

Kids Online in Europe and in Brazil. Challenges for a comparative research on children's and teenagers' Internet practices

Kids Online na Europa e no Brasil. Desafios para a pesquisa comparada sobre as práticas de crianças e adolescentes na Internet

Kids Online en Europa y en Brasil. Desafíos para el estudio comparado sobre prácticas de niños y adolescentes en Internet

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Abstract *This article is focused on EU Kids Online, the European project which, since 2006, has researched the relation between children and teenagers with the Internet. It presents its history, the organizational and structural matters which have made possible to work with a network of researchers from different countries, as well as with their theoretical and methodological framework. This study presents the results of a survey carried out in 25 European countries in 2010, and the perspectives of a comparative investigation that arises from the application of the same survey, Kids Online, in Brazil.*

Keywords: *Comparative research. EU Kids Online. Digital inclusion.*

Resumo *Focado no projeto europeu EU Kids Online, que desde 2006 tem pesquisado a relação das crianças e adolescentes com a internet, este artigo apresenta o seu historial, as questões de organização e de estrutura que têm possibilitado um trabalho em rede de investigadores de diferentes países, bem como os seus enquadramentos teóricos e metodológicos. Apresentam-se resultados do inquérito que realizou em 25 países europeus, em 2010, e perspetivas de investigação comparada que se abrem com a realização do mesmo inquérito, Kids Online, no Brasil.*

Palavras-chave: *Pesquisa comparada. EU Kids Online. Inclusão digital.*

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Resumen *Centrado en el proyecto europeo EU Kids Online, que desde 2006 viene investigando la relación de los niños y adolescentes con Internet, este artículo presenta la historia de dicho proyecto, las cuestiones de organización y de estructura que han posibilitado un trabajo en red de investigadores de diferentes países, así como sus puntos de partida teóricos y metodológicos. Se muestran en él también los resultados de la investigación que se realizó en 2010 en 25 países europeos y las perspectivas de estudio comparado que se abren tras la realización del citado trabajo, Kids Online, en Brasil.*

Palabras-clave: *Investigación comparada. EU Kids Online. Inclusión digital.*

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Introduction

This article has appeared at the time of the publication of the first results of the survey *Kids Online Brasil*, carried out with a national sample of Brazilian children and teenagers from 9 to 16 years of age, about the conditions of their Internet access, their activities, parental mediation, and mediation by their colleagues and teachers, their declared digital abilities, and their Internet experience of risk. The Brazilian survey carried out by CETIC.br² has adapted the survey questionnaires of *EU Kids Online* undertaken in 25 European countries, including Portugal, in 2010, so as to allow a comparison of replies. Thus, for the first time in the history of the studies of children, teenagers and the media, we can compare European, Portuguese and Brazilian results based on national surveys which also asked questions to parents and carers. This opportunity induces our thinking about the potentialities and challenges posed to the comparative research about the relation of children and teenagers with the media, discarding insularity and favoring the identification of new questions prompted by the acknowledgment of research gaps and problems that tend to arise. Based on the history of the Project *EU Kids Online* since its beginning in 2006, the article presents the organizational and structural aspects that have enabled the realization of a project with a network of tens of investigators from different countries, as well as their theoretical and methodological framework. Some of the results both at a European and at a Portuguese level are referred to, and we conclude with new perspectives arising from the survey undertaken in Brazil.

² For further information on this study, see <http://cetic.br/criancas2012/index.html>

Advantages and difficulties of comparative research: the experience of *EU Kids Online*

The internationalization of academic research has intensified – having benefitted from the removal of political barriers, and from a greater cosmopolitanism and accessibility to knowledge – via new communication networks and the context of cultural globalization. It is not difficult to find arguments in favor of this perspective which brings new points of view, allowing the investigators to point out aspects hitherto blurred and to look at their country from other places and positions.

However, these advantages do not avoid the recognition of methodological difficulties about the nature, quality and comparability of the data on which a comparative survey is based. Although initially all seemed to be talking about the same thing, the first steps of the international teams' meetings demonstrated the difficulty in defining *common units of research*, in identifying *equivalent samples*, or even in *selecting indicators* that are really comparable.

Other less evident difficulties lie in the actual variation in the national academic cultures, the traditions, and the social history, and the history of social sciences in each country. Besides the variety of designations of programs which include Communications, in some countries there is a strong humanistic heritage, while others are closer to Social Sciences. Differentiated methodological orientations derive from this, between options of a more interpretative character or of a more quantifiable approach to results and indicators, although a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies has occurred in the research, as a result of the interdisciplinary nature of the investigating teams. In the European context, recognizing the need for a common language for a dialogue and teamwork tends to place native and non-native speakers of English in unequal conditions of expression.

Despite these hindrances, it has been possible to undertake a joint and cooperative work on the Project *EU Kids Online*, under the lead-

ership of Sonia Livingstone and Leslie Haddon, from the London School of Economics, funded by the European Commission. Coordinating and mobilizing a European network which started with approximately 40 investigators in 21 countries in 2006, and presently gathering over 120 investigators in 33 countries, requires a firm leadership able to mobilize, integrate and nourish a productive and positive atmosphere among the participants with distinct academic training (Media and Communication, Education, Sociology, Social Psychology). During the building up of the relationship, scientific maturity, co-responsibility, and sensitivity have been core ingredients in this joint effort.

The first three years (2006-2009) of this Project's work saw the constitution of the body of the network, identified the gaps in the European research about children and the Internet, made a comparison among 21 countries about their relation levels between the Internet penetration in society and the dimensions of risk encountered by children, produced an archive of reports and guidelines, and identified the needs for further research. The intermediate years (2009-2011) were dedicated to designing, testing, applying and analyzing the results of a huge European survey in 25 countries. The present phase (2011-2014), with the participation of 33 countries, has the following objectives: 1) to update the European research on children and the Internet, and to highlight studies of particularly high quality; 2) to deepen and further extend the results of the European survey, by means of focused analysis and comparisons with previous studies and with other countries (as will be the case of Brazil); 3) to design and undertake a qualitative research about the experience of risks and security in the Internet, expressed by children and teenagers in their own terms, to take place in 15 countries; 4) to continue disseminating these results to the public and promoting information to support enlightened policies and interventions by decision-makers and regulators, industries, schools, journalists, families, and civil society.

EU Kids Online I (2006-2009): To define European research about children and the Internet

As previously said, the project started by collecting and analyzing researches and studies undertaken since 2000 about children and the Internet in the 21 participating countries. By collecting, systematizing and characterizing the investigations, the objectives were: 1) to identify gaps in the research; 2) to characterize the contexts – institutional, financial, media contexts, among others – in which researches take place; 3) to compare results about access and use, risks and opportunities in the use of the Internet by children from the various countries, bearing in mind their respective national contexts; 4) to produce methodological guidelines for the research about/with children; 5) to formulate recommendations on this topic to the participating countries, and also at European Union level; and 6) to disseminate the conclusions to a target public (investigators, decision-makers, regulators, industries, educators, and NGOs, among others).

Therefore, the national teams were responsible for identifying relevant studies carried out in that country or internationally with the participation of that country on the relation between children and the Internet. In the analysis were considered indicators such as funding sources, objectives, methodologies employed (quantitative or qualitative) and the results obtained. To 'read' the national research and the contexts in which it took place, it was necessary to resort to privileged informants (for example, in the areas of Education, Family, Technological Infrastructures, the Law, Information Security...). Thus the objective was, on the one hand, to provide as thorough a picture as possible about the conditions (institutional, financial, political, public debates) that characterized the research in each country; and, on the other hand, to examine what the research itself reveals concerning the access and use of the Internet by children, and the risks and opportunities experienced in each country.

In the case of Portugal, we faced an invisibility of official data, a lack of updated statistics including younger users in their connection with

the digital networks, and an almost complete absence of representative national studies about the Internet which included children. This led us to collect academic production (master degree and doctorate theses, conditioned by being essentially individual studies and centered on local 'cases'), which was done by means of direct contact with the country's university post-graduation courses, or by research in the National Library. Other countries, with more national scope in their research and investigation projects, did not have to resort to academic studies, which highlights the need, as far as the studies found are concerned, to read the numbers of each country in their specific context.

Conceptual frameworks: the cement of the network

While the teams were seeking to locate national researches, it was necessary to make sure that all the participants were guided by the same theoretical perspectives. Therefore, it is necessary to stress the importance of the semestral meetings of national coordinators, as they became forums for a general discussion about relevant research issues.

Let's start with general considerations about comparative research. In a transnational comparison, each country can be considered as *object of study*, to analyze their national data in juxtaposition with data from the other countries; as *context of study*, for testing hypotheses; as *unit of analysis*, for examining relations between the dimensions in which countries vary; and as part of a wider *international system* (KOHN, 1989, in LOBE ET AL., 2007). The first three categories were studied in the *EU Kids Online* project.

The country as *object of study* involved statistical information on similarities and differences between countries, such as that provided by Eurobarometer or Eurostat, which allows for the positioning of each country in relation to the others and to a European average. The following steps towards considering countries as *contexts of study* and as *units of analysis* will be presented together.

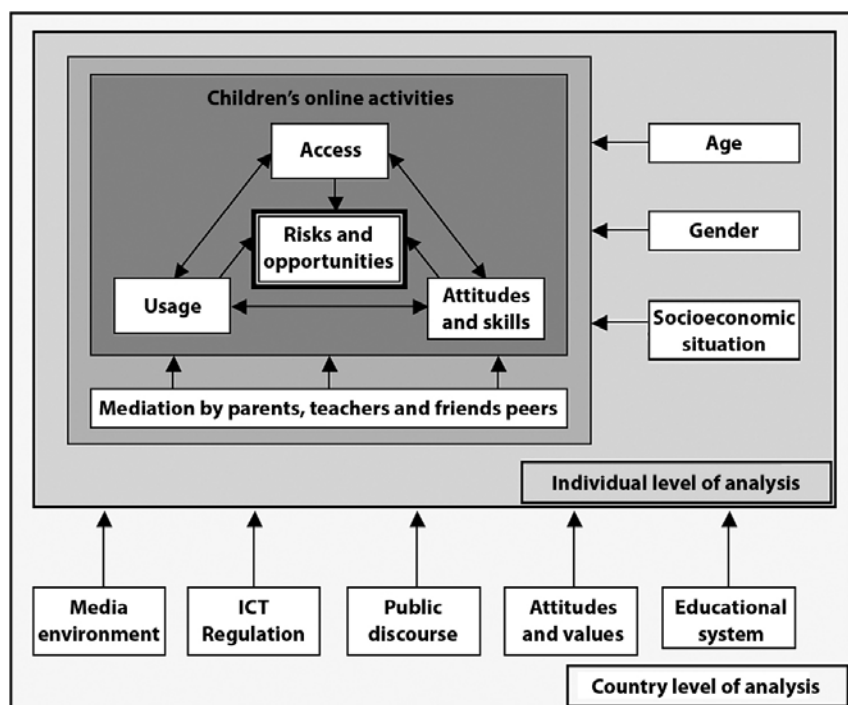


Figura 1. Children and the Internet: conceptual framework for analysis.

Source: HASEBRINK, LIVINGSTONE, HADDON and ÓLAFSSON (2009)

An initial conceptual framework about children and their relation with the Internet considered the risks and opportunities, simultaneously, in an individual dimension (the child) and in a contextual dimension (the country in which the child lives), as shown in Figure 1. The first dimension is centered on the concrete conditions in which the child performs his/her activities (conditions of *access*, *uses*, *attitudes* and *skills* in using the Internet). These conditions were considered to be affected by *mediations* by parents, teachers and friends, as well as by demographic factors such as age, gender and the household's socioeconomic situation. On the other hand, from the perspective of the country as context of study, we considered the hypothesis of factors such as media environment and its regulation, public discourse on children and the Internet,

attitudes and cultural values or the characteristics of the educational system, as they may influence children's practices of the Internet in a positive or negative way.

A second conceptual framework covers the definition itself of what is considered as risk or opportunity. Drawing on communication questions, the systematic perspective for this approach arose from the question: "Which communication processes lead to different risks and different opportunities?". The model created arises from the motivation to use the Internet (to be *recipient* of mass contents; to *participate* in contacts initiated by others; or to be *agent*, whose behaviors activate contents and contacts). These three positions – recipient, participant and actor – were articulated with four categories of Opportunities and Risks associated with the use of the Internet. Under the Opportunities that it provides are included: educational learning and digital literacy, civic participation and involvement, creativity and self-expression, and social and identity relations. Under Risks are included: commercial risks, violence and aggressiveness, sexual risks and negative values. Their combination with the three positions mentioned above constitutes the 24 activity cells of Figure 2.

The application of these conceptual classifications to the research collected in each country has allowed us to observe that most of the studies covered the characterization of access and uses, followed by the characterization of interests and activities, particularly *online* activities, as educational resources, entertainment, and social relationships, in a transversal model of countries. Thus, it was possible to identify in the report about this data collection (see STAKSRUD, LIVINGSTONE and HADDON, 2009) the scant attention given to topics related to risks and safety in the Internet, which were absent in over one-third of the studies. This gap in the consideration of risks and skills to deal with them, including resilience, resistance to frustration or disturbance, was particularly noticeable concerning younger children and children from underprivileged social environments. The scarce attention given to forms of mediation of children's experience of the Internet was also evident, as only few studies included parents, teachers and peers as mediators.

		Content: the child as recipient	Contact: the child as participant	Conduct: the child as actor
Opportunities	Educational learning and digital literacy	Educational resources	Contact with others that share the same interests	Self-initiative or collaborative learning
	Civic participation and involvement	Global information	Exchange between groups of interest	Concrete ways of civic participation
	Creativity and self-expression	Diversity of available resources	Be impelled to create or participate	Create contents
	Identity and social relations	Advice (personal, health, sexuality, etc.)	Social networks, sharing experience with others	Expression of identity
Risks	Advertising	Unsolicited adverts (spam), sponsorships	Provide/collect personal information	Games and illegal downloads, hacking
	Aggressiveness	Violent, discriminatory contents	Be intimidated, harassed, bullied	Intimidate or harass others
	Sexual	Pornographic, sexually malicious contents	Sexual grooming	Create, insert pornographic content
	Negative values	Racial content, tendentious content (for example, about drugs)	Inducement to self-harm, unwelcome persuasion	Propagation of advice on suicide, anorexia

Figure 2. A classification of Risks and Opportunities.

Source: HASEBRINK, LIVINGSTONE, HADDON and ÓLAFSSON (2009)

Preparing the comparative analysis of studies on children and the Internet

In the first year of the Project, a pilot study involving three countries (Portugal, Poland and the United Kingdom) was carried out to underpin the comparative analysis to be extended to 21 countries in the following year. The choice of three countries was based on their geographic differences (Central, Northern and Southern Europe), on their different levels of technological penetration, and also on the fact that they had taken part in a previous study, *Mediappro*. The research teams of the three countries started writing their respective reports based on the researches found on children and the Internet in that country, and on the collection and discussion of contextual indicators that would enable them to consider the country as *unit of analysis*.

Among the lessons learned in this exploratory study can be mentioned the social processes in the research and in the writing of the national reports: only when we read the notes from other countries do we become aware of how we could have also provided equivalent information in our own report. For example, despite the clear indications about the kind of content sought, there was a variation of what was referred by the researchers, of the ways they presented the material, of the level on which they based their evidence and of the actual evidence they presented (HASEBRINK ET AL., 2007). These indications were invaluable for the following phase, the widening of the national reports' scope and their comparative analysis.

Figure 3 represents in a schematic form the four steps of procedures undertaken for the articulation of the national reports in a comparative analysis.

The discussion of the pilot study by the network allowed for the identification of research questions and hypotheses. For example, the question *Where do the children use the Internet?*, or the hypothesis *Are there gender differences in the children's access to the Internet?* These and other questions were formulated in a grid which constituted the first step for

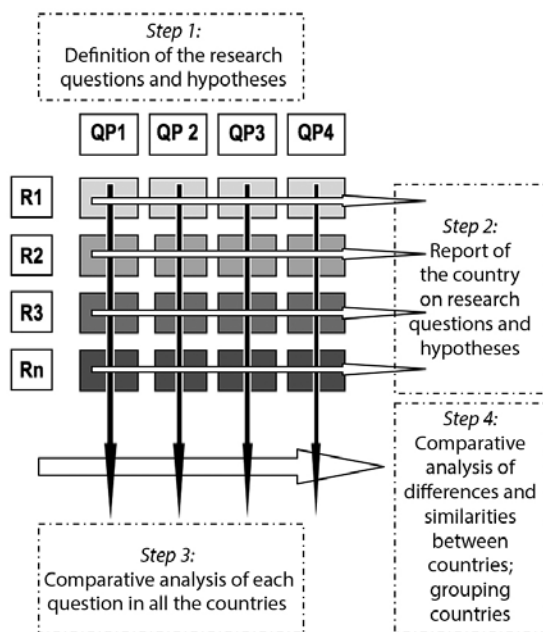


Figure 3. General view of comparative analysis procedures.

Source: HASEBRINK, LIVINGSTONE, HADDON and ÓLAFSSON (2009)

the comparative research (Figure 3, Step 1). The grid was filled in by the 21 countries, based on the available investigation, on statistics and on interviews with privileged informants in order to obtain the most precise and up-to-date answers in national reports, filling-in the form horizontally (Figure 3, Step 2). Once all the reports were collected, they were dissected by research questions, analyzed by small teams of researchers, according to their volunteering and their interests in the research (Figure 3, Step 3). Based on these similarities and differences, a discussion took place about the classification of the countries according to their positions and the team created a typology for groups of countries (Figure 3, Step 4) presented in Figure 4.

The disparate nature of the information provided in the national reports resulting from the differences in the national studies and the dates of the empirical investigation (on a subject in which updating

Children's use of the Internet			
Online Risk	Low (<65%)	Medium (65% - 85%)	High (>85%)
Low	Cyprus Italy	France Germany	
Medium	Greece	Austria Belgium Ireland Portugal Spain	Denmark Sweden
High		Bulgaria Czech Republic	Estonia Iceland Holland Norway Poland Slovenia United Kingdom

Figure 4. Classification of countries according to use and risks of Internet use by children.

Source: HASEBRINK, LIVINGSTONE, HADDON and ÓLAFSSON (2009)

is crucial) would lead to the decision to include also the latest information common to all the countries, two surveys by Eurobarometro which had consulted European parents in 2006 and 2008, respectively about children's access to the Internet and about concerns with safety and risks.

From this articulation between national studies, European surveys concerning considerations about risks, and statistical indices of Internet use by children emerged three scenarios, whose distribution is seen in Figure 4: "high use, high risk" countries (mainly northern European countries), "low use, low risk" countries (Southern countries), and countries marked with "new uses, new risks" (countries from Central Europe). As seen, "low risk" was not identified in countries with high rates of Internet penetration among the youngest, and neither were

identified situations of countries with low penetration and high incidence of risks.³

Furthermore, reports were co-produced on the contextual research conditions (STALD and HADDON, 2009), documents supporting the investigation (LOBE, LIVINGSTONE and HADDON, 2008) and a Guideline of Good Practices on research about children and the Internet (LOBE, LIVINGSTONE, OLAFSSON and SIMÕES, 2008), besides the undertaking of a comparative analysis of the press on news regarding children and the Internet, for two months, in newspapers of 13 countries (see PONTE, 2009)⁴. The teamwork also led to the production of the book *Kids Online*, with detailed analysis about the results from this first phase (LIVINGSTONE and HADDON, 2009), comprising 19 chapters and over 40 authors, and also two special issues of journals of international circulation, *Journal of Children and Media* and *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics*.

EU Kids Online II (2009-2011): an extensive and comparable investigation

Having encountered hindrances in the comparison of researches that failed to have, as their basis, a consistent set of questions, common methodological procedures, and a consequent empirical body produced according to the same parameters, the new *EU Kids Online II* (2009-2011) project aimed at carrying out a robust investigation in the field that would allow to go further in the European research on children and the Internet, focusing on risk materials and their consequences, and also identifying similarities and differences among countries resorting to the same investigative tools.

³ This process and its various phases are described in the report *Comparing children's online opportunities and risks across Europe* (HASEBRINK, LIVINGSTONE, HADDON and OLAFSSON, 2009), available on www.eukidsonline.net.

⁴ Reports and other documents on <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20Online%20reports.aspx>

The second phase of the project *EU Kids Online*, sponsored again by the European Commission *Safer Internet Plus* Program, and now with 25 participating countries, had the following objectives: 1) to design a strong research tool, able of identifying the nature of online access by children and teenagers (9-16 years), their uses, risks and ways of dealing with them, gathering together the parents' and children's perspectives; 2) to follow up the administration of the investigation in each country, including its translation into the national language; 3) to analyze the results in a systematic way in order to identify the fundamental facts and standards on a national and comparative basis; 4) to identify and propagate in due course the key recommendations relevant for the development of safety initiatives at an European level.

The framework that sustained the design of the investigation had as its basis the previous conceptualizations (Figures 1 and 2, above), adapting to the initial questions: how do the conditions of access and use, as well as the activities, constitute risk factors, and how do children and teenagers respond to risk? This framework has opened up the way for a contextualized and judicious understanding of safety and risks facing the youngest on the Internet. Not only did the investigation try to relate the online risks with those that happen offline, such as bullying and the contact with messages and images of sexual character, but it also outlined a distinction between the exposure to risks and the harm that it may ensue— not all the exposures to risks lead necessarily to harm. This perspective about risk, which opposes the prevailing discourse about the dangers of the Internet, required therefore to give special attention to *ways of dealing* with risky situations.

Therefore, the investigation has discriminated between *risk* and *harm*, verifying responses to risks that reveal *knowledge of how to deal* with the situation, and responses that reveal this inability, thereby causing the experience of risk to have harmful consequences. Thus, the investigation tried to understand the different patterns of incidence, distribution, seriousness and the consequence of *harm* resulting from the experience of risks online. As it was important to know the strategies developed by

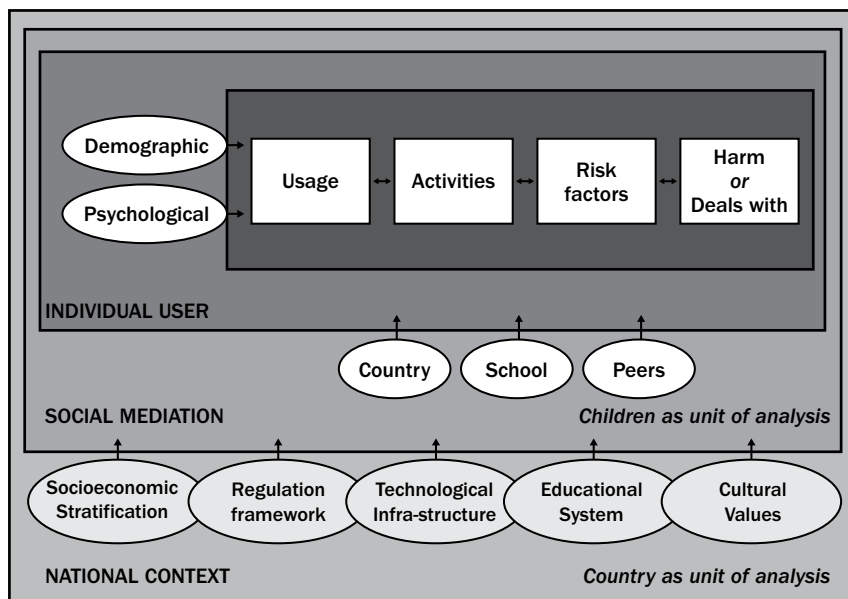


Figure 5. Framework that guided the *EU Kids Online* survey.
Source: LIVINGSTONE, HADDON and GÖRZIG (2011)

children in situations of risk online, other questions were added to the questions about demographic conditions (age, gender, socioeconomic ambience) such as questions to allow the verification of psychological characteristics (Figure 5).

The investigation consisted in three questionnaires: one questionnaire by interview aimed at children and teenagers, covering the conditions of access, the activities, the digital skills and the mediations by parents/carers, teachers and peers (an area in which a research gap had been identified, as already mentioned); one questionnaire to be filled in by the younger, from 9 to 10 year olds, and the older from 11 to 16 year olds themselves, for sensitive questions about risk experiences related to pornographic contents, contact with strangers met on the Internet, bullying, 'sexting', potentially harmful contents generated by users, and personal information abuse. The last four questions were only asked to children older than 11 years. The ques-

tions allowed for the evaluation of the extent of the eventual harm, as well as strategies to resolve the risk situation positively; and a third questionnaire with parallel questions directed to parents, allowing for a comparison of the answers.

The choice of these risks was mindful of the European discussion about Internet risks and the limitations of the extent of the investigation. The study was also guided by objectives of public intervention, in the form of Recommendations to organizations with responsibilities for policies and practices, from industries to governments, and including families and school. Therefore, the investigation covered the most prominent risks in the public agenda, and not necessarily those that most concern children in their daily lives, often related with technical risks, such as virus, and with the invasion of commercial advertising in their Internet surfing. Thus, not all the risks listed in Figure 2 have been asked, namely the risks related with commercial contents nor practices that infringe copyrights. The investigation goes beyond the open question which preceded the questionnaire to be filled in by the children themselves, and which allowed the expression of what they considered to be bothering people of their own age (whose answers are still being analyzed). Therefore, it is important to proceed with the research about what are the practices of children and teenagers on the Internet, and about their concerns and ways of dealing with situations of risk, which is being done on the third phase of the *EU Kids Online*, by means of a qualitative research.

The investigation comprised a representative sample of 25.142 children and teenagers, Internet users, and of one of their parents, in 25 countries. It was designed in English and was translated to 19 European languages, thereby ensuring comparability and adaptation with examples and local languages, and it was the object of two rounds of cognitive tests, before its final version, to ascertain the understanding of the questions on the part of children, and their reactions (about this process see HADDON and PONTE, 2012). It was applied between spring and the end of summer this year to a random stratified sample,

at home, by face-to-face questioning, except for the sensitive questions, which were filled in by the interviewees⁵.

Besides presenting a detailed descriptive analysis of the results by demographic categories and by countries, the final report resulting from this European investigation adds six points to its conclusions: indications for intervention policies by regulators and governments, industries, awareness regarding safety, intervention by schools and teachers, and questions and advice to families. We present a graph (Figure 6) from this report illustrating the diversity of conditions of access and of positions of digital leadership in families, in the European context, contrasting the percentage of children who access the Internet daily with their parents' access. In a European average 60% of the children and teenagers access the Internet every day. In several Northern and Central Eastern countries this percentage reaches nearly 80%, contrasting with lower values in the Southern countries, among which Portugal. We also observed that in the Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Norway, Finland, Holland), where the Internet has been present longer, it is the parent who leads the daily frequency, whereas the former socialist bloc countries – which have moved on to market economies and where the Internet has had a more recent penetration – register overwhelming contrasts between the frequency levels of children and parents (for example, Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, Lithuania). In Southern European countries (Portugal, Greece, Italy, Spain), albeit with lower average values, those who access the web daily are mainly children, but surprisingly Turkey is a country with a very low Internet penetration. Countries that had been considered as of “high use, high risk” and “new uses, new risks” continue contrasting with countries of “low use, low risk” (see Figure 4).

Moving on from the conditions of access to the answers related to risks and harm, we also noticed relevant contrasts between countries.

⁵ Further details about the investigation's methodology and its application can be consulted in the final report *Risks and Safety on the internet. The perspective of European children* (LIVINGSTONE, HADDON, GORZIG and OLAFSSON, 2011) and in the *Technical Report* produced by the agency IPSOS-MORI, who applied the questionnaire in the 25 countries, both available in the Report site (www.eukidsonline.net).

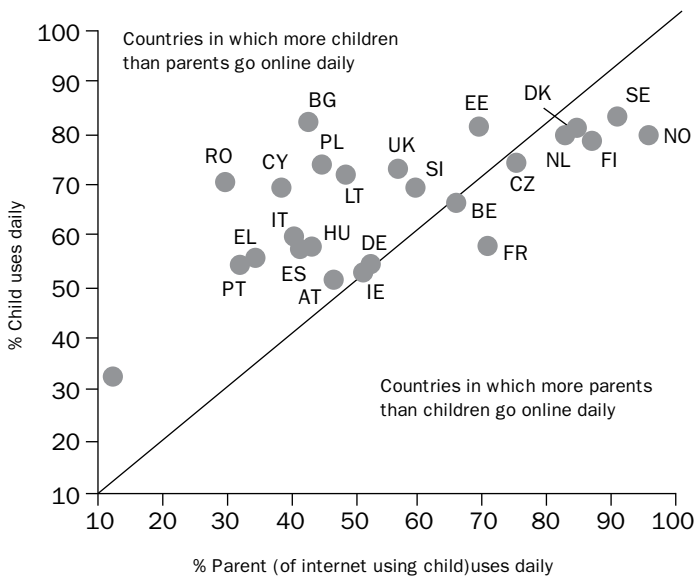


Figure 6. Results from the European investigation regarding daily Internet access.
Source: LIVINGSTONE, HADDON, GÖRZIG and ÓLAFSSON, 2011

AT: Austria; BE: Belgium; BG: Bulgaria; CY: Cyprus; CZ: Czech Republic;
DE: Germany; DK: Denmark; EE: Estonia; EL: Greece; ES: Spain; FI: Finland;
FR: France; HU: Hungary; IE: Ireland; IT: Italy; LT: Lithuania; NL: Nederland;
NO: Norway; PL: Poland; PT: Portugal; RO: Romania; SE: Sweden;
SI: Slovenia; TR: Turkey; UK: Great Britain

The research on the first phase (see Figure 4) suggested a direct relation between the intensity of use and the exposure to risks. What this investigation allowed us to observe is that the relation between *risk and harm* is neither linear nor proportional.

The exploration of results around the question concerning the relation between exposure to risk and the experience of harm and its variation between countries has evidenced these differences, but it has also highlighted some relation. As Figure 7 illustrates, the percentage of children and teenagers reported to have faced one or more of the risks listed in the investigation varies between 30% and 70%, while the percent-

age of answers that report being bothered by these risks is much lower, mostly below 15%. We can also observe the differences between of ‘high use’ countries and ‘new uses’ on the one hand (top right quadrant), and countries of ‘low use’ (bottom left quadrant), on the other. We have also found that the numbers of declarations of experiences of harm are higher in the countries with greater diversified use of the Internet by children – a result which has implications for policies concerning the promotion of digital safety and for enabling children and teenagers to deal with the Internet, benefitting its opportunities while minimizing its negative impacts.

Besides the final report containing recommendations and indications for European policies (LIVINGSTONE, HADDON, GÖRZIG and ÓLAFSSON, 2011), the investigators also carried out analysis of the results of the investigation, which would give rise to a new academic

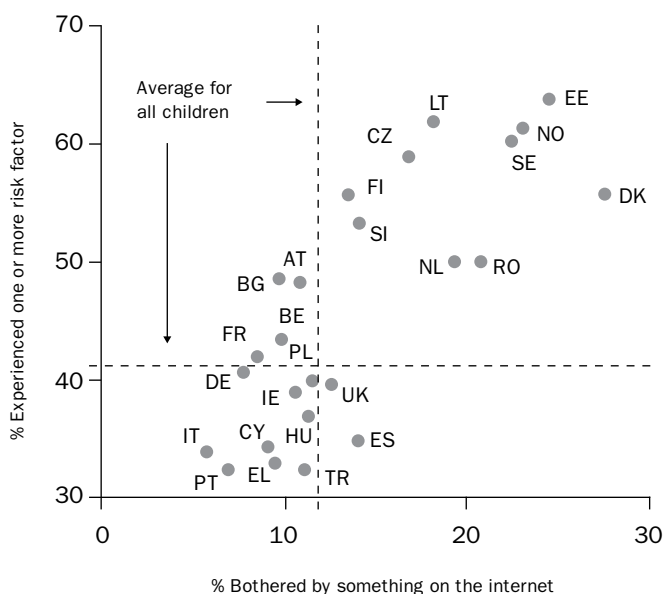


Figure 7. Results of the European investigation about experiences of risk and harm.

Source: LIVINGSTONE, ÓLAFSSON, O'NEILL and DONOSO (2012)

book, *Children, Risk and Safety on the internet* (LIVINGSTONE, HADDON and GÖRZIG, 2012), with 26 chapters and over 50 authors, a new special issue of *Journal of Children and Media* (1/2013), and a series of brief reports (12-16 pages) exploring themes such as Social Medias, Parental mediation, Excessive use, among others, and equally available on the Project site.

Furthermore, the teams also analyzed the results from their own countries and presented indications to national interlocutors: governmental organizations and stakeholders in matters related to safety, education, protection of children and teenagers, NGOs, academics. In Portugal, these results were presented and commented by a diversified panel, in a national conference in February 2011, which went on to produce the book *Crianças e Internet em Portugal* (PONTE, JORGE, SIMÕES and CARDOSO, 2012). We present below a brief summary of some of the results and indications.

Portugal in the European context: a summary of the results of the survey *EU Kids Online*

Within Europe, Portuguese children and teenagers head the Internet access through their personal portable devices (68%), as a direct consequence of policies that enabled students to acquire these computers at low cost, leading to a democratization in computer ownership. The home is the main place for Internet access, and a high percentage (67%) accesses it from their bedrooms, a rate above the European average (49%). However, they are placed among those who make less use of the Internet on a daily basis (cf. Figure 6), because the cost of access weighs on the budget of the economically-disadvantaged families. Less use goes hand in hand with a value lower than the European average regarding reported risks (9%, compared to a 12% European average).

Despite these results about the four surveyed risks, approximately half of the respondents over 11 years old reported some signs of “excessive

use” (the second value in European terms), something that may be more related with the anxiety due to limitations on time rather than time duration itself (CARDOSO, 2012). On the other hand, although Portuguese children and teenagers declare to have more digital skills than the European average, when analyzed against their responses to risk situations it was demonstrated that they do not always know how to use their skills to deal with the situation (JORGE, 2012).

As a result from the investment on ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) in school and in the curricula, the schools are the place of Internet access for 72% of the Portuguese children and teenagers, which is above the European average (63%). If we add the public places with free Internet access, mentioned by 25%, more than doubling the European average – while the paid spaces, such as cybercafés have little expression (5%) – we can see the result of public policies enabling the youngest users to access the digital world.

Although the response to these policies by the families, particularly those with less resources, has been positive, Portuguese parents place the Internet risks as their main concerns (children coming across contents inappropriate for their age and being in contact with strangers), almost doubling the European average (LIVINGSTONE, ÓLAFSSON, O’NEILL and DONOSO, 2012, p. 3).

As for the forms of parental mediation, and according to the replies given by children, the most common form is to talk with them about what they are doing on the Internet (83%), but only about half of the parents incentivize the use of the Internet for learning purposes, and even fewer parents join their children. The age variations weigh less than variations of socioeconomic status, with an accentuated reduction of active mediation of Internet uses in general, and of safe uses in particular, among families with fewer resources. Nevertheless, teachers’ involvement in the active mediation of Internet uses is referred to by over 86% of children and teenagers, placing Portugal among the European countries where the school mediation is one of the highest. Outside their personal circle, children and parents jointly wish to re-

ceive more information from teachers and schools about safer Internet uses, and also from the social media (SIMÕES, 2012).

In a country where more than half (53%) of the surveyed families were considered as belonging to a low socioeconomic level⁶ (for a 19% European average), 40% of the parents do not access the Internet, and 22% declare that they make rudimentary uses. Family and friends are the first sources of information about Internet uses, but the social diversity has a bearing on this: two-thirds of the children and teenagers from families with fewer resources declared that it is totally true that they know more about the Internet than their parents, compared to less than one-third of families from higher socioeconomic level. Children from underprivileged socioeconomic level and the youngest are the ones who reported feeling bothered by the risks that they encounter (JORGE, 2012).

In the 2010 results, Portugal presents a dual scenario. On the one hand, the country relies on infrastructures that include: a national network of free access (albeit unequally implemented); strong investment in schools and fairly implanted conditions of computer ownership, thus reducing the first level of the *digital divide* based on a “technological shock” rhetoric; and the trust in the power of technology to foster change and social and digital inclusion (about the Portuguese context, see PONTE, 2011). On the other hand, digital, cultural and socioeconomic differentiations in the family highlight the inequalities in digital experience conditions.

At a time when children are initiated increasingly earlier into the digital world, and when mobile access is growing, an answer to this challenge will devote greater attention to families with fewer resources, both at the level of media messages opposing their manifested fears, and in the local conditions to facilitate their approach to technology, so that they can enjoy it and thus become able to follow more closely their children’s experience, specially the youngest; also in relation to children and

⁶ For this indicator, were considered the education level and the occupation of the family member in the highest position.

teenagers, school and informal environments such as libraries, and other spaces of digital inclusion, are spaces to promote not only access but also conditions and literacy for a more participatory and critical use of the Internet. These are suggestions that we have presented publicly, namely in the *Conselho de Acompanhamento do Projeto Internet Segura* (Follow-up Council), as part of the Safer Internet Plus Program.

Kids Online Brazil: potentialities and challenges for a comparative research

Besides the 25 European countries, this survey was also conducted in Australia (GREEN, BRADY, ÓLAFSSON, HARTLEY & LUMBY, 2011), and in Russia, extending to Brazil in 2012, through an agreement with the *Comitê Gestor da Internet no Brasil* (CGL.br) (Brazilian Internet Steering Committee) and the Project's coordination in the London School of Economics. Since 2009 Cetic.br conducts surveys at national level about Internet access and uses by Brazilian children from 5 to 9 years old. The intention of this agreement was to extend the survey to the 9 to 16 age group, based on the theoretical framework and on the *EU Kids Online* questionnaires adapted to the Brazilian reality. The objective is to proceed with its annual application.

Thus, there opens up the perspective of not only being able to obtain results comparable with the European results, but also to be able to carry out a longitudinal research to analyze the impacts on children and teenagers of the noticeable growth in digital access in the last few years, as well as the challenges and policies to be followed in order to enable the youngest users to fully experience the digital opportunities in safe conditions.

Statistics from Cetic.br indicate that nearly two-thirds of the Brazilian children and teenagers, from 10 to 24 years old, have already used the Internet. Approximately one-quarter of the children aged from 5 to 9 years old have also already used the Internet, a value that is superior to

that related to adults over 45. The very quick Network penetration in Brazilian homes (with an increase of about 8-12% between 2010 and 2011) in several regional areas, in urban areas, and above all among the classes B and C, is even surpassed by Internet access through cell phones, particularly among the economic classes with more purchasing power. The fast expansion of these digital networks evokes the also fast-growing diffusion of the Internet among children and teenagers in the former socialist-bloc countries, considered as “new uses, new risks”.

As the national realities are not exportable nor can they be ignored, it is important to consider the Brazilian contextual conditions and to insert them in the framework of the survey's results (the country as *object of study*, at a national level of analysis, as shown in Figure 1). The following steps, for the survey to be compared with Europe and especially with Portugal, will consist in the reading of country as *context of study*, in order to test hypotheses, and as *unit of analysis*, in order to examine the relations between the dimensions that vary between countries, as we have seen.

Thus, the Portuguese team of *EU Kids Online*, the consultant for the Brazilian project *Kids Online Brasil*, has highlighted the interest of having a more articulated involvement of the Brazilian researchers with the researchers who carry out this project in the field, as occurred during the discussions about adapting the questionnaires, in March 2012. At that time, a workshop was held with 25 participants, among them, Brazilian academics, Ministry of Justice, UNESCO, UNICEF, IPSOS and a member of the *EU Kids Online*'s Portuguese team, José Alberto Simões, who presented the European experience. The discussion also included matters such as the contextual particularities to be considered given the cultural, economic and social diversity of the country, the design of the sample to ensure the national representativeness, the contents of the questionnaires to ensure, simultaneously, comparability and adequacy to the context, besides public policies implications.

In fact, a comparative research consists in much more than simply translating pre-existing questionnaires and applying them to samples

considered equivalent. As seen during the testing of the questionnaires (translated from English and using the Portuguese language questionnaires as reference), some old problems reappeared, which had been identified in the cognitive tests phase in the 25 countries (HADDON and PONTE, 2012), such as: the extent of the questionnaire, the difficulty in translating in an accessible language basic terms such as *bother* and *upset*, difficulties in asking questions requiring time calculation. However, other difficulties found evoke differentiated conditions of Internet penetration, such as the difficulty in understanding expressions connected to social networking sites and to spaces for conversation, and to the concept of “safety in the Internet” itself, which will not be so embedded in the public discourse as it has been in the European space. Another characteristic also identified in the pre-tests was the great difficulty in answering questions in the self-completion part of the questionnaire by children and teenagers of disadvantaged social economic levels, due to their difficulties in reading and understanding instructions. Three rounds of tests were necessary so that finally the questionnaires for children and teenagers, and for one of their parents, could be stabilized.

The testing of questionnaires led to successive adaptations, which made the language more colloquial and the interviewers’ questions shorter and more direct. It also led to the elimination of some questions related to the extent of harm, so as to shorten the self-completion questionnaire, which also derives from the perspective of finding low values of answers related to risks and harm, as a consequence of the low use in general. On the other hand, the continuity of this survey will allow for a later introduction of these questions, while other remaining questions will provide a longitudinal view.

In the general computation, the face-to-face questionnaire consists of 40 questions, about access (places, ways, frequency), activities, social networking, mediation and an open question about risks; the self-completion questionnaire for 9 to 10-year olds has 20 questions, and the questionnaire for the 11 to 16 year old group has 35 questions; and final-

ly, the questionnaire for a parent/carer has 43 questions. The field work was carried out by ISPOS Brasil, during May and June, for a national representative sample duly reflecting geographic and social areas.

The *Kids Online Brasil* survey has in its origins the highest interest in acquiring knowledge of the Brazilian reality. It accommodates the adaptation of European questionnaires and their theoretical framework. Its process differs from the European study, although both are funded with public money. The European research has a network of academics who investigate the theme in a two-fold approach: to obtain results to inform European and national policies, and also to enable the development of a joint scientific work. This work involves the following: a deepening of the descriptive results by means of more sophisticated analyses; an assessment of projects and studies and their public availability; the production of guidance for a survey about children and the Internet; the identification of gaps in research and design of new studies, namely of qualitative and longitudinal nature, in the present phase. As for the Brazilian research, it is carried out by an enterprise specialized in studies in this field whose main objective is to describe the situation in order to inform public policies.

Thus, this may be an excellent opportunity for the Brazilian researchers from various disciplines to work in a network and take advantage of the immense source of information provided by this study about the Brazilian context, about children's and teenagers' digital practices, parental mediation, as well as mediation by teachers and others, and what constitutes opportunities and harm. Although traditionally research in Communication and Education in Brazil tends to favor a qualitative rather than quantitative methodology, we believe that the scientific challenge rests not only on the method but – primarily – on the questions that can be asked, in the framework and theoretical concepts to think through critically. For our part, we gave a testimony of how it is possible to work effectively in teams, in an interdisciplinary and stimulating way, both at national and international level. The closeness between the Brazilian network and the Portuguese team benefits from the shared language; a

more ambitious comparative perspective rather than the simple description of the situation in each country would enable us to look at each of the countries as *contexts of study* in order to verify hypotheses about questions of digital inclusion, and as *units of analysis* to verify what similarities and differences they present in relation to other European countries. The challenge is set.

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