CITIZENS IN A MEDIATED WORLD

Digital technology has become a natural part of our daily lives and requires new skills, knowledge and attitudes. Everyone can create their own media content and share it with others, and the distinction between reception and perception is erased.

This development represents a marked departure from the traditional media use of people, and challenges the perceptions about what it means to use and produce media in appropriate and meaningful ways. Critical media literacy, communication skills and competencies for creative and responsible content production have become increasingly important means for empowering people with Media and Information Literacy (MIL) in present media culture.

This book presents the discussions and conclusions from a conference on Media and Information Literacy that was held in Helsinki in May 2016, financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The event was organized by the NORDICOM (Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research), together with KAVI (National Audiovisual Institute) in Finland, jointly with the Nordic media and media education authorities: Media Council for Children and Youth in Denmark, Fjölmiðlanefnd (The Media Commission) of Iceland, Norwegian Media Authority and the Swedish Media Council.

Ingela Wadbring, PhD and Professor, is the Director of NORDICOM, Sweden

Leo Pekkala, PhD, is the Deputy Director of KAVI, Finland
CITIZENS IN A MEDIATED WORLD

A Nordic-Baltic Perspective on Media and Information Literacy

Ingela Wadbring & Leo Pekkala (eds)
Citizens in a Mediated World
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The publication is also available as open access at www.nordicom.gu.se

Published by:
Nordicom
University of Gothenburg
Box 713
SE 405 30 GÖTEBORG
Sweden

Cover by: Per Nilsson
Printed by: Exacta Print, Borås, Sweden, 2017
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Media Literacy and Expanding Public Spaces

Cultures, Policies and Risks in the Baltic countries

Auksė Balčytienė & Kristina Juraitė

Understanding media and its role in education and socialization has been a rather diversified process, in terms of the perspectives, practices and actors involved in media and information literacy (MIL) – from a protectionist and reactive approach, which perceives media as a threat and danger, to the perception of media as a tool of public empowerment, promoting institutional, structural and individual change in contemporary society. What is expected of people in such a society is to acquire the skills and resources necessary to navigate complex and permanently unstable social and technological networks.

Apparently, the abundance of new media and information sources require new competencies and skills for teachers, students and all other actors involved in the learning process. In order to empower students and young people to use media in a creative, responsible and critical way, rather than protecting them from the harmful information and its effects, a consolidation of different stakeholders at the local, national, regional, and European levels is needed, including the main actors in the education system, research and analysis, the media and creative industry, the private sector and civil society.

This overview looks at some of the contextual particularities of political, economic and societal cultures in the three Baltic States and discusses how these are contributing and shaping specific tendencies registered in the climate of media literacy in each country.

Though there seems to be no directly observable relationship between the position of literacy definitions in the media policies and media system specificities of a particular country, media literacy, indeed, is among the key aspects and characteristics of a democratically functioning and participative media system (Jenkins 2006). In present communications’ environment, which is indeed far-reaching and rich in content and saturated with views and opinions, people are required to be knowledgeable not only about their basic democratic rights and freedoms of access to information; they must also be perceived as actively experienced with novel means of communication and self-expression (Niemenen 2016; Ahva et al. 2015).

European media policy makers have traditionally perceived and understood information users as citizens. But today’s media environments offer to and also require supplementary attachments from their users, suggesting that audiences should also be viewed as clients and customers, and not just as citizens. The customer requests underlining perspective (and predominantly those needs which are associated with openness, plurality and safety of the communications’ system), in principle, is an approach that allows people to fully master literacy competences to enjoy self-expression and to contribute to self-actualization, happiness and general societal wellbeing (EU Digital agenda; EU media freedom).

From international assessments, it becomes clear that higher income countries are more advanced in terms of media literacy promotion and development, because they are richer and invest more resources in the development of adequate policies and practices in media education. But, as will be shown here, we would also like to argue that aside from economic and financial pre-conditions, cultural features are of no less significance in the promotion of media literacy and, hence, of participatory societal culture. In the European context, Estonia is a good example of a country that has intellectually and intentionally shaped its strategic development vision in communications aimed at the advancement of societal consensus and solidarity through innovative thinking, creativeness and other advancements in education (and also the promotion of media education and learning).

The Baltic media context:
From media customs and routines, to media literacy

In the three Baltic countries, media trends and developments, as well as the climate of media freedom, are highly influenced by contextual conditions, namely the small market, very liberal regulation, and fragile and fluid media professionalism (Vihalemm 2002, Baerug 2005, Balčytienė 2010, Balčytienė 2012). The ideally favourable conditions for the media industry – unrestricted freedom of the press and an oligopolistic market – do not automatically promote media professionalism, accountability and self-regulation (Loit et al. 2011, Rožukalne 2013). In all three countries, media markets are of an oligopolistic character – as contextually moulded economic opportunities are indeed limited and tiny and, thus, cannot accommodate too many owners – which results in the scarcity of local and regional media, it also disturbs media pluralism and diversity, as well as media professionalism. In most cases, available legislation and court practice do not yet contribute to the process of supporting media professionalism, know-how, and accountability. Additionally, very small and highly concentrated media markets can give jobs for a limited number of journalists; hence news commentators more often than not prioritize loyalty to the employer, rather than to professional ideals (Balčytienė & Lauk 2005). Hence, freedom of the press has become freedom for the press owners and enables the media organizations to abuse freedom of expression by
blocking certain uncomfortable voices. In most cases, in all three Baltic countries, media business strategies follow an opportunistic approach: by focusing on attracting the highest possible share of audience, too few investments go into the promotion of media professionalism, competence, performance analysis, and audience requests’ research. This seriously distresses editorial decision-making, as shifts have been noticed towards stricter ‘managerialism’ with market logic and media instrumentalisation taking over professionalism ideals and standards. In general, risks to media freedom and pluralism in the Baltic countries are relatively small, but obvious deficiencies emerge due to the lack of the regulation of horizontal media concentration and media ownership transparency, inadequate and short-term standards of PSM funding, underdeveloped policies of media literacy, and limited support for minority and community media. Among the most recent representative trends are media ownership changes towards even greater concentration, a rising rivalry among media outlets, continuing audience fragmentation, and dropping institutional trust.

All things considered, in most cases, the Baltic media’s response to democratic needs and requirements is fairly mixed – the media seldom functions as a pure and actual contributor to the needs of democracy and the ideals of the public good. Likewise, the general public disappointment with democratic functioning is also due to the interrelated processes of growing commercialization and marketisation of media and politics – the rise of strategic political communications, and the rise of partisan and ideologically tinted journalism. In the same way, the public’s trust in and the quality of democracy decreases when media moves into the field of political and economic power sharing and instrumentalisation, and when self-censorship becomes an everyday reality among media professionals. As seen from the table below, though specific general trends are recognized as shifting towards more commercially-oriented content production, even the smallest countries can show great cultural diversity in terms of what types of media are dominating and trusted and what types of content people tend to choose as their daily news experience and practice (if any).

In such a context, media education and literacy is of particular importance in raising public awareness and understanding of what is behind the so called free information, i.e. what kind of interests media, politics or business may have, how these may affect public perceptions and decisions regarding the dissemination of information. Media literacy based on democratic values of participation and critical thinking then becomes crucial to improve media quality, and promote professional journalism and a democratic culture.

None of the Baltic countries, in general, has a well established and functioning media literacy policy (Media Pluralism Monitor: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia 2015, 2016). Media literacy issues are very seldom discussed in public, and even then usually understood as digital literacy with such issues as consumer literacy and the effects of advertising, media production, and internet safety are identified.

Estonia, though, is a country that significantly differs from the other two – Latvia and Lithuania. In Estonia, media literacy subjects have been present in the current na-
### General indicators

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Estonia</th>
<th>Latvia</th>
<th>Lithuania</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population (Eurostat, January 2016)</td>
<td>1.32 (million)</td>
<td>1.97 (million)</td>
<td>2.89 (million)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major linguistic and ethnic groups (Eurostat, 2011)</td>
<td>68.6% Estonians, 25.7% Russians, 3.3% Ukrainians and Belorussians</td>
<td>59% Latvians, 28% Russians, 4% Belorussians, 2% Poles, 1% Lithuanians, 5% other</td>
<td>83.7% Lithuanians, 6.6% Poles, 5.3% Russians, 1.3% Belorussians, 3.1% other language groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita (Eurostat, 2015)</td>
<td>13.3 (thsd., EUR)</td>
<td>10.7 (thsd., EUR)</td>
<td>11.6 (thsd., EUR)</td>
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### Political and social life

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<th>Estonia</th>
<th>Latvia</th>
<th>Lithuania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU and NATO membership</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eurozone membership</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter turnout in last national parliament and EU parliament elections (Eurostat)</td>
<td>63.5% (in 2011)</td>
<td>58.8% (in 2014)</td>
<td>52.9% (in 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in political institutions (Standard Eurobarometer 83, Spring 2015)</td>
<td>33% parliament, 38% government, 15% political parties</td>
<td>17% parliament, 25% government, 5% political parties</td>
<td>16% parliament, 34% government, 9% political parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political interest index (Standard Eurobarometer 83, Spring 2015)</td>
<td>18% strong, 55% medium, 11% not at all</td>
<td>12% strong, 54% medium, 12% not at all</td>
<td>16% strong, 53% medium, 16% not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational membership (% of members of trade union or similar organization, European Social Survey, 2014)</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index of corruption (Transparency International, 2016)*</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>59</td>
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### Media culture and media life

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>Estonia</th>
<th>Latvia</th>
<th>Lithuania</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The year of the publication of a first newspaper</td>
<td>Ordinary Freytags (later Donnerstags) Post-Zeitung, 1675</td>
<td>Rigische Montags (Donnerstags) Ordinari Post-Zeitung, 1680</td>
<td>Kurjer Litewski, 1760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily use of media (Standard Eurobarometer 82, Autumn 2014)</td>
<td>63% watch TV, 63% listen to radio, 42% read printed press, 71% use Internet, 40% use social networks</td>
<td>79% watch TV, 67% listen to radio, 30% read printed press, 64% use Internet, 43% use social networks</td>
<td>83% watch TV, 83% listen to radio, 20% read printed press, 58% use Internet, 33% use social networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media advertising expenditure (TNS, 2014)</td>
<td>72.2 (million, EUR)</td>
<td>75.6 (million, EUR)</td>
<td>99.1 (million, EUR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popularity of the main PSB channel – TV (TNS, 2015)</td>
<td>Audience market share: 15.5% ETV</td>
<td>Audience market share: 10.8% LTV1</td>
<td>Audience market share: 9.2% LRT TV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Media performance assessments and risks

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<th>Estonia</th>
<th>Latvia</th>
<th>Lithuania</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media freedom (Freedom House, 2015)**</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risks to media pluralism (Media Pluralism Monitoring, 2016)</td>
<td>3-29%</td>
<td>25-48%</td>
<td>10-56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risks to media literacy (Media Pluralism Monitoring, 2016)</td>
<td>25% low</td>
<td>75% high</td>
<td>81% high</td>
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* The lower the index, the more corruption is in the country, while 100 (max. score) represents no corruption in the country.

** The lower the index, the more freedom have media, while 100 is max. score to represent no freedom at all.
tional curriculum since 2002. Informal educational activities are also rich and varied; though there is no possibility to have a broader overview of those, since many of those are lacking in sustainability. In Latvia, conversely, media literacy is included in the priorities list of media policy document that has been developed by the Unit of Media Policy at the Ministry of Culture since 2015. As a result of these political decisions and actions, several practical undertakings are realized: the content of the subject 'Social knowledge' of mandatory education (basic education, from 7 to 9 years) includes few topics about the media operations and media effects; additionally, the content of the subject 'Politics and law' also provides few hours on media (secondary school, from 10 to 12 year). Broadly speaking, many of the informal activities are developed due to lobbying actions, rather than clearer visions or strategic directions, based on an informed and knowledgeable analysis of the state of the art. The state of media policy development in Lithuania appears to be critical. Despite a general agreement on the importance of MIL in the media-engaged world, national policy measures remain missing (there is no media education curriculum adopted and implemented at the national level). Due to the international policies, especially EU policies and recommendations, the first steps have been taken in integrating MIL into the high school curriculum, both formal and informal education. On the other hand, a number of MIL initiatives and advocacy actions have been undertaken by different stakeholders, including high schools, civil society, private sector, and academia. Though activities and projects appear to have a varied nature, many of those are intended to have only short-term effects, since there is no coordinated activities and all actions are split between two institutions, namely the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Science and Education, and also by the third party sector (such as initiatives supported through the Nordic Council of Ministers network and representatives in Lithuania). Despite all of those diverse initiatives and project outcomes, the critical aspect arises from the lack of coordination, the lack of informed leadership, and the absence of a coordination plan among the actors taking part in this endeavour.

Though there exists similarities in policy actions and practical choices among the three countries, differences are also certainly seen. Attentive media education in Estonia, lobby actions in Latvia and scattered didactic activities in Lithuania produce varied results. Estonia appears to be a country that is most consistently working in the promotion of 'culture of literacy' through such actions as media education and teacher training and varying educational supports. Latvian business investors appear to be more active in promoting public competences and the knowledge of information usage. Lithuania, the largest of the three countries, has the least strategic and intentional development of the related actions. In spite of different meanings given and arrangements of media related education, in all three countries, media literacy training at a school level needs to be strengthened and, as seen from situation analyses, various steps are under way. Still, it is another question whether the teachers will actually be able to support the intended media-enhanced learning process – as the curriculum is not well worded in any of the countries. What is seen from the current situation in
teaching at schools, in all three countries, media related education is mostly focused on digital competencies and far less on the skills of the critical evaluation of various sources, and does not include functional reading and the comprehension of current news, nor identifies the production of media as a learning outcome.

In general, Baltic countries have been lacking in systematic and comprehensive media education policies so far. Conceptual inconsistence, a lack of resources and coordination, a protectionist rather than proactive approach, as well as an emphasis on the digital literacies, rather than more general media education, have been prevailing in the understanding of how MIL policies and activities should be framed. Civil society organizations and other stakeholders (academic institutions, private and public sector) have been filling the niche by implementing a wide range of different initiatives while promoting media awareness and competences. However, these collaborations are often limited by the lack of coordination, financial sustainability, sufficient human resources and a more comprehensive understanding of MIL.

**Discussion: Changing media, changing societies**

Digital innovations and social media have become dominant communication means, offering information sources for all types of audiences throughout their whole life course. Though technological effects and outcomes of new ICTs application and usage are extensively questioned, most recent studies have observed that intensified use of new technologies and social media bring unique social effects and consequences to political and social life. Numerous studies suggest that having access to digital devices and social networks increases the amount of social capital that a person can have, which, as a matter of fact, contributes to social connectivity, creates new learning possibilities, raises career opportunities, and, along with this, adds to qualitative changes in societal and political life.

Still, despite the growing availability and daily usage and applicability of new technologies in news consumption, becoming an assured, familiarized, informed and accustomed user of digital innovations and online news media is not self-evident. Though inequalities in access to digital networks and its various uses (such as e-business, e-government and other interactive services) are indeed diminishing within and across various European states, these are overtaken by a number of social consequences and adaptation inequalities contributing to ‘communication inequality’ bringing social, educational, participatory and even economic variations within and across different countries. Hence, a number of questions call to be asked here: How does the inequality in access to information and news channels create inequalities within and across the countries? How could public organizations, such as education and media, contribute to overcoming communication and information inequality gaps among the citizens – more specifically, what is the role of education, as well as of journalism and news media, in helping the overcoming of those divides?
To sum up, MIL is a culturally embedded phenomenon, strongly dependent on the public and political culture, media development, the role of the state, media professionalism, and the nature of a civil society. In the Baltic countries, media literacy appears to be a question of high concern indeed, predominantly within the current state of affairs linked with increased information wars and propaganda (the latter issue became especially sensitive in the context of the informational attacks, trolling, falsification and lies that are incessantly found in media). Though discussions about media and information literacy have been active for quite some time, and the governments have outlined certain directions (such as the activation of media related analysis skills training in the schools), very few thorough and informed policy-making decisions towards active measures for a goal-oriented massive implementation in schools (or elsewhere, like public libraries) have taken place yet in each of those countries. The current situation calls to be defined as an active analysis-oriented stage, when numerous research and methodological projects are funded through different initiatives and programs. More consistent and ongoing media awareness and practice-oriented education is linked with the initiatives and activities of various NGOs and academic institutions; public intellectuals are also active and their ideas are often taken by the leading news media and are reflected in daily reports. Another particularity of the region is a positive influence of different international programs, including the European Commission, Council of Europe, UNESCO, Nordic Council of Ministers and others, which are bringing MIL to the forefront of the public competences necessary for a democratic and sustainable welfare society. In short, though 'media literacy' issues find an adequate place in public debates and public agenda, related policies are underdeveloped, and the measures taken only address some specific and fragmented matters (such as pilot studies of young audiences and their media preferences).

Notes

1. In Estonia (Ugur & Harro-Loit 2010; Ugur 2011; Media Pluralism Monitor; Estonia 2016), there exists a cross-curricular theme 'Information environment' that should be applied for all school levels, and two mandatory courses in upper high school ('Media and its influences' and 'Practical Estonian language 2', 35 lessons each). Schools may, if they desire, include voluntary media courses in a school's curriculum. Depending on the school's understanding of what media literacy is, these courses may focus on ICTs, multimedia production, critical media literacy, journalistic skills etc.

2. Usually these groups focus on simple video production or, depending on the county's support, help in producing local newspapers etc. In some schools, school media (newspapers, TV or radio programs) can be considered as non-formal education, whereas in other schools these forms of production are strictly controlled by the school's management. There are some NGOs (like Kinobuss/The Cinema Bus) that hold short workshops for interested children and youth all over Estonia. Other forms of media literacy, besides simple media production, are hardly represented – perhaps some occasional lectures or workshops in Open Youth Centres on the topic of internet safety should be mentioned here.

Ideas reported here were partially supported through the research project News Literacy: How to Understand Media, financed by the Lithuanian Research Council project No.: REP-2/2015, 2015-2016.
3. As reported (Media Pluralism Monitor: Latvia 2016), the media literacy policy document covers activities that are mostly oriented to the basic education system; the general target audience for media literacy are schoolchildren, librarians (many pupils living in the countryside use the Internet in local libraries), and youth policy specialists at local government institutions. Media literacy exists, but only to a limited extent in the education curriculum in Latvia.

4. As suggested (Media Pluralism Monitor: Latvia 2016), the media literacy project ‘Cinema in the schools’ elaborated by the Latvian Cinema Center has been launched in 2015. This is an educational tool for teachers of any subject (history, literature, geography, physics etc.) to change/replace the content of traditional teaching material with the tasks and examples from new and old films produced in Latvia. The main aim of this project is to educate school children about the national films and to develop their ability of understanding the specific language of the audiovisual medium. A pilot project on digital literacy lessons for basic education was launched by the Ministry of Education and Science in cooperation with the Association of Digital Technologies in 2015. Activities of this project are mostly related to the usage of gadgets, applications, technologies and creation of self-produced content. National telecommunication company Lattelecom organizes a program of computer and Internet literacy for seniors. In addition, many adult life-long learning institutions of local municipalities provide computer courses for senior citizens.

5. In Lithuania’s Progress Strategy 2030, adopted by the Lithuanian Parliament in 2012, which highlights a national vision, priorities and guidelines for the future national development, media education is underlined as an important premise for a vibrant public sphere, responsible media, as well as a democratic and sustainable society.

6. As reported, (Media Pluralism Monitor: Lithuania 2016), there are several projects running that actively focus on media literacy education in schools (by producing learning materials, educational applications, giving advice and support). The institution that is most active here is the Education Development Centre (http://www.upc.smm.lt/veikla/about.php), which is a co-product of the Ministry of Science and Education. There are projects focusing on media education aspects as non-formal media literacy training, for example, by training media users to be active in media content production. An example of such non-formal education practices could be different short-term programs and courses in media (audiovisual, interactive, cross-media) production and education.

7. For instance, in Estonia, open youth centres foster a number of media education activities, as well as the Estonian Media Educators Union, which provides training and education in media literacy for high school teachers. In Lithuania, the National Institute for Social Integration is paying special focus on the media training and literacy in raising public awareness of the socially vulnerable groups, including ethnic minorities, immigrants, disabled people, and other social minorities. The main activities of the institute are mainly targeting young people, as well as a broader society through different communication channels. Other public institutions, such as libraries, should be emphasized as active partners in MIL projects. As an example, in 2008, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation initiated a Libraries for Innovation project in Lithuania, which was aimed at providing all public libraries, especially those in rural areas, with Internet access. The project has been successfully continued since then and is now focusing on digital agenda, digital inclusion and life-long learning goals. Different public libraries are supported by the scheme to implement different activities, including interactive workshops, creative laboratories and other educational initiatives to improve the digital literacies of children, young people, disabled and seniors.

References

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European Social Survey: http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/

Eurostat: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat


The Authors

AUĶŠĖ BALČYTIENĖ Professor at Vyutas Magnus University, Lithuania

SANNI GRAHN-LAASONEN Minister of Education and Culture, Finland

KRISTINA JURAITĖ Professor and Head of the Department, Vyutas Magnus University, Lithuania

KRISTIINA KUMPULAINEN Professor at the University of Helsinki, Finland

EVA LIESTØL Director at the Norwegian Media Authority

LEO PEKKALA Deputy Director at the National Audiovisual Institute (KAVI), Finland

MARI SOL PÉREZ GUEVARA Policy Officer in Charge of Media Literacy at the Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CONNECT) in the European Commission

ROBERT PUTNIS Head Media Policy, Latvian Ministry of Culture

SAARA SALOMAA Senior Adviser at the National Audiovisual Institute (KAVI), Finland

HREFNA SIGURJÓNSDÓTTIR Manager, Home and School – National Parent Organization, Iceland

EWA THORSLUND Director at the Swedish Media Council

KADRI UGUR Lecturer at the Institute of Social Studies at the University of Tartu, Estonia

INGELA WADBbring Director at the Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research (Nordicom), University of Gothenburg, Sweden