraries in that both offer the possibility to reach adult learners.

Media education is also part of the general cultural work of municipalities. Elements of media education may be included in the municipal cultural education plan, although not all cultural education plans contain content explicitly defined as media education.

The emphasis in youth work on inclusion, active citizenship and social empowerment means that, in principle, media education fits naturally into the field of action of municipal youth work. According to interviewees, there is a certain amount of media education activity in youth work, such as media workshops, but at the same time, media education often overlaps to a large extent with general work with young people, so it is not necessarily explicitly visible in the same way as work in other sectors.

Municipal actors cooperate with various third-sector actors in the field of media education. In particular, libraries cooperate with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and associations to reach target groups and to tailor the library's guidance to the target group. The organisations' knowledge of the needs and wishes of the target group is useful in shaping media education content and policies. Partner organisations included those for senior citizens, mental health, local film or media centres and arts associations.

Generally, municipalities saw media education as a relatively well-established and ongoing activity. The actors interviewed were typically involved in a number of projects aimed at promoting media literacy. The experts from a wide range of municipalities saw project-based activities as important, even essential, in media literacy work. It was precisely through ongoing projects that media literacy activities gradually became established in the municipalities.

## FACTORS CHALLENGING MEDIA EDUCATION IN MUNICIPALITIES

We asked the interviewed heads of sector to describe the state of media education in their municipality through the challenges they face and the factors that contribute to them.

The interviewees felt that, although there are regional and school-specific differences in the intensity and consistency of activities, children, particularly school-age children, and young people are generally well served by media education. The importance of media literacy for adults and older people is well recognised in municipalities, but there is little action and planning in practice.

Although in many municipalities skilled staff were seen as an asset for media education, there was also a perception that professional competences could be improved. In many municipalities, staff competence surveys reveal a perceived skills gap, particularly in relation to issues in the digital world. The media is in a state of constant change, so the level of competence of staff involved in media education needs to be constantly monitored and updated where necessary.

The regional aspect was raised, for example, in terms of accessibility. Although there were actors from outside the major cities, the regional focus was not particularly strong in the interviewees' descriptions. More generally, the experience of how resources were harnessed for media education activities was not linked to the size or location of the municipality. Although the experts felt that, overall, media education work in the municipality was fairly well resourced, there were also perceived gaps in the resourcing of media education and of supporting work.

The lack of understanding of the nature or importance of media education among decision-makers in the municipality was seen as a challenge to achieving the objectives of media education. This indicated that awareness-raising among decision-makers and commitment to the objectives are needed. Media education is defined, in particular through the content of the curricula, as an essentially ongoing activity, and many municipalities have co-operation structures in place to support this permanence. Nevertheless, in order to ensure continuity, media education should, according to the interviewees, be kept on the municipal agenda, even when decision-makers change.

## FACTORS SUPPORTING MEDIA EDUCATION IN MUNICIPALITIES

Interviewees were asked to identify their municipality's strengths in media education, along with the factors that contribute to media education in their municipality.

In the majority of the municipalities studied, the heads of departments and other development actors interviewed felt that, overall, the role of media education was fairly well identified. However, there were differences in the extent to which media education was systematically integrated into the municipality's activities. In some, media education was more strongly identified, with the development of top-level strategies to guide it. To the extent that media literacy promotion is included in a municipality's strategies or action plans, it is most often included in local curricula, library action plans or municipal cultural education plans.

Cross-service co-operation, either in day-to-day activities or in development work through projects, was seen as an absolute strength in the municipalities. Co-operation is typically between the education system and libraries, which have the most well-established co-operative structures. Co-operation with actors outside the local public administration, mainly with the third sector, was not quite as strong, but where co-operative patterns were well established, those with organisations were mentioned as a strength.

Skilled staff, such as teachers, librarians or digital pedagogical developers, along with technical support to enable the use and accessibility of digital equipment, were seen as important resources and supporting factors. There were perceived differences in staff skills and motivation to engage with media education content, but these were systematically

addressed through monitoring of skills and in-service training.

In many municipalities, project work was perceived as an effective way of carrying out development work. It not only enables activities that would not necessarily be otherwise resourced, but it also creates networks with other actors. The municipalities involved in projects felt that they were able to use the knowledge and networks built during the projects in such a way that the knowledge gained and the approaches and operating models were transferred into their day-to-day activities.

One of the strengths highlighted was municipalities' well-functioning infrastructure for implementing media education. This meant, first, that the equipment used for media education was appropriately accessible. Infrastructure also referred to the available spaces and facilities.

Sufficient resources for the activities were an important factor in supporting media education, according to the interviewees. Although some improvements in resourcing were felt to be necessary, the municipalities were generally seen as having fairly well-resourced media education.



## MANAGEMENT OF MEDIA EDUCATION

The management of media education is one of the key starting points of this study, as the national media education policy identified media education management as an important factor in promoting systematic and planned media education at the national and local levels.

Identifying and building a holistic vision of media education and media literacy, as well as creating common objectives and communicating them to the actors involved, were seen as the most crucial tasks of media education management at all levels of the municipality, meaning both at the top management level of the education department or equivalent and at the management level of its subordinate functions (education, library, culture, youth work), libraries and schools. In the context of managing the big picture, the manager was also seen as responsible for identifying and targeting areas where media education was lacking.

In addition, the importance of communicating the wider values of media education, the role of media education and its importance to society were emphasised in the role of the manager, who is tasked with communicating the values behind media education. The role of management in education is also to ensure that the activities undertaken are in line with policy-making. The engagement of decision-makers is essential, as their awareness and support are key factors in promoting media education in a municipality. Their engagement was also identified as a factor in supporting management and the work of the manager at different levels of the municipality.

The key tools and responsibilities in the work of the manager are the different means of resource, norm and information steering.

Through their position and actions, managers enable media education activities and the co-operation supporting them, both within the sector as a whole and within sectoral management. Standards and regulations also guide and support the manager's work. It is easier to justify and drive actions that are required by law. The manager is responsible for translating existing plans and definitions into everyday practices and annual objectives. With their actions and enthusiasm, managers can play a key role in the emergence of new activities. Managers are also key to ensuring the consistency of activities across different units.

However, in the fields of culture, basic education and youth work, the manager's main role is to provide information and guidance, such as by disseminating information, facilitating training and participating in and supporting projects or other development activities. The role of the manager is not only seen as facilitating project activities but also, equally importantly, as supporting the sustainability of the projects (i.e. the transfer and consolidation of the practices generated by the projects into the activities of the sectors).

## MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES AND FACTORS THAT SUPPORT MANAGEMENT

The management of media education is challenged by its scale and cross-governance: how to manage co-operation and co-ordinate the division of work between sectors when activities are often bound to sectors, especially in terms of financial and human resources. Media education management is above all about network management and enabling co-operation between different actors. In that sense, the projects were highlighted as effective means and channels for inter-sectoral co-operation.

Adequate resources support media education management. Financial resources also allow for management in municipalities.

The management of media education at the top level and also within the sectors is also supported by guiding norms, plans and strategies. The interviewees called for stronger guidance and support at the national level, specifically, in terms of disseminating a broader understanding of media education to municipalities. They also called for a stronger and more concrete link between media education and the strengthening of municipal participation and social cohesion through well-being promotion and for the objectives of media education to be integrated into the well-being discussion on the national level.

The support of top management for the entire municipality and top management of the different sectors was seen as particularly important for supporting the managers' activities in the various fields. In addition, the support, commitment and skills of the professional community and practitioners in media education were identified as key resources for the managers' work.

The management of media education in municipalities is supported by various models of co-operation, such as working groups. They should be permanent, not tied to projects, and cross-sectoral. Other structures that were mentioned as supporting concrete media education activities included ICT mentoring systems, monitoring and evaluation practices and intra- and inter-departmental co-ordinators and other support staff to ask for help when needed.

Municipalities are also supported by ready-made materials and guidelines, such as tailor-made media education training materials for different grade levels, to support teachers' practical work. In addition to the teachers implementing media education themselves, the manager is also supported in this work by the existence in some municipalities of different competence frameworks or other systematic descriptions of the competencies required of pupils at each grade level.

The management of staff competences is seen as central to the management of media education. Staff may have very different skills and competences in relation to media education and literacy, and staff competences support the work and competences of the manager. Therefore, supporting and strengthening staff competences (e.g. by providing training), as well as levelling the skills gap among staff, are seen as key roles of the manager

## THEMES FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Finally, we examine the perceptions of municipal officials on the future of media education and media literacy and the main issues and phenomena in media education, which we mirror in the themes that emerged from the study.

The promotion of media literacy was strongly linked to the promotion of digital literacy in project work and decision-making in municipalities. Frequently, interviewees talked about media literacy through skills and opportunities for utilising equipment and digital literacy. Interviewees saw it as the task of media educators, and of management, to articulate media education objectives and link them to digitalisation promotion objectives.

The interviewees highlighted the need to strengthen the digital inclusion capacities of adults, older people or adult migrants in municipalities. Further recognition and support for work on media education for adults was thus also seen as important. Critical media and information literacy, interaction skills and factors related to conversational culture and information security were identified as key areas that should be promoted in the future.

The interviews revealed that media education work in municipalities is not necessarily identified or comprehensively defined in all sectors. This is partly due to the everyday practices of media education, which are based on situational rather than guiding plans and common articulated objectives. Making activities visible also allows for more structured management of them. To create an overall picture of the work of the municipal departments and of the media education work with the third sector, there is a need for stronger co-ordination between the departments and

for someone to take overall responsibility for promoting media education.

The most important aspect was seen as the linking of media education for local citizens to social inclusion and participation, the overall well-being of people, the smooth running of everyday life and the ability and opportunity for all citizens, including the disadvantaged, to play a full part in society. In organisational terms, this would be supported by a stronger link between the municipal education sector and the welfare sector in cross-sectoral co-operation. National guidelines and support are also needed to link media education to strengthening local residents' participation and sense of community. In practice, libraries are currently most clearly perceived as interfaces and opportunities for supporting the inclusion and participation of all local residents.

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