Media literacy needs to go beyond the skills-based definition focused on users (access, analysis, evaluation and content creation), and to consider the “knowledge arrangements of society” implied in their texts and technologies, in their social and institutional uses and in the ways they are managed, namely by media, governmental, educational, and commercial bodies (Sonia Livingstone, 2004).

Based on such perspective on Media Literacy, this presentation is organised around 3 main topics:

1. **Children's access to the Web in the perspective of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: Protection, Provision and Participation**

2. **Internet Providers and Media Literacy in recent European Recommendations**

3. **Internet Providers and Media Literacy of children: Assuring Protection, Provision and Participation by a focus on People, Products, and Processes**

1. **Children's access to the Web in the perspective of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: Protection, Provision and Participation**

   Children's access to the web should be thinking in terms of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most relevant Document concerning children's rights, signed by all the EU countries in the early 1990s. Approved before the emergence and generalisation of online media, this Document still has relevance as a guide for local, national and transnational political decision making affecting children.

   In this Media Expert Seminar, promoted by the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union, let us briefly remember the four basic principles of the UN Convention:

   1) Decisions should be taken with the best interests of the child as a primary consideration;

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1 Many thanks to Carlos Correia and Daniel Cardoso (FCSH/UNL); Francisco Teotónio Pereira and Noélia Macedo (RTP); Vitor Tomé (FPCE/UL); Célia Quico and Dalila Martins (PT); Rui Shantilal (ONI), Nelson Vieira, Sofia Leitão and Tomás Patrocínio (EU Kids Online/Portugal);
2) The opinions of children themselves should be heard;

3) Their development should be ensured;

4) There should be no discrimination between children.

Particularly important for this debate are the article 13 and the article 17, both stressing children’s access to information.

Article 13 emphasizes the children’s right to freedom of expression: freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, through any media of the child’s choice. Restrictions for the exercise of this right are the respect of the rights or reputations of others, and the protection of national security or of public order or public health or morals.

Internet and online tools allow children to achieve this right of expression in a powerful way, while underlining their responsibility and awareness of the rights of the others, including other children. This is a civic issue, connected with human rights and citizenship, much more than a technological skill. As Divina Frau-Meigs (2006b: 8-9) stresses:

"The real added-value of Internet, as an interactive tool, took here its full meaning to capture the scope of children’s and young people’s activities (content production, dissemination and appropriation). This has implications for the protection of their human rights, and their own awareness of the rights and responsibilities it entails for them too. (...) Children need to be more aware of their rights but also more aware of their infringements on the rights of adults.”

Concurrently, article 17 presents the mass media as providers of information and material from a diversity of cultural, national and international sources. The article also invites mass media to develop appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child. In spite of the differences of mass and online media in their access and uses, it makes sense to include here the Internet, which is used by millions of people.

It is possible to identify in these two articles the 3 Ps associated with Child’s Rights: the right of protection (from illegal or harmful contents and situations); the right of provision (to seek/have access and receive a diversity of information and material); the right of participation (freedom of expression, imparting information).

The right of protection is much more present in the public discourses (regulatory bodies, govern, corporations and so) and in parental concerns on Internet than the rights of provision or participation. Questions of children’s empowerment and agency in media literacy programs, for instance, only recently came to the public agenda and are still lacking consensus.

Although the UN Convention presents children as those under the age of 18, for the purpose of discussing web access and uses, it makes sense to consider age groups, with different written and reading competencies and with distinct social experiences and
interests. The 3 Ps presented above certainly need to have these age differences in consideration.

While younger children like to play online games and explore other activities, in warm, colourful and dynamic sites, older children’s Internet use seems to be strongly associated with interpersonal communication and social contact. Ever earlier, they jump the “walled garden” of protected sites designed for children wanting to be where their friends are, where “everybody is”. For many youngsters, information research or “surfing” seem not to be as popular as the continuous self presentation, in a “cool” atmosphere, sharing music, pictures, interests, view points, or just changing personal messages. Instant messengers and e-mailing promote contacts with friends, whereas online chat rooms and social networks, such as My Space or Hi5, are more public and opened to contacts outside the personal cycle. Online gaming, whether or not providing opportunities to synchronous interactivity, is not only leisure, but also present topics for conversation. Web publishing and blogging are other activities which allow children and young people to be producers or co-producers.

As Mckay et al (2004: 195) write, the technology that provides mobility to the young people also provides a feeling of autonomy, giving them a sense of control over their lives and independence from their families, while at the same time providing their parents with the assurance (albeit perhaps illusory) of contact and immediate access. Broadband Internet access is also affecting user patterns, whereby young people are able to spend much more time online, using streaming video and playing internet games, and inevitably bringing to technology their needs for information, entertainment and socializing. It appears to be that, for children, it is all about interaction and power, characteristics that stand above the differences between the media. They look for peer relations and community, and to attain this goal connectedness has a key importance for them be it through online navigation or cell phones.

In this world of hypertextuality, anarchic organization, synchronous communication, interactivity, visual aesthetics and so forth, how may Internet Providers contribute to children’s media literacy in the perspective of children’s rights expressed by the 3 Ps? Before trying to answer this question, let us see how Internet Providers and Media Literacy are considered by European political instances.

2. Internet Providers and Media Literacy in recent European Recommendations

Internet Providers are here considered in a broad sense, involving:

1) Industry and private corporations such as Internet service providers (ISP), manufacturers of computer equipment and software, and Internet content providers;

2) Public content providers, such as institutional portals or associated with public broadcasting service.
These different Internet Providers can make contributions to the Internet safety of children (protection) as well as to enrich the Internet provision of experiences and participatory activities.

This “multi-provider” approach may be associated with recent political European Recommendations related to children and online access, such as Empowering children in the new information and communications environment, Recommendation Rec(2006)12, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, on 27 September 2006; and Protection of Minors and Human Dignity, Recommendation (2006/952/EC), by the European Parliament and the Council, on 20 December 2006.2

Both European Recommendations present the needs of multi stakeholder approaches, media literacy and child’s Protection, the latest being the focus of the EC Recommendation. However, there are some differences in their approaches indicated by the semantic distinction on the titles (Empowering vs Protection; Children vs Minors).

The EC Recommendation, Protection of Minors and Human Dignity, presents the multi stakeholder approach as a “continuous dialogue” which includes “national and European legislators, regulatory authorities, industries, associations, citizens and civil society”. In this platform, online industry is invited mainly to assure a wider access and to provide technological devices and labelling information about the content:

“Develop positive measures for the benefit of minors, including initiatives to facilitate their wider access to audiovisual and online information services, while avoiding potentially harmful content, for instance, by means of filtering systems. Such measures could include (…) a system of common descriptive symbols or warning messages indicating the age category and/or which aspects of the content have led to a certain age recommendation” (II.1)

The perspective of media literacy is presented in an adults-children approach which excludes children agency and participation as well as other contributions from Internet Providers besides those pointed above:

“Action to enable minors to make responsible use of audiovisual and on-line information services, notably by improving the level of awareness among parents, teachers and trainers of the potential of the new services and of the means whereby they may be made safe for minors, in particular through media literacy or media education programmes and, for instance, by continuous training within school education.” (I.2.a)

Among future Child Protection perspectives some are singled out such as “activate parental control”, the existence of “available complaint mechanisms and information resources”, “information for parents about the effectiveness of filtering software”, and “the

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2 Besides these Recommendations, it should be mentioned the European Framework to safer mobile use by younger teenagers and children, promoted by 15 mobile provider and content communities from a number of EU Member States, and signed on 6 February 2007, the Safer Internet Day, in the presence of the EC Information Society and Media Commissioner, Viviane Reding.
possibility of supporting the establishment of a generic second level domain reserved for monitored sites committed to respecting minors and their rights, such as .KiD.eu”.

The Council of Europe Recommendation, *Empowering children in the new information and communications environment*, suggests a broader agenda to the private sector, and underlines the responsibility of the Internet industry concerning children’s rights to protection, provision and participation and their media literacy:

“In partnership with governments, the private sector, as one of the key actors in the information society, should be encouraged to promote and facilitate children’s skills, well-being and related information literacy and training initiatives. In this connection, actors in this sector should regularly assess and evaluate their information policies and practices regarding child safety and responsible use, while respecting fundamental rights, in particular the right to freedom of expression and to receive and impart information and opinions without interference and regardless of frontiers.”

Enlarging this multi-stakeholder approach for empowering children, which also involves civil society actors and the media, Divine Frau-Meigs\(^3\) (2006b: 13) includes two other social actors: Young People, and International Governmental Organizations (IGO), such as UNICEF, UNESCO or Council of Europe. In the next point, the role of UNICEF as an Internet Content Provider will be visible, as well as the perspective of taking children and young people accesses and uses online into consideration.

3. Internet Providers and Media Literacy of children: Assuring Protection, Provision and Participation by focus on People, Products, and Processes

The Internet Providers, in the broad sense mentioned above, may promote children’s media literacy to self-empower them and to enable them to deal with not only the technological apparatus but also (and mostly) with the online potentialities and risks.

Discussions on the ways they may achieve such purpose imply taking into consideration different questions, such as the nature of the Internet Providers (private corporations vs public institutions or associated with public service broadcasting) or the age of children involved.

If the 3 Ps surrounding Child’s Rights (Protection, Provision and Participation) should be always present, the child’s age and its related interests are variables into account when considering the contributions of Internet Providers towards media literacy.

*Private Internet Providers contributing to a Safer Internet place*

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\(^3\) Divine Frau-Meigs was the General Rapporteur at the Council of Europe Pan European Forum on Human Rights in the Informational Society: Empowering Children and Young People, which occurred in Yerevan, some weeks after this Recommendation.
Other 3 Ps (People, Processes and Products) are required to guarantee effective security and a safe environment for children using the Internet. Technology by itself will not be effective if it is not put into practice with the full support of Processes and the People. In fact, some consulting studies, such as AMS CATALYST Publication, referring to security measures mention that 80% of the effort has to be done by the People and Processes while Technology is just 20% of the cake. Therefore, the best approach to improve children’s safety in the Internet is through the implementation of scenarios that ensure the correct usage of the 3 Ps.

In the different protection measures from EUROISPA (the European Internet Service Providers Association), the 3 Ps are present at different levels. Products, Processes and People (parents) are linked to children’s protection through the use of devices such as filters for differentiated surfing, to be installed on the user’s home, content classification, age senders, passwords custody, user identification and data base management. Children’s online access and use is in this way co-promoted by parents and industry, excluding children and young people from this process.

Belgium ISPA developed a technological device, a Safer Chat Room, by making the use of an e-ID card that allows the age verification of the chat room entrants. This example may be considered as a Product that may be interesting for assuring safety for young children, but risks not being considered by elder children.

In Ireland, an ISPA candidate has to adopt the ISPA Code of Practice and Ethics, which incorporates Acceptable Usage Policies to support a Safer Internet environment, particularly for children. The UK ISPA works with the Home Office Child Protection Task Force on Child Protection (active since 2001), the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) and supports the Ofcom Media Literacy Initiative. Both cases seem to involve the 3 Ps: People (parents, regulators, educators, Police...), Processes and Products.

Walled gardens and their differences for a media literacy approach

Regarding younger children, it is important to create a safe web environment that will allow for an interactive exploration where content options can be done according to the child’s interests, which, in turn, will allow for these to expand building and broadening a wider knowledge open to the child and the others.

The creation of relatively closed environments where one can surf within a gateway or to another related gateway, and where it is no possible to reach unwanted sites, that is a “walled garden”, can be associated to the use of filters and other technological devices as ones mentioned. For this to happen it is necessary, nonetheless, that the information given by Internet Providers to the parents and educators in order to built this “safe garden” may be of easy access by adult population with little or no computer literacy. ISP may make available

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4 EUROISPA is the world’s largest association of ISPs, and involves 8 European countries: Finland, France, Italy, Austria, Germany, the UK and Ireland. Their members work in a co-regulatory in some countries and in a self-regulatory approach in others.
very simple handbooks receiving, in turn, public recognition for their contribution to the use of a Safer Internet.

It is this right of protection (mainly, from sexual predators and pornographic images) that is frequently present in powerful Internet Providers gateways oriented to children in their early years: KOL (from the AOL, member of Time Warner Group) or Kids.yahoo (the Yahoo gateway for children), to name but a few.

Commercial Internet Content Providers directly oriented to children are also associated with media industries that migrate from the audiovisual to the web space: Fox Kids Networks, The Disney Channel (which is present in 13 European countries with contents and ads in different languages) or Nick.com, from Nickelodeon/MTV, among others. This migration allows these corporations “a rapid penetration in the household while creating a whole culture of coherent signs - with rituals and recurring characters that please and comfort children - that provide many possibilities for on-line merchandizing” (Frau-Meigs, 2006a: 19).

These and many other corporations provide children with a dynamic environment inviting people to stay in the site, exploring its endless possibilities, strictly related to the consumption of entertainment contents. Screens on constant change, a panoply of contents at a simple click, sound effects, are strategies used for “child agitation” and consumption appeal under the appearance of a tranquil space walled from external dangers.

The commercial dimension of these websites goes beyond the entertainment products that are shown on screen. A reading of the Private Policy texts reveals the economic value of such sites in the entertainment and consumption child industry.

In spite of their differences (for instance, Advertisement is more identified in Nick.com, which has a more private policy for children’s identification), the use of personal information (name, age, address, e-mail...), cookies or “log data” allow these corporations to know how many visitors their websites have received, how long they stay for each visit, where they go when they are at the website and what kind of browser and operating system they use. These are shared routines of controlling Internet use by children as dynamic new consumer targets in a market economy.

Provision of alternative contents

Some “commercial-free harbour” comes from public service broadcasting for children; such is the case of the PBS Kids, in the US, one of the most prestigious, offering games, educational series, music and so on. In Europe, Cbeebies, Children BBC is an impressive example of these alternative contents, oriented to the early age children, with an attractive design and a high level of interaction. In other European countries, there are also these alternative gateways in connection to the public broadcasting service. In contrast with the private ones, some of the public portals are relatively poor in interaction, screen animation and design. Absence of financial resources for these gateways for young children and the speed of the challenges in the online are the arguments. However, these Public Internet
Providers should also consider their obligations and promote more children participation, including their production in association with the educational body.

**Jumping the garden, exploring the world**

As they grow, children want to experiment other online possibilities, like exchange of messages and the participation in discussion forums. Again, an example of a Public Service Provider comes from the UK. CBBC Newsround is a gateway where children may participate in monitored social networks and express their voices about different subjects and activities, such as surveys, chats, quizzes and so. Children are advised on bullying and other negative situations they may experience online, and their comments appear on the top of the screen, inviting others to express their perspectives. The Newsround invites the participation of children as citizens in several discussions, includes news and promotes a civic space to debate them. Its Press Pack space is an example of self-empowerment of children as media producers. Suggestions oriented to older children (8-12) may also be found in Magic, the UNICEF gateway.

From private companies there are also interesting examples of initiatives targeted at children and young people (mostly, considered as students) instances. This is the case, for instance, of a national media literacy initiative promoted by a Portuguese ISP (SAPO), cooperating with governmental bodies (Education, Culture), other media, and private corporations. During 3 months, around 15.000 students and 1.200 teachers from all the country (including Azores and Madeira) were provided with the basic skills to create and publish digital content, through online and CD-Rom tutorials, and workshops in “broadband trains” that crossed the country. The next step aim was to participate in a national schools contest involving online competencies, presented in television (RTP)

This year, a national contest was associated with the Reading Promotion Plan (Plano Nacional de Leitura). Teams chose a book from a Portuguese author (the only basic condition), worked it, produced multimedia contents (videos, podcasts and so) and shared and discussed their experiences in an associated blog. A jury elected a winner team by each one the 18 regions involved.

**Mixing Internet worlds**

The UNICEF gateway for young people, Voices of Youth (VOY), is certainly one of the richest portals for allowing children to express themselves as citizens in different ways, and their achieving of self-empowerment not only in the Internet space but also in different social roles. It is available in different languages (namely English, French, Spanish, Arab, Swalli) and involves young people from all over the world.

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5 The first step of the contest had two phases: 1) Searching: weekly challenges in which the teams had to find the correct answer by searching the web (using Sapo search engine); 2) Create: teams had to create a multimedia work (blog or home page) with a teacher’s support.
VOY is an example of a contribution of an IGO for the media literacy of children and young people in the sense of plurality of perspectives and experiences, inclusiveness, and self-empowerment. Some of the Projects are associated with private media companies, like MTV, such as a competition among young people: “Have a good idea on how to educate others about HIV and AIDS? Vlogit!

Associated with Global Kids, a NGO based in New York, VOY entered in the space of the popular game Teen Second Life and promoted a cyber-festival that involved children from different parts of the world. Designed by children and organized on their island within Second Life, the cyber-festival was centred on a competition to build virtual structures in response to issues such as HIV/AIDS, education, health and child exploitation and abuse. Even if the number of participants were not huge, this may be certainly an open door to young people, contributing to enlarge their perspectives about children and young people related issues.

The same scenario could be considered for other social spaces. For instance, the VOY initiative ”Make a difference” One minute video contest!”, around a child’s right could have a distinctive presence in The Citizentube, the very new space of YouTube, contributing for the enlargement of the public sphere and discussion on news and politics.

Promoting safety online and its risks

Remembering the 3 Ps on online safety (People, Process and Products), let us see how they may be considered for older children and young people.

Some public providers have pages with Internet safe advice in an attempt to reach different audiences (early children, kids, young people, and adults). These sites tend to be affected by the discourse of fear rather than by a discourse of opportunities and risk controls. It is possible to find pages where written texts prevail, giving advice to young people in an, not uncommon, adult and authoritative tone. Others have more interactive activities, but are still poor in the decision-making process, which would contribute to their reflexivity and empowerment so needed in a risky context. They certainly provide useful information for adults with a minimum level of online literacy but should be more focused on children’s culture in the online context. Also the hotlines assured by ISP should be designed to be “age sensitive”.

The portal Décode le web is a production of the Microsoft MSN and is, possibly, one of the most interesting examples of how software industry may contribute towards the media literacy. The portal was produced in collaboration with E-Enfance, a French parental association6, and covers a range of subjects associated with Internet and online uses, including mobile phones. Its home page design is modern and the language tends to be familiar to young people and could be used as a self-empowerment device.

6 The “discourse of fear” is present in the home page of this parental association, which presents two 30’ videos, both placing children as fatal victims of Internet content and contacts, without oppositional perspectives.
It would be interesting to research how young people deal with this portal or with others, take into consideration their comments and how the different age groups or genders evaluate their content and self-empowerment provided.

The active presence of young people’s voice and involvement in the design and conception of these contents and on safety, associated with their online positive experiences, could contribute to promote a different media literacy discourse. Creative and dynamic ways of involving young people, in role-playing and decision making games, team work with educators and media professionals, could be a way to change the discourse of danger and fears that seems to be ignored by the target, the young people. This happens particularly with teens, experiencing a felling of being able to dominate and control risks, and relying more on their peers’ experience and competencies than in mute written pages in screens.

Taking into consideration children and young people that have jumped the fence garden, an ISP Security Practice Manager, Rui Shantilal\(^7\), comments how technological measures could be friendly addressed, promoting their empowerment to deal with online risks:

> “Technology should not be used primarily to filter or to limit the access to children and young people, because the natural tendency will be to try to overlap or to find a workaround to that limitation. Children should not see technological approaches for safety as a challenge or as a barrier. Therefore, these technological approaches, together with the implementation of effective processes, should be setup in the sense to make children trust and feel that these tools will in fact be helpful for them. Children should see the technology measures as friendly and not as a challenge. This approach will in fact contribute to the children’s online literacy and empowerment.”

Stressing that the most powerful protection comes from Processes and People (children and young people included), this ISP professional suggests as a possible contribution from the industry a technological device:

> “Let’s take an example. MSN is a very popular chat tool also used by the majority of children in the Internet. A very useful implementation would be the existence of a virtual buddy in MSN that would help children regarding safety in chat. This could be achieved through the development of a plug-in for MSN or through development of Microsoft itself as a feature of MSN. This virtual buddy, that should have a cool look for children, should communicate with children in an appropriate cool language. It should also have triggers to advise them how to act in some ‘weird’ situations. In practice, this virtual buddy could be an intelligent correlation engine with pattern matching in order to, for example, detect that someone that is chatting with the user for the first time is asking something like “What is your address?”, for instance. In this situation, the cool virtual buddy would pop-up and invites the child to think a little about the question. This could

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\(^7\) Rui Shantilal works to OniTelecom/Portugal as a Security Practice Manager and is also a MSc Student of Information Security at Royal Holloway - University of London.
be a way of stopping for moments the synchronic and immediate answers that children tend to
use online, contributing for being auto-reflexive about their practice before acting immediately.
This virtual buddy should also be able to detect that someone is claiming to a user a suspicious
purpose. For instance: “I collect credit card numbers, I have credit card numbers from all over
the world! If you get me your mum’s credit card number I will get you some nice pictures of an
artist or something at the top for your desktop. I can send one now in advance so that you can
evaluate if you like it.” Here the pattern is: low score user + detection of ‘CREDIT’ near ‘CARD).
This concept could also be used in a Browser. For example, Internet Explorer could have a
Virtual Buddy that could inspect the content of the web pages before displaying it, and advise the
users about them.”

Synthesis:
- As part of their media literacy, children rights to information and online
communication should be protected and provided, allowing children an active participation in
the online world;
- A safe online environment involves much more People and Processes than Products;
technology is not the most relevant factor but should be taken in consideration by the
industry as and ISP part of their social responsibility. Also, parents and educators without ICT
literacy should be provided with easy to use handbooks with information about how to protect
children.
- Different ages demand different approaches in media literacy;
- Empowerment of children as safe Internet users and media literates involves a multi
stakeholder approach, including children and young people themselves;
- Internet Providers in a broad sense play a relevant role for media literacy, providing
children with rich and interactive contents and tools as well as with self-training devices and
gateways where their active participation, experience and ways of expressing are taken in
consideration;
- Public Broadcasting and institutional gateways should provide a diversity of
educational and civic contents, be attractive in their design, stress citizenship and children
rights and associated issues.

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Internet addresses:
Children BBC: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/)
Children BBC Newsroom: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/default.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/default.stm)
Decode le web: [http://www.decodeleweb.com/default.aspx](http://www.decodeleweb.com/default.aspx)
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/)
Kids On Line (AOL): [http://kids.aol.com/welcome](http://kids.aol.com/welcome)
SAPO.PT Project (Turma SAPO): [http://turma.sapo.pt](http://turma.sapo.pt)