

“Investing in a high-quality digital education ecosystem is investing in democracy”

Summary of online event, 16 June 2021

On 16 June 2021, IFRRO held the second “Re:start conversations” event, together with its partners EVA, EWC and FEP. These events aim to create better awareness about the actions authors, publishers and collective management organisations (CMOs) in the text and image sectors have taken to make content available and accessible during the Covid-19 crisis, and also provide a forum to discuss the sectors’ needs going forward.

Following some opening remarks by IFRRO’s **CEO Caroline Morgan**, IFRRO’s **President, Yngve Slettholm** welcomed participants and introduced the speakers. He underlined that education is the key to democracy, opinion-forming, freedom and social values and that authors, illustrators and publishers have for years provided innovative learning materials, including in digital format, that can be licensed for educational purposes, while CMOs have developed complementary licences. He said the Covid-19 crisis had shown the importance of digital access to teaching and education materials.

Victor Negrescu MEP, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament’s (EP) Culture Committee, opened the event by discussing the EP’s recent work: a [Resolution](#) on ‘The future of European education in the context of COVID-19’ and a [Resolution](#) on ‘Shaping digital education policy’. He underlined the need for quality educational content, adapted to the needs of the learner and acknowledged that building such content in physical and digital form required a great deal of effort. He said there was a need to take a multi-stakeholder approach, working together with creators of educational content, who can bring added value and whose voices may have previously been ignored. He said there is a big role to be played by creators in for example, stakeholder consultations and digital education hubs.

He also stressed the need to avoid non-respect of copyright legislation and dumping of low-quality educational content. He also underlined the importance of avoiding inequalities in accessing high-quality content, reflecting that while some schools had access to high quality content during the pandemic, others did not. He said that reflection was needed at both EU and national level and it was up to each ministry of education to build infrastructure, working with e.g., professors, parents and creators of educational content. He said it was important to have an integrated vision of what education needs to be today and tomorrow, digital is not separate. He wants to work with the EC, Member States’ ministries and stakeholders, including the IFRRO community, to identify the way forward.

Georgi Dimitrov, “Digital Education” Head of Unit in the European Commission’s (EC) DG for Education and Culture (DG EAC), discussed some of the EC’s initiatives in this field including its [Digital Education Action Plan](#) (DEAP) 2021-27 (see EC webpage [here](#)). He said that developing a high performing digital education ecosystem was challenging and the different aspects (infrastructure, digital skills, quality content etc.) had to all click for it to work. He said it was important for the EC, EP and Council to align.

As regards the EC’s work, he said they are about to adopt a proposal for a Council Recommendation on online and distance learning for primary and secondary education and there will also be a high-level dialogue with Member States on digital education. As

regards investment, he said the Member States' plans they had seen indicated they were putting a significant amount of recovery and resilience funds into digital education (up to 10% in specific cases).

The EC is working on specific parts of education, including the intersection with AI and data (see call for experts [here](#)), tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy (the call for experts is open until 29 June - see [here](#)). It has launched a feasibility study on the creation of a European exchange platform to share certified online resources. At the end of June, it will launch a [call](#) for experts for the European Digital Education Hub initiative to promote better cooperation and exchange on digital education at EU-level. This is open to a variety of stakeholders including the creator community. The EC will also propose in 2023 a European Digital Education Content Framework that will include guiding principles for specific sectors of education, e.g., high-quality instructional design.

Georgi underlined that “universal digital education and skills for people to take an active part in society and in democratic processes” are among the digital principles put forward under the EC’s [Digital Compass](#) Communication (9 March 2021). The EC is also looking forward to receiving details of Member States’ implementation of the DSM [Directive](#) Article 5 ‘illustration for teaching’ exception, which provides a margin of discretion for the use of licences under certain conditions.

Panel discussion

The panellists discussed what goes into producing innovative, high-quality, independent educational materials; what authors, publishers, visual artists and CMOs have learnt from the Covid-19 crisis; and how the needs of a democratic society can be met, as well as those of writers, illustrators and publishers in the education sector:

Maïa Bensimon, Vice President of the European Writers’ Council and General Counsel of Société des Gens de Lettres (SGDL), France, discussed how the needs of a democratic society could be met by supporting authors and translators (see summary [here](#)). She referred to some key findings from the EWC follow-up monitoring «*One Year of Crisis: The impact on Covid 19 on writers and translators in the European Book Sector*» (to be published this summer), which include: a lack of financial support from governments; use of materials without writers’ consent; and the cancellation of contracts and events in schools for authors, resulting in a loss of important remuneration.

Maïa then spoke about the needs of the public and creating best practice initiatives. She said e-schooling is important today and has to be shaped according to the needs of the public, but not at any cost. Authors should be taken care of in relation to digital works as much as they are for physical works. She also acknowledged the growth of educational websites, which have raised questions as regards authors’ rights and remuneration.

In terms of authors’ needs, she highlighted in particular: 1) improvement of contracts for e-books / digital exploitation / e-learning; 2) improvement of contracts for interventions of authors as teachers; 3) improving Member States’ actions (e.g., raising of budgets for educational materials; equipment levies and fair compensation for authors via CMOs; post-covid package for authors, where works have been given away for free); 4) support for monitoring of further developments in 2021-2023 and a coordinated stakeholder dialogue at EU-level on sustainable, high-quality education in Europe; and 5) closely

monitoring the implementation of exceptions under Art. 5 Directive 2019/790 to ensure that authors are remunerated for uses of educational books, text works and other materials. This guarantees a high-quality standard of digital education.

Raffaele Grandi, CEO of Edi.Ermes S.r.l, Milan, Italy, explained that students need an environment where they can find reliable resources as well as a way to evaluate their knowledge. His medical publishing house has designed a platform (which was subsequently presented) in a clear, didactical way, that offers reliable content validated and confirmed by academic referees, in Italian, English and Spanish. It provides access to, e.g., topics, lectures, laboratories and experiments. A digital version of the book is available for the duration of the course when a physical copy is bought.

Teachers and institutions have access to the same features as the students and the ability to add any resources they consider suitable for their courses. They are provided with tools and ready to use content to prepare exams. Particular attention is paid to accessibility, with the platform providing equal functionality and information for all.

Mr. Grandi explained that the publisher has a central role to help authors transform their ideas and knowledge. The publisher's work is to mainly realise the contents in a didactic manner choosing the best approach to show each specific content. This is adapted to any university course, as the contents are based on a national curriculum.

He said that democracy in a digital education ecosystem means producing an easy-to-use offering based on educational needs, and access modulated on user needs, also considering the intellectual and financial efforts to produce it. He said that intellectual property protection and fair remuneration are fundamental to sustain the continuous development of the educational eco-system.

Kate Mayne, artist and writer (UK/Belgium) began with a poem-in-prose that evoked the impact of the covid-19 pandemic and which recognised that works of art, music and literature – both printed and digital - “held us upright and kept us connected”.

She explained how words and images appearing side-by-side are particularly conducive to learning and that to attune images to texts requires a special collaboration, amongst authors, makers of images and designers. She also discussed the project Athena-Syntax at the Antwerp Athenaeum, where professional artists are called into the classroom to activate creative processes with pupils. This allows them to not only learn about pattern, form and colour, but also, for example, address complex issues, such as identity and belonging.

Kate then outlined the economic insecurity faced by artists, for whom financial measures, such as a build-up of pension rights is often beyond their reach. She reflected on how much more thriving the arts could be, how much happier and wealthier in insight and inventiveness our communities would be, if artists could receive a suitable means of income.

She said that answers to questions such as “who will propose an increase in funding for the arts?”, “how can a social status for artists be developed?”, “which clauses in contracts help artists gain more stability” and “how does one respect existing authors’ rights, in moral and economic terms” would lead to measurable ways of giving artists the opportunities and support they deserve. She said it was important to involve artists as equal partners. Further details can be found in Kate’s speaking note, [here](#).

Anders Kristian Rasch, CEO Copydan Writing, Denmark in his presentation (see [here](#)) explained that Copydan Writing, a Collective Management Organisation (CMO), was founded at the beginning of the 1980s when schools started to photocopy and has subsequently expanded.

As regards the legal framework, Extended Collective Licensing (ECL) is used, a Nordic legal construction dating back to the 1960s, which is rooted in the trade-union movement. They have had a positive experience of collective settlements between employers and employees, which are extended to non-represented parties.

Anders explained the ‘cultural circuit’ in which customers copy and report on uses, Copydan Writing register the copies and pay remuneration to rightholders, who can then create new material that Copydan Writing’s customers can then copy. He showed a video (see [here](#)) of a textbook author, explaining the value of the remuneration for copies and the whole circuit that makes it possible to create new works.

He said the most important thing they had learned from the Covid-19 crisis is that licence agreements have to be flexible. Because Copydan Writing could offer a licence with flexible, digital solutions, they were able to meet the needs of the users – including educational establishments and libraries - during the pandemic. Educational institutions were able to make digital copies as well as, for example, being able to access digitised out of commerce works online.

Q&A

A follow-up question was put to Mr. Grandi regarding the key elements for sustainability for the academic publishing sector looking ahead. He said policy measures can play a fundamental role in ensuring the right to quality education at all levels, in particular support for less affluent families in purchasing academic text books, e.g., through growth-friendly tax policies or dedicated bonuses. He said economic policies could also support publishers’ investment (e.g., via grants, incentives, tax credits).

He said it is imperative to support copyright against piracy both in physical and in new digital forms and to raise awareness about copyright with dedicated initiatives. He warned that piracy causes severe economic damage to the education ecosystem, resulting in job losses and lower content innovation, and that penalties for those that harm the system should be increased. He also said it was important to promote knowledge about the correct use of copyright content and promote the use of licences.

Dr. Igor Pesek, Head of Unit “Digital education”, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Republic of Slovenia, in his closing comments, presented the plans of the upcoming Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU (with the priorities pending final government adoption). See presentation [here](#).

He explained that education and research are the main vehicles for the future development of European society and way of life, and the EU vision in this field is rooted in core European values such as democracy and human rights. If we want to successfully meet the challenges of modern society, we must equip all generations with competences that go beyond traditional knowledge and skills. This new skill set should help build active citizenship, helping us co-create a digital and green society.



The four overarching priorities for the upcoming Presidency are: inclusive governance, knowledge and skills, green transition and digital transformation, while the thematic priorities in education and training are: 1) synergies between higher education, and research, 2) digitalisation, artificial intelligence and ethics, 3) European Agenda on Adult Learning, and 4) governance of the Strategic Framework of European Cooperation in Education and Training (2021-2030). They are also supporting EC activities on the Council Recommendation for blended learning, which is relevant not only in the context of covid but also in view of ongoing technological changes.

He concluded by highlighting some key events under the upcoming Presidency in the second half of 2021, including a high-level ministerial conference on the role of education and training in the digital era on 6 July; the Ministerial Conference “Resetting education and training for the digital age” on 9–10 November; and the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council on 29 November.

The event concluded with some closing remarks from the **Chair, Yngve Slettholm**, who said the IFRRO community will continue to work together as well as with the EU Institutions and other stakeholders, to help ensure the sustainability of the sector and its ability to offer the quality, educational content that is so vital for our democratic society.

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