Study on the Impact of the Internet and Social Media on Youth Participation and Youth work

Final Report

Youth

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Editor: Francisco Lupiáñez-Villanueva

Authors: Alexandra Theben, Federica Porcu, Ismael Peña-López, Francisco Lupiáñez Villanueva

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Study on the impact of the internet and social media on youth participation and youth work – *Final report*

The study examines the impact of the internet, social media and new technology on youth participation and looks at the role of youth work in supporting young people to develop digital skills and new media literacy. It is based on an extensive collection of data, summarised in an inventory of 50 good practices and 12 case studies reflecting the diversity of youth work from across the EU. It confirms that youth work has an important role to play, but more has to be done by policy makers at both EU and national level to respond to the challenges and adapt policies in order to foster engagement and active citizenship of young people.

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1. Introduction

This report looks into the impact of the internet, social media and new technology on young people's participation alongside new ways of political engagement and interaction and how youth work can educate young people to be able to exploit the new medium to the fullest.

It summarises main findings of a study launched by the European Commission and the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency with the overall purpose to explore how the internet and social media influence young people's active citizenship and participation in the public spheres of democratic societies and how those working with them, particularly youth workers as well as public authorities, can use these tools to engage with all young people, including disadvantaged groups, in an effective and meaningful way.

The study has been commissioned by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) and has been carried out by a consortium of Open Evidence S (ES) and Telecentre Europe (BE).

1.1. Context

The economic crisis has hit young people particularly hard. It has widened the gap between those with more and those with fewer opportunities. Some young people are increasingly excluded from social and civic life. Worse still, some are at risk of disengagement, marginalisation or even violent radicalisation. The EU youth policies and programmes encourage active citizenship and participation among young people in line with Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which sets out that the EU should "*contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States*" and encourage "*the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe*" (Art. 165 TFEU, Para.1, Para. 2),

Youth cooperation has become a well-structured and developed EU policy field, with programmes for young people being implemented since 1988. The policy process, however, was developed through the Commission's White Paper "A new impetus for European Youth" (EC, 2001), based on three distinct pillars:

- Active citizenship of young people via the Open Method of Cooperation with four priorities (participation, information, volunteering and better knowledge of young people), common objectives, Member States reports and structured dialogue with young people;

- Social and occupational integration through the implementation of the European Youth Pact[1] under the Lisbon Strategy, with three priorities (employment/social inclusion, education/training, reconciliation of work and private life). The Commission Communication "Promoting young people's full participation in education, employment and society"[2] went further in proposing additional actions;

- Youth mainstreaming in other policies (e.g. anti-discrimination, health).

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[1] Presidency Conclusions of the European Council, March 2005 (7619/05)

[2] COM (2007) 498

Supporting young people's involvement in political, social, cultural and economic life is also embedded in the EU's youth work mission. The EU has contributed with its youth policy and programmes to supporting youth work and non-formal learning, such as the current Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020). Since 2012, following the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, Member States are starting to introduce measures to allow young people make the most of what they learn outside formal education.

The Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018) points out that 'youth work is a broad term covering a large scope of activities of a social, cultural, educational or political nature both by, with and for young people. Increasingly, such activities also include sport and services for young people. Youth work belongs to the area of "out-of-school" education, as well as specific leisure time activities managed by professional or voluntary youth workers and youth leaders and is based on non-formal learning processes and on voluntary participation.'

The EU Youth Strategy was endorsed by the Council through this Council Resolution, based on the Commission Communication "An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering". The new strategy is also closely linked to those of the Renewed Social Agenda, and sets particular focus on creating more opportunities for young people in education and employment; improving access and full participation of all those in society; fostering mutual solidarity between society and young people.

The EU Youth Strategy greatly emphasises an evidence-based approach to youth policy, including indicators in eight 'fields of action' enabling examination as to whether overall objectives are being met by the EU and the member states. Its eight fields of action include: 1) Employment and Entrepreneurship 2) Social inclusion, 3) Participation, 4) Education and training 5) Health and well-being 6) Voluntary activities 7) Youth and the world, 8) Creativity and culture.

Inside each field there is a list of possible specific actions which can be undertaken by Member States and/or the Commission. The challenges and opportunities facing the young people of today are to be regularly assessed and prioritised every three years to ensure flexibility and to ensure that the fields of action reflect the ever changing needs of newer generations (EC, 2009).

As part of the EU Strategy, the structured dialogue monitors the implementation of the strategy and is a space for joint reflection on its priorities. Member States are invited to organise a permanent and regular dialogue with young people as part of their national youth strategies. The structured dialogue with young people is an initiative that particularly encourages youth participation in a representative democracy: as a forum that allows for continuous joint reflection on the priorities, implementation, and follow-up of European cooperation in the youth field. It involves regular consultations of young people and youth organisations at all levels in EU countries, as well as dialogue between youth representatives and policy makers at EU youth conferences.

As provided in the 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018), the cooperation framework for youth in the years 2016-2018 should aim to empower more and more diverse young people, especially those at risk of exclusion. In particular, it should help young people find better jobs and increase their participation and engagement in social life.

For that purpose, the EU has several initiatives to hand in order to support the actions of the Member States. In line with the Union action in the field of education, training, youth and sport established under the Regulation[3] establishing the 'Erasmus+' programme, EU funding under the programme complements policy cooperation on youth work, voluntary activities and participation in democratic life. Other instruments, such as the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), will provide funding targeted at the inclusion of young people in the labour market and at developing their human capital.

The outcomes of the study will contribute to identifying, developing and testing new methods and tools in Europe. These take the form of trainings, seminars and youth projects as well as through cross-sectoral cooperation opportunities offered by the Erasmus+ programme. Additionally, they develop new ways of engaging with young people in policy making e.g. within the structured dialogue; and informing policy framework at EU level and at national levels, in line with the current operational agenda in the youth field.

1.2. Terminology

Young people	Persons in the age range of 13 to 30.
The EU youth strategy does not include an official definition of the specific period in life when a person is considered to be 'young'. The understanding of which age groups are considered to be 'young people' varies from one Member State to another, and from one period in time and one socioeconomic context to the other. As an instrument for implementing the EU youth strategy, the Erasmus+ programme targets young people between 13 and 30. The dashboard of EU youth indicators (Eurostat, n.d.) operates with three 5-year categories where possible, covering the age range 15-30.	
Youth work	Actions directed towards young people regarding activities where they take part voluntarily, designed for supporting their personal and social development through non-formal and informal learning
This definition was proposed by the Expert Group on Youth Work Quality Systems (Expert Group on Youth Work Quality Systems in the EU Member States, 2015).	
Youth worker	Youth workers work with young people in a wide variety of non-formal and informal contexts, typically focusing on personal and social development through one-to-one relationships and in group-based activities.
Chisholm, L. (2005): Bridges for Recognition Cheat Sheet: Proceedings of the SALTO Bridges for Recognition: Promoting Recognition of Youth Work across Europe, Leuven-Louvain.	
Non-formal	Non-formal learning is a purposive, but voluntary, learning that

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[3] REGULATION (EU) No 1288/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 11 December 2013 establishing 'Erasmus+': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Decisions No 1719/2006/EC, No 1720/2006/EC and No 1298/2008/EC

learning	takes place in a diverse range of environments and situations for which teaching/training and learning is not necessarily their sole or main activity. These environments and situations may be intermittent or transitory, and the activities or courses that take place may be staffed by professional learning facilitators (such as youth trainers) or by volunteers (such as youth leaders). The activities and courses are planned but are seldom structured by conventional rhythms or curriculum subjects.
	Non-formal learning and education, understood as learning outside of institutional contexts (out-of-school) is the key activity, but also the key competence, of youth work. Non-formal learning/education in youth work is often structured, based on learning objectives, learning time and specific learning support and it is intentional. It typically does not lead to certification, but in an increasing number of cases, certificates are delivered, leading to a better recognition of the individual learning outcome.
	Non-formal education and learning in the youth field is more than a sub-category of education and training since it is contributing to the preparation of young people for the knowledge-based and the civil society.
Chisholm, L. (2005): Bridges for Recognition Cheat Sheet: Proceedings of the SALTO Bridges for Recognition: Promoting Recognition of Youth Work across Europe, Leuven-Louvain; Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the Field of Youth (2011): Pathways 2.0 towards recognition of non-formal learning/education and of youth work in Europe, Strasbourg.	
Formal learning	Formal learning is purposive learning that takes place in a distinct and institutionalised environment specifically designed for teaching/training and learning. It is staffed by learning facilitators who are specifically qualified for the sector, level and subject concerned and who usually serve a specified category of learners (defined by age, level and specialism). Learning aims are almost always externally set, learning progress is usually monitored and assessed, and learning outcomes are usually recognised by certificates or diplomas. Much formal learning provision is compulsory (school education).
Chisholm, L. (2005): Bridges for Recognition Cheat Sheet: Proceedings of the SALTO Bridges for Recognition: Promoting Recognition of Youth Work across Europe, Leuven-Louvain.	
Informal learning	Informal learning, from the learner's standpoint at least, is non-purposive learning, which takes place in everyday life contexts in the family, at work, during leisure and in the community. It does have outcomes, but these are seldom recorded, virtually never certified and are typically neither immediately visible for the learner nor do they count in themselves for education, training or employment purposes.
Chisholm, L. (2005): Bridges for Recognition Cheat Sheet: Proceedings of the SALTO Bridges for Recognition: Promoting Recognition of Youth Work across	

Europe, Leuven-Louvain	
Inclusion	Inclusion is a term used widely in social and educational policymaking to express the idea that all people living in a given society should have access and participation rights on equal terms. This means on the one hand that institutions, structures and measures should be designed positively to accommodate diversity of circumstances, identities and ways of life. On the other hand, it means that opportunities and resources should be distributed so as to minimise disadvantage and marginalisation. In the sphere of European youth work and non-formal education, inclusion is considered as an all-embracing strategy and practice of ensuring that people with fewer opportunities have access to the structures and programmes offered.
European Commission: Commission Staff Working Document accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM (2009) 200 – 27 April 2009: Youth – Investing and Empowering. EU Youth Report.	
Active citizenship	(Active) citizenship stands for an active participation of citizens in the economic, social, cultural and political fields of life. In the youth field much emphasis is on learning the necessary competences through voluntary activities. The aim is not only to improve the knowledge, but also motivation, skills and practical experience to be an active citizen.
Siurala, L. (2005): European framework of youth policy.	
Civic engagement	Civic engagement involves working to make a difference in the civic life of one's community and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes. Civic engagement includes both paid and unpaid forms of political activism, environmentalism, and community and national service. The goal of civic engagement is to address public concerns and promote the quality of the community. More and more young people are discovering that their voices matter to their communities and that they can make their communities better places to live if they become active citizens. Volunteering is one form of civic engagement.
Thomas Erlich, Civic Responsibility and Higher Education, American Council on Education/Oryx Press, 2000.	
Digital media literacy	A constellation of life skills that are necessary for full participation in a media-saturated, information-rich society. These include the ability to do the following: • Make responsible choices and access information by locating and sharing materials and comprehending information and ideas • Analyse messages in a variety of forms by identifying the author, purpose and point of view, and evaluating the

	quality and credibility of the content
	• Create content in a variety of forms, making use of language, images, sound, and new digital tools and technologies
	• Reflect on one's own conduct and communication behaviour by applying social responsibility and ethical principles
	• Take social action by working individually and collaboratively to share knowledge and solve problems in the family, workplace and community, and by participating as a member of a community.
Hobbs, R., 2010. Digital and media literacy. A Plan of Action. Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.	
Digital youth work	Digital youth work means addressing and/or using digital media and technology in youth work. Digital youth work is not a youth work method – digital youth work can be included in any youth work setting (open youth work, youth information and counselling, youth clubs, detached youth work, etc.). Digital youth work has the same goals as youth work in general, and using digital media and technology in youth work should always support these goals. Digital youth work can happen in face-to-face situations as well as in online environments – or in a mixture of these two. Digital media and technology can be either a tool, an activity or a content in youth work. Digital youth work is underpinned by the same ethics, values and principles as youth work
This definition was proposed by the Expert Group on risks, opportunities and implications of digitalisation for youth, youth work and youth policy, 2017 (also called Expert group on digitalisation and youth)	
Digital citizenship	A combination of respectful, tolerant online behaviour and online civic engagement activities (e.g. finding information to help the community or other youth; sharing skills).
Jones, L.M. & Mitchell, K.J., 2015. Defining and measuring youth digital citizenship. New Media & Society, 2016, Vol. 18(9), 2063 –2079.	
E-Participation	E-participation is the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to support participation and involvement in government and governance processes. It may concern administration, service delivery, decision making or policy making. E-Participation refers to all ICT-supported democratic processes except e-voting. Traditionally most of the forms of participation were linked to direct face to face interactions with public authorities, however nowadays technology often facilitates the process. Citizens and civil society organisations are now able to participate using online tools thus e-participation is a popular means of participation. This mode of participation also provides an incentive for governments and authorities to improve transparency due to the ability of civil society and activist groups to mobilize

	support. Using social media tools, citizens can participate in the decision-making processes and are able to lobby, and advocate, for different causes.
E-participation – Best Practice Manual. European Commission, Digital Agenda for Europe, Glossary.	
Empowerment	Empowerment is helping people to help themselves. This concept is used in many contexts: management ("the process of sharing information, training and allowing employees to manage their jobs in order to obtain optimum results"), community development ("action-oriented management training aimed at community members and their leaders, poverty reduction, gender strategy, facilitation, income generation, capacity development, community participation, social animation") and mobilisation ("leading people to learn to lead themselves"). Empowerment involves a process to change power relations. "On the one hand it aims to enable excluded people to take initiatives, make decisions and acquire more power over their lives. At the same time, it forces social, economic and political systems to relinquish some of that power and to enable excluded people and groups to enter into negotiation over decision-making processes, thereby playing a full role in society".
Siurala, L. (2005): European framework of youth policy, Soto Hardiman, Paul et al. (2004): Youth and exclusion in disadvantaged urban areas, Council of Europe, Strasbourg	
Good practice	A good practice is not only a practice that is good, but a practice that has been proven to work well and produce good results, and is therefore recommended as a model. It is a successful experience, which has been tested and validated, in the broad sense, which has been repeated and deserves to be shared so that a greater number of people can adopt it.
Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), 2014	
Media literacy	Media literacy refers to all the technical, cognitive, social, civic and creative capacities that allow us to access and have a critical understanding of and interact with media. These capacities allow us to exercise critical thinking, while participating in the economic, social and cultural aspects of society and playing an active role in the democratic process. This concept covers different media: broadcasting, radio, press, through various channels: traditional, internet, social media and addresses the needs of all ages.
This definition was proposed by the Expert Group on Media Literacy (MLEG), 2015	
NEET	The term NEET is an acronym for Not in Education, Employment or Training. It is used to describe young people who are not engaged in any form of employment, education or training. The term has come into the policy debate in recent years due to disproportionate

	impact of the recession on young people (under 30 years old).
Eurofound, Young people and 'NEETs'.	
Political participation	A range of concrete acts that might be meaningful for young people to carry out in order to influence the political process, or fellow citizens.
Ostman, J. (2012), Information, expression, participation: How involvement in user-generated content relates to democratic engagement among young people, New Media & Society, Vol. 14, No. 6, pp.1004–1021.	
Social participation	Social Participation refers to the involvement in life situations offering interaction between an individual and the physical, social, and attitudinal environments. Social participation involves forming and maintaining social relationships in families and other social networks. Engagement in activities in youth work help young people to expand their social networks with people not involved in their families or school environment and thus is part of social participation.
Council of the European Union (2017). Glossary on youth.	
Participatory politics	Participatory politics are interactive, peer-based acts through which individuals and groups seek to exert both voice and influence on issues of public concern. Examples of participatory political acts range from blogging and circulating political news, to starting a new political group, to creating petitions, to mobilizing one's social network on behalf of a cause. These activities need not occur online (one can start a political group or circulate petitions, for example, without digital media).
Kahne, J., Hodgin, E., Eidman-Aadahl (2016). Redesigning Civic Education in the Digital Age: Participatory politics and the Pursuit of Democratic Engagement. Theory & research in Social Education, 44: 1–35, 2016.	
Young people with fewer opportunities	Young people with fewer opportunities are young people who are at a disadvantage compared to their peers because they face one or more of the exclusion factors and obstacles below. The following situations often prevent young people from taking part in employment, formal and non-formal education, trans-national mobility, democratic process and society at large: • Disability (i.e. participants with special needs): young people with mental (intellectual, cognitive, learning), physical, sensory or other disabilities etc. • Health problems: young people with chronic health problems, severe illnesses or psychiatric conditions etc. • Educational difficulties: young people with learning difficulties, early school leavers, lower qualified persons, young people with poor school performance etc. • Cultural differences: immigrants, refugees or descendants from immigrant or refugee families, young people belonging

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to a national or ethnic minority, young people with linguistic adaptation and cultural inclusion difficulties etc.

- Economic obstacles: young people with a low standard of living, low income, dependence on social welfare system, young people in long-term unemployment or poverty, young people who are homeless, in debt or with financial problems etc.

- Social obstacles: young people facing discrimination because of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, etc., young people with limited social skills or anti-social or high-risk behaviours, young people in a precarious situation, (ex-)offenders, (ex-)drug or alcohol abusers, young and/or single parents, orphans etc.

- Geographical obstacles: young people from remote or rural areas, young people living on small islands or in peripheral regions, young people from urban problem zones, young people from less serviced areas (limited public transport, poor facilities) etc.

This definition deliberately focuses on the situation young people are in, to avoid stigmatisation and blame. This list is not exhaustive, but gives an indication of the type of exclusion situations we are talking about. Some target groups of this strategy, such as notably young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs), find themselves in several of the situations listed above at the same time.

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Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Strategy - – in the field of Youth, European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture, December 2014

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1.3. The study design in brief

The study pursued seven interrelated study objectives, each contributing to an in-depth understanding of the impact of the internet and social media on young people's participation in democratic life and the role of youth work. The specific study objectives as outlines in the terms of references for the study are:

- Exploring the characteristics of the internet and social media in view of their impact on young people as a specific target group among the internet users, to better understand the patterns of young people's online activities.

- Examining how the internet and social media influence young people's active citizenship and participation in the public sphere of democratic societies including new contexts of participation along with new ways of political/social engagement and interaction, as compared to more traditional forms.

- Analysing skills and competences needed as well as new media literacy which would enable young people to use the internet and social media to their fullest, with a critical mind and being aware of potential threats, particularly in relation to illegal, criminal, antidemocratic content or recruitment techniques for illegal, terrorist activities.

- Exploring how the internet and social media can be used in youth work activities in view of developing new effective learning and teaching methods and tools along with the increased outreach to young people, particularly from disadvantaged groups, and providing examples of good practices.

- Analysing the skills and competences needed and providing good practice examples on how to increase the ability of youth workers to effectively use new technologies in their work with young people.

- Exploring the possible role of EU youth policies and the Erasmus+ programmes as strategic frameworks for cooperation in the youth field, particularly in view of young people's commitment to EU integration, European values and active citizenship.

- Exploring how public institutions at EU, national, regional and local levels can engage with young people via the internet and social media and involve them in decision-making, particularly in the context of the structured dialogue, and providing recommendations on how the potential and impact of the structured dialogue can be maximised.

The way in which these objectives are interrelated is depicted in the study framework below.

Figure 1 Study framework
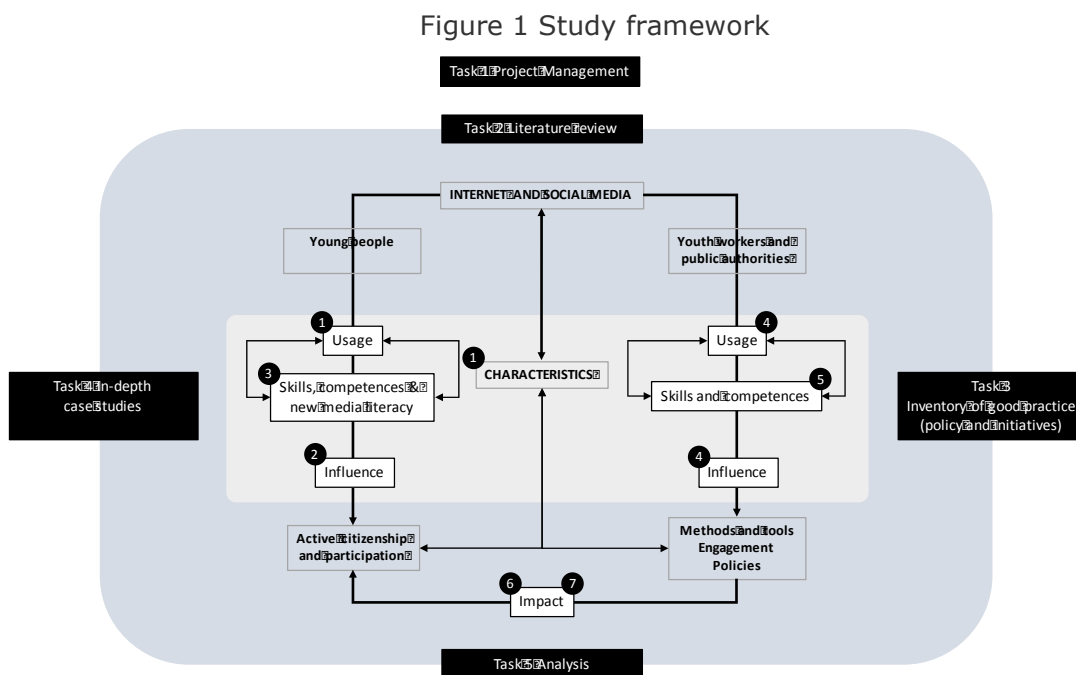
Source: Source: Editor's own elaboration

The study objectives were addressed through extensive data collection and analysis and include the following:

- A literature review of sources related to the general and specific objectives of the study, namely education, youth work and non-formal learning, the internet/social media, development of skills and competences, new media literacy, young people's active citizenship and participation. The aim of this literary review was to analyse and synthesise relevant literature on the contribution of youth work to stimulating young people's participation and active citizenship via the internet and social networking.

- An inventory of good practices on capacity building for youth workers in the field of the development of skills and competences linked to new technologies and media literacy as well as on effective learning and teaching methods and tools based on the internet and social media along with increased outreach to young people. The inventory captures a broad diversity of initiatives stemming from a representative sample of Erasmus+ countries and reflects the diversity of youth work.

- The in-depth case studies aimed at gaining a more profound understanding of the impact of the internet and social media on young people's participation and youth work. For this purpose, twelve cases, defined in accordance with the general and specific objectives of the study, were selected on the basis of a high degree of maturity, impact and scope and coverage of a range of different learning contexts and funding sources.

- Interviews with 21 stakeholders involved in initiatives related to the study objectives.

The analysis was performed using different sources of data and collection methods under a process of data triangulation in order to reinforce the robustness and solidity of the analysis. The analysis of the information gathered provides insights on the following:

- The patterns of young people's online activities; how the internet and social media influence young people's active citizenship and participation;

- Helping young people develop digital skills and competencies and new media literacy, particularly in relation to antidemocratic content or recruitment techniques for terrorist activities;

- New effective (digital) learning and teaching methods and tools along with increased outreach to young people, especially those with fewer opportunities;

- (Digital) Skills and competence requirements for youth workers;

- The possible role of EU youth policies and Erasmus+ as strategic frameworks for cooperation in this field;

- Involving young people in decision-making, particularly in the context of the structured dialogue, via the internet and social media.

1.4.   Structure of this report

The structure of the report follows the objectives of the study.

Chapter 1 is the current introduction.

Chapter 2 describes the findings related to patterns of young people's online activities, including the influence of the internet and social media on young people's active citizenship and participation and the skills and competences required to benefit from the affordances of new technologies.

Chapter 3 analyses the current state of you work with view of effective (digital) learning and teaching methods and tools along with the increased outreach to young people, as well as the skill and competence needs for youth workers.

Chapter 4 concludes the study while analysing the possible role of EU youth policies and Erasmus+ as strategic frameworks for cooperation in this field. In this chapter, policy recommendations related to how young people can be involved in decision-making, particularly through leveraging the internet and social media, are provided. The chapter ends with some key takeaway messages based on the study findings.

Annex 1 [separate annex ISBN 978-92-79-70198-6 (PDF)] contains an inventory of 50 good practice initiatives from a representative sample of Erasmus+ countries plus the USA, Norway and Turkey.

Annex 2 [separate annex ISBN 978-92-79-70193-1 (PDF)] contains 12 in-depth case studies produced as part of the study.

Annex 3 (included at the back of the report) contains the full list of data sources consulted during the course of the fieldwork (individuals and organisations consulted in the course of the project work, and literature and other secondary sources).

2. Youth, the internet and social media

2.1. The internet and social media as spaces for socialisation and self-expression

The internet and social media in particular, plays a ubiquitous role in young people's lives and is used by young people more often and for more diverse reasons than by any other age group (Weaver, Tinkham & Sweetser, 2011). As recent Eurostat data suggests, the proportion of young people using the internet exceeds significantly that of the whole population.

Figure 2 Proportion of people who use the internet on a daily basis, EU-28, 2014
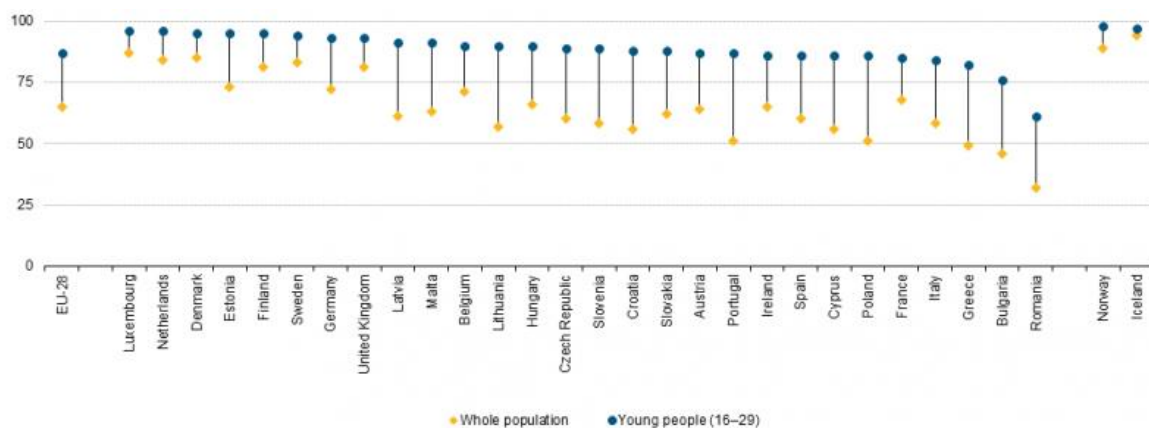
Source: Eurostat (online data code: isoc_ci_ifp_fu)

Similarly, the proportion of young people who participated on social networking sites is significantly higher than that of the whole population.

Figure 3 proportion of people who participated on social networking, EU-28, 2014
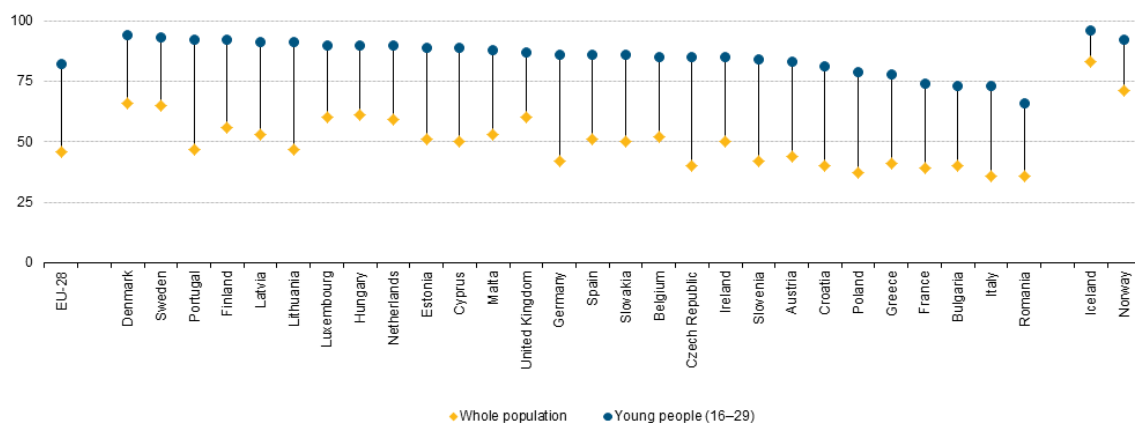
(*) For example, created a user profile, posted messages or other contributions to Facebook, Twitter, etc.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: isoc_ci_ac_i)

Also the proportion of young people performing social and civic activities is higher than the overall population.

The most common online social activities for young people in the EU-28 in 2014 included sending and receiving e-mails (86 %) and participating on social networking sites (82 %) —for example, Facebook or Twitter, by creating a user profile, posting messages or making other contributions— while close to half (47 %) of all young

people in the EU-28 uploaded self-created content, such as photos, videos or text to the internet.

Figure 4 Proportion of people who used the internet for social activities, EU-28, 2014
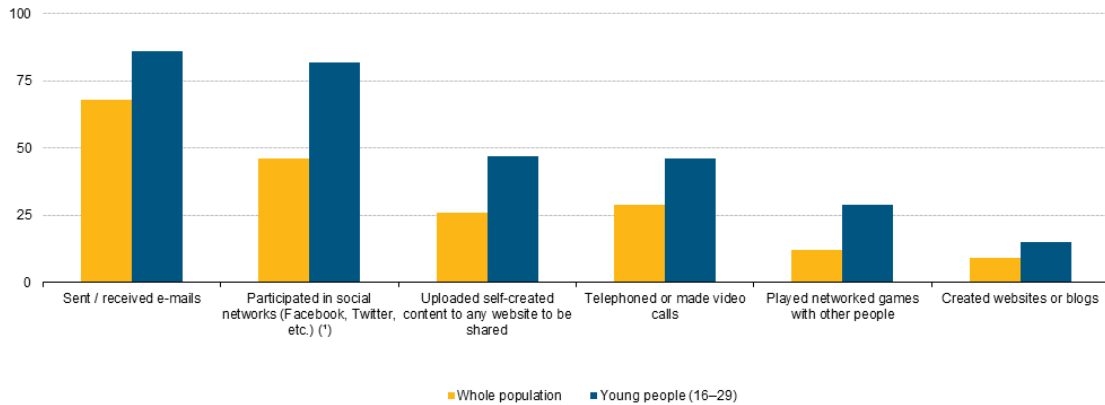
(¹) For example, created a user profile, posted messages or other contributions.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: isoc_ci_ac_i)

Among the online civic activities performed, the most common for young persons were related to online interaction with public authorities, most notably obtaining information from websites of public authorities. About 18 % of young people in the EU-28 posted their opinions on civic or political issues via websites (within the 3-month period prior to the survey), while about 10% of young people took part in online consultations or voted to define civic or political issues.

Figure 5 Proportion of people who used the internet for civic activities, EU-28, 2014
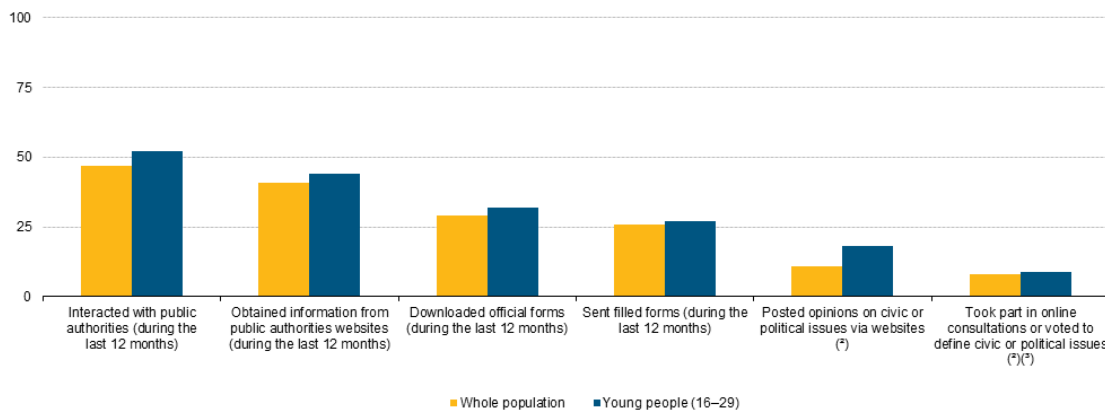
(¹) Respondents carried out the task during the three-month period prior to the survey (unless otherwise stated).
(²) 2013.
(³) Such as urban planning or petitions.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: isoc_ci_ac_i)

Young people's offline practices are often replicated through new media using novel approaches (McKerlich, Ives & McGreal, 2013). The use of the internet, and social networks in particular, revolve around their daily and closest social circles outside their families (i.e. their friends and schoolmates), which means that the high level of integration of these technologies into their daily life essentially translates into an online extension of their offline life (Sánchez-Navarro & Aranda, 2012). The technology mediated activities that young people participate in are comparable to those of past generations. This results in social media platforms being used as spaces for socialisation (Sánchez-Navarro & Aranda, 2012; McKerlich, Ives & McGreal, 2013)

offering a unique potential to assist people in building and maintaining relationships and knowledge (Helsper & Eynon, 2010; Mihailidis, 2014).

The technical characteristics of these technologies turn them into essential tools related to their sociability. As Clark (2015) suggests, social media platforms such as Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, and Instagram share several characteristics: as commercial platforms, they are easily accessed through smart phones, laptops, or tablets. They allow for instantaneous and real-time postings that can consist of quick reports, shared photos, or short replies.

Each of these platforms, however, have distinct characteristics. For example, while Facebook serves as a platform to broadcast or share positive and negative life occurrences and to seek further support or information, Twitter allows playful performances and improvisation within its 140-word limit; Snapchat in turn allows communication among selected groups of recipients and restricted in time, which reinforces immediate responses by the receiver (Clark, 2015).

One of the main features of the internet, especially of social networks, is the participation of the sender and the receiver at the same time (EC, 2015). This differs markedly from the possibilities offered by earlier forms of mass communication such as television and radio, where a model of one-way traffic made little or no provision for feedback from the audience. This appears to be particularly appealing for young people.

In attempt to study young people's engagement and use of a very broad range of media, van Kruistum, Leseman & de Haan (2014) find that that differences in the need or desire to bring offline social connections to online activity play a particularly large role in how media is adopted. The authors identify four clearly different media lifestyles defined in terms of (a) the medium through which a particular media activity took place, (b) the social distance involved between sender and receiver, and (c) the function of the particular activity:

Table 1 Media lifestyles of young people

Media Lifestyle	Description
Cluster 1 - Omnivores	Appropriating all media for multiple functions in diverse social contexts: Omnivores appeared to be especially adept at appropriating possibilities offered by new technology, but without disconnecting from face-to-face interactions or print-based media and without specializing in a particular media use.
Cluster 2 - Networkers	Staying connected with known acquaintances across offline and online formats: networkers stayed connected with known others through face-to-face interaction and new media, but without including print-based media like letters, notes, and postcards. This suggests that besides the functional and social context, the technology was of importance as well.
Cluster 3 - Gamers	Specialising in a medium for entertainment within a distant social context: Gamers' high engagement in multiplayer online games—higher than any other media practice and much higher than youth from all other clusters—suggested that this media practice exists on its own right, without having clear connections to other media practices. However, as gamers were (somewhat) less involved in a similar type of usage through asynchronous new media, this indicated that a combination of the medium (new), function (social-entertainment), and social arrangement (large social distance) drove their engagement.
Cluster 4 - Low-frequency users	Not bringing offline interests and relationships online: Their low involvement in the broad media spectrum indicated that these young people did not bring their offline interests and relationships into regular use through any medium, be it print-based or new. Of all media practices, they were mostly oriented toward face-to-face interaction with friends and relatives.

Source: van Kruistum, Leseman, & de Haan (2014)

Their findings indicate that technological properties of synchronous new media (i.e. instant messenger, social networking sites, webcams, and multiplayer online games) tap into a basic need young people have, which is to engage in real-time interaction with significant others, just as it happens with traditional face-to-face interaction. Synchronous new media are therefore preferred over asynchronous alternatives that offer less or no possibility for interaction (i.e. e-mail, photo-editing software, YouTube clips, television). This is confirmed in other studies, which find that online social networks are often used as a resource to meet psychological as well as social needs (Colás-Bravo, González-Ramírez & de Pablos-Pons, 2013; Mihailidis, 2014).

The internet and new media technologies further represent new avenues for social inclusion. Among the features that bridge traditional and cultural divides include anonymity and lack of barriers to entry (Maisnah, 2007). In particular, the anonymity of the internet is essential for marginalised groups who are otherwise isolated from social and cultural interaction outside their group. The lack of barriers to entry means that once people are able to go online, they have almost unlimited choices and minimal constraints about where to go and what to do. In this sense, online

participation can possibly open up and strengthen ties across class, race, ethnicity, and other types of divides (Mainsah, 2007). Social networking sites further serve as a port of entry to the internet for many who were previously 'digitally excluded' (Correa, 2015).

Despite country-based differences related to the possession of technical devices to access the internet (Ignatova et al., 2014), young people are increasingly connected through a range of devices, such as smartphones, tablets and portable computers. This led to the assumption that traditional conceptions of the digital divide in terms of access may no longer be viable. Rather, it appears that young people find a way to get connected and participate in online social communities (Ahn, 2011).

Similarly, Bohmann & Schupp (2016) postulate that the digital divide, manifested as a social internet access gap, has almost completely closed – at least for teenagers. They find that digital media's increasing availability, portability, and interconnection have established these technologies as the most frequently used leisure activity among young people. However, this does not mean that the internet and social media have created a level-playing field. Rather, a new digital divide along socio-demographic traits concerning the specific purpose for which the new media and technologies are used has emerged. Aspects that change as a function of a teenager's family background include the use of the internet for capital-enhancing activities, such as searching for information and obtaining knowledge about specific topics (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007), the possession of web-based skills (Hargittai, 2010) and the creating and sharing of user-generated content (Hargittai & Walejko, 2008; Hoffmann, Lutz & Meckel, 2015). In particular, online participation and content creation require a more extensive skill set than mere consumptive internet uses (Hargittai, 2001; Van Dijk, 2005). Involvement in user-generated content creation, however, relates in decisively distinct ways to two key dimensions of democratic engagement: political knowledge and political participation (Ostman, 2012). In principle, user generated content should be distinguished from online social networking, although on the site-level both activities are usually supported in many applications, such as Facebook, MySpace, Flickr, Blogger and YouTube.

In that regard, Micheli (2016) finds that teenagers from lower socio-economic backgrounds are not necessarily lagging behind their privileged peers in exploiting the affordances of social networks. Rather, they appear more eager to take up the opportunities offered by these platforms for socialisation and the extension of personal networks. Social background was found to impact the way social media sites are used: while those from lower socio-economic background use social media to meet new people, have fun and entertainment purposes, those from higher socio-economic backgrounds use social media sites as places to exchange information or even to conduct business, while displaying certain detachment and skepticism in relation to social media in general and Facebook in particular.

Correa (2015) finds that more educated and skilful individuals tend to use Facebook for informational and mobilizing purposes, but socio-demographic factors and skills did not make a difference in Facebook use for social purpose. Hoffmann, Lutz, & Meckel (2015), find a significant negative effect of education on the production of social and entertainment and skilled content. They interpret their findings as highly educated users being less interested in online interactions, especially for social or entertainment purposes. Self-efficacy, which increases with education, is considered a key driver of all forms of content creation, which clearly differs by age, gender, and education. They argue that a participation divide exists for all types of content creation.

Thus, while it appears that digital media is levelling the playing field when it comes to exposure to content, engaging in more in capital enhancing activities and "creative pursuits" offered by digital technology remains unequally distributed by social

background (Hargittai & Walejko, 2008, p. 256) with differential effects on democratic engagement (Ostman, 2012).

2.2. The influence of the internet and social media on active citizenship and participation

Similar to their role as spaces for socialisation, the internet and social media have evolved as venues for civic and political engagement. Despite concerns over young people's apathy toward politics, various forms of political participation and social engagement based on the internet and social media have emerged that challenge the view of young people's disenchantment (EC, 2015). Such activities often emphasise lifestyle values and self-expression, and include political consumerism, boycotts, political comedy, self-organizing protests, and discussing politics online (Freelon, Wells & Bennett (2013).

As a conduit of information, the internet and social media facilitate greater overall exposure of young people to different perspectives on civic and political topics (Middaugh, Bowyer & Kahne, 2016). Information is the first and most used stage of political participation of young people (Álvaro & Rubio, 2016). There exists broad consensus that informational uses of the internet have positive effects on various dimensions of democratic engagement (Boulianne, 2009).

Young people today have access to a large range of information and political conversation that extends far beyond their parents, teachers and geographically close peers, which increases young people's awareness (Josh et al., 2006) and potential participation (Middaugh, Bowyer & Kahne, 2016; Coffé & Chapman, 2016).

The affordances of digital technologies have not only changed the channels used to access information, but also the nature of the information itself: it is often presented in different forms, has a more graphic component and strong symbolic content. This affects the way of receiving it (comfortably and practically in real-time), processing it (putting in the background reflection and the spectacular impact), the effects on the recipient (reactive, with a strong sentimental load), on how to transmit it, and redistribute it (Álvaro & Rubio, 2016). Social network sites have become an important open channel for communication about political action and have been thus associated with the mobilisation of other newcomers (Clark, 2015).

Similarly, the characteristics of social media platforms, such as inclusiveness (Storsul, 2014) and the sense of community (Dumitrica, 2016) can spur participation. The changed parameters of communication between individuals and groups allow dialogue to be democratised and multiplied exponentially (García-Galera, Del-Hoyo-Hurtado & Fernández-Muñoz, 2014) and facilitate direct connection with public political actors (Tang & Lee, 2013). In this articulation, social media appears as both the tool that produces engagement and the space where this engagement unfolds.

Social media allows users to be active producers and content creators. These interactive, collaborative and user-generated content capacities of social media technologies themselves offer the prospect of facilitating new modes of political communication which are more commensurate with those contemporary youth (Loader, 2014). This has fostered new opportunities to engage in dynamic expression of values and beliefs, sharing of ideas and opinions, and public deliberation (Milhalidis, 2014).

While outlets for youth activism and civic participation are not new, two things distinguish recent examples from traditional ones: they are peer created and directed, and they rely on social media (Kahne & Middaugh, 2012). Young people are leveraging social media to build networks and magnify their voice. They engage politically in

public spaces that matter to them and to which they have access. Using social network tools, they leverage connections to spread messages virally, creating solidarity through friends and friends-of-friends (Boyd, 2013). The #BringBackOurGirls campaign is an example of the ways that activists are using social media to mobilise communities, influence the public conversation, and spur political action (Olson, 2016).

These activities are distinguished by their avoidance of major institutions, emphasis on individual identity construction and expression, and a less formalised, often networked structure (Freelon, Wells & Bennett, 2013). Social networks make it possible to bypass formal institutions and attract the attention of the authorities, the media and the public, so that local problems can be put on the world agenda (EC, 2015). At the same time, social media conversations are gaining an increasingly important agenda-setting function because internet communities are becoming stronger and more fully voiced (Olson, 2016).

The internet has not only become a revolutionary and promising political communication medium and campaigning tool, but is regarded a bulwark of democracy (Forrester & Matusitz, 2010) that facilitates innovative forms of participation (Vissers & Stolle, 2013).

These activities, which pertain not only to politics but also to wide-ranging social issues, are gradually being accepted as legitimate forms of participation (Kim & Yang, 2015) and are perceived differently by young people (Weaver, Tinkham & Sweetser, 2011). As suggested by Thorson (2014), contemporary citizenship, particularly for younger cohorts, is characterised by openness, by choice, by uncertainty, by tolerance, and by no single "right way" to take part in public life.

New forms of engagement, such as consumption of political news, or sharing a presidential candidate's photo on Facebook - co-exist with practices like voting and volunteering in the community, and neither scholars nor young people themselves have sorted out how to adjudicate what kinds of actions are most efficacious (Thorson, 2014). Social media have accelerated the changing character of civic engagement by adding new opportunities for engaging with organisations and activist groups by commenting on discussions, petitions and different forms of supportive action such as "retweets" and Facebook liking (Brandtzaeg et al., 2015).

However, the absence of a full recognition of the wide range of opportunities that social media provide, institutional resistance, but also self-perceived lack of value may continue to compromise the potential value of these tools and spaces for daily civic life (Milhalidis, 2014).

2.3.   Digital skills and competence needs of young people

Despite the general positive impact of the internet and social media for participation, a new divide exists that is marked by unequal capacities to make use of digital media for personal benefit and a self-empowering appropriation of the internet.

In a context of very high rates of internet penetration and a clear decline in the digital divide with regards to access, several studies have focussed on the importance of the internet "for what". One of the most interesting studies along these lines was aimed at analysing to what degree certain uses of the internet generate competitive advantages for their users, termed 'beneficial and advanced uses of the internet' (BAUI) (Van Dijk, 2005).

From this perspective, the basic premise is that digital inequality is the result of the difference between citizens that make use of these types of internet services and tools and those citizens who do not have the resources to do so (DiMaggio and Hargittai,

2001). The central idea of these works was to analyse the factors that explain why a particular person is in a position to transform the possibilities offered by the internet into opportunities to improve his or her life (DiMaggio and Hargittai, 2001). Digital skills were found to be the most important set of variables related to capacities to manage the internet.

Similarly, Morales *et al*. (2016) find that digital skills are key to understanding inequalities in the network society. They are a chain of transmission between traditional forms of inequality, the uneven distribution of economic (status) and educational resources, and the possibilities citizens have to participate in the new social context. The new central basis of the participation divide is therefore a conjunction between middle/low education level and a low level of ability to manage the internet, as well as middle/low status and the lack of digital skills.

As suggested by Correa (2015), it is particularly important to take account of the complexity and use of new technologies even among a highly connected group of young people because the 'digital native' myth – postulating that younger generations are native speakers of the digital language of computers, video games and the internet -may lead to the conclusion that young people are universally tech-savvy and do not need to be considered in policymaking initiatives that target digital inequality.

To distinguish among users' abilities in navigating digital media, also the concept of digital literacy has become a focus of attention (Hargittai, 2008), suggesting that the myriad of opportunities offered by the internet requires particular skills and abilities in order to benefit from the time spent online (Hargittai & Waleiko, 2008).

While it remains uncontested that the mediated world requires new kind of literacy that is rooted in the real world of instant information, global interactivity and messages created on multiple media platforms (Thoman & Jolls, 2004), there is no agreement on which set of core competences and skills are required to fully exploit the benefits of the internet and social media, at least from a conceptual point of view. While in many cases overlapping and intersecting, the concepts quoted in the literature range from digital competence, digital and internet skills, information and data literacy, to media literacy, new media literacy and digital literacy.

For example, Ilomäki et al. (2016) elaborate on digital competence as an emergent boundary concept related to the development of digital technology and the political aims and expectations of citizenship in a knowledge society that is defined as consisting of (1) technical competence, (2) the ability to use digital technologies in a meaningful way for working, studying and in everyday life, (3) the ability to evaluate digital technologies critically, and (4) motivation to participate and commit in the digital culture.

The author's claim that digital competence seems to be a 'loose' concept: one that is not well-defined, still emerging, with meanings varying based on users from different approaches. However, it is strongly political term by nature, reflecting beliefs and wishes about the future skills, thought to be necessary for capable citizens.

The concept is broadly used in EU policy making within the European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens, known as "DigComp". In June 2016, the DigComp 2.0 was published, updating the terminology and conceptual model, as well as showcasing examples of its implementation at the European, national and regional level (Carretero, Vuorikari & Punie, 2017). DigComp 2.0 identifies the key components of digital competence in 5 areas which can be summarised as below:

Table 2 Key components of digital competence

Information and data literacy	To articulate information needs, to locate and retrieve digital data, information and content. To judge the relevance of the source and its content. To store, manage, and organise digital data, information and content.
Communication and collaboration	To interact, communicate and collaborate through digital technologies while being aware of cultural and generational diversity. To participate in society through public and private digital services and participatory citizenship. To manage one's digital identity and reputation.
Digital content creation	To create and edit digital content. To improve and integrate information and content into an existing body of knowledge while understanding how copyright and licences are to be applied. To know how to give understandable instructions for a computer system.
Safety	To protect devices, content, personal data and privacy in digital environments. To protect physical and psychological health, and to be aware of digital technologies for social well-being and social inclusion. To be aware of the environmental impact of digital technologies and their use.
Problem solving	To identify needs and problems, and to resolve conceptual problems and problem situations in digital environments. To use digital tools to innovate processes and products. To keep up-to-date with the digital evolution.

Source: Carretero, Vuorikari & Punie (2017)

What appears to be certain is that how people use digital technology has long-term outcomes that could be either beneficial or disadvantageous (Park, 2012). More skilful implementation of internet and social networking sites can facilitate social capital building and political engagement (Hargittai & Shaw, 2013), while the ability to create is closely related to social inclusion and exclusion (Park, 2012). The new media literacies for young people serve as core cultural competencies and social skills in a new media landscape, but also emerge as key practices toward youth cultural production and participatory politics (Jocson, 2015). As put forward by Annette (2009), an important feature of participatory politics which has recently been emphasised is that of the need to enable the capacity to participate in deliberative democratic engagement, which includes skills related to 'civic listening' and not just 'civic speaking'.

In that regard, Mihailidis & Thevenin (2013) have elaborated on media literacy as a core competency for engaged citizenship. They suggest that in an age of increased reliance on digital and social media across all age groups for information and communication needs, citizens must be able to critically access and analyse a constant and diverse stream of information on which to base their democratic participation. In learning to critically read media messages, citizens are developing the abilities to gather accurate, relevant information about their society and to question authority (both textual and, by implication, institutional).

Figure 6 Framework for media literacy as a core competency for engaged citizenship
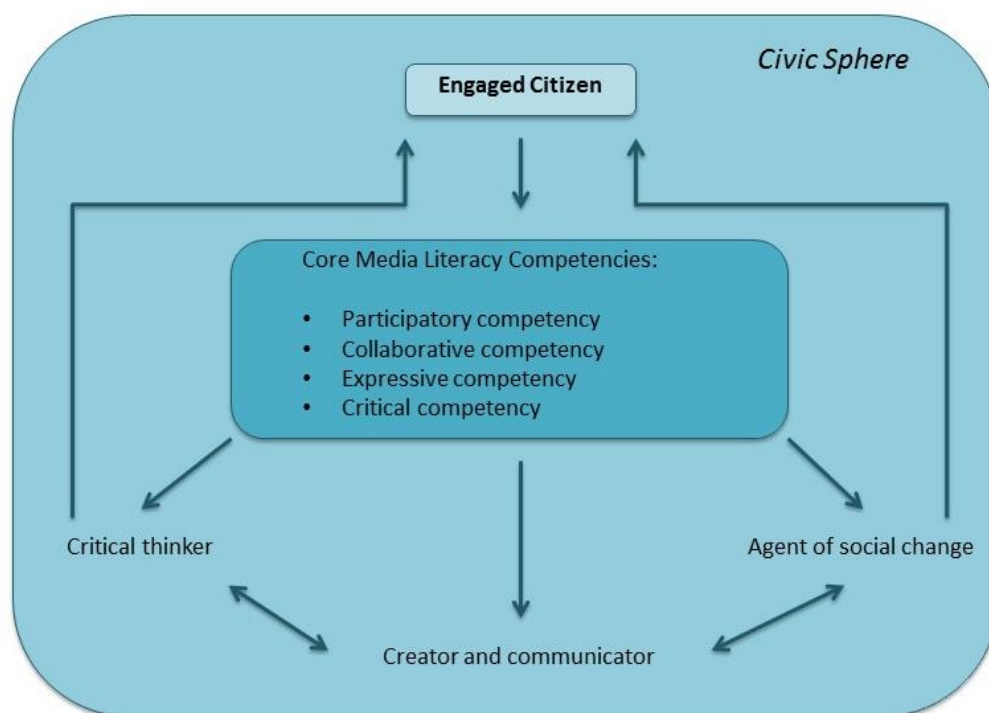
Source: Mihailidis & Thevenin (2013)

They suggest that citizens with the capacities to participate, collaborate, and express online stand a better chance to become critical thinkers, creators and communicators, and agents of social change: helping to empower civic voices for the future of sustainable, tolerant, and participatory democracy in the digital age.

While the ability to critically evaluate online content undoubtedly constitutes a main precondition to participate in a democratic society, Hobbs (2010) uses the concept

"digital and media literacy" as a constellation of life skills that are necessary for full participation in a media-saturated, information-rich society. It encompasses the skills related to critical thinking and analysis, while capturing essential competencies related also to the ability to use computers, social media and the internet.

The competencies and skills captured by the concept of digital and media literacy encompass the full range of cognitive, emotional and social competencies that includes the use of texts, tools and technologies; the skills of critical thinking and analysis; the practice of message composition and creativity; the ability to engage in reflection and ethical thinking; as well as active participation through teamwork and collaboration.

Table 3 Essential competencies of digital and media literacy

ACCESS	Finding and using media and technology tools skilfully and sharing appropriate and relevant information with others.
ANALYSE & EVALUATE	Comprehending messages and using critical thinking to analyse message quality, veracity, credibility, and point of view, while considering potential effects or consequences of messages.
CREATE	Composing or generating content using creativity and confidence in self-expression, with awareness of purpose, audience, and composition techniques.
REFLECT	Applying social responsibility and ethical principles to one's own identity and lived experience, communication behavior and conduct.
ACT	Working individually and collaboratively to share knowledge and solve problems in the family, the workplace and the community, and participating as a member of a community at local, regional, national and international levels.

Source: Hobbs (2010)

These digital and media literacy competencies, which constitute the core skills required of citizenship in the digital age, have enormous practical value, as they facilitate a beneficial use and navigation of the internet. As suggested by Hobbs (2010), they work together in a spiral of empowerment, while facilitating people's active participation in lifelong learning through the process of consuming and creating messages.

Both digital and media literacy draw on the same core skill of critical thinking. However, there are important differences in how the two have traditionally been approached from an educational standpoint. Whereas media literacy was generally associated with teaching young people to be critically engaged consumers of media, digital literacy referred more about skills that enable young people to participate in digital media in wise, safe and ethical ways (MediaSmarts, 2017).

The figure below depicts how skills for digital literacy and media literacy intersect with each other and with other core literacies to provide a full range of competencies required that are essential in today's digital world. As gets visible, media literacy and digital literacy are not separate, but rather complementary. Both concepts are mutually supporting and are constantly evolving and intersecting in new ways.

Figure 7 Intersection of digital and media literacy
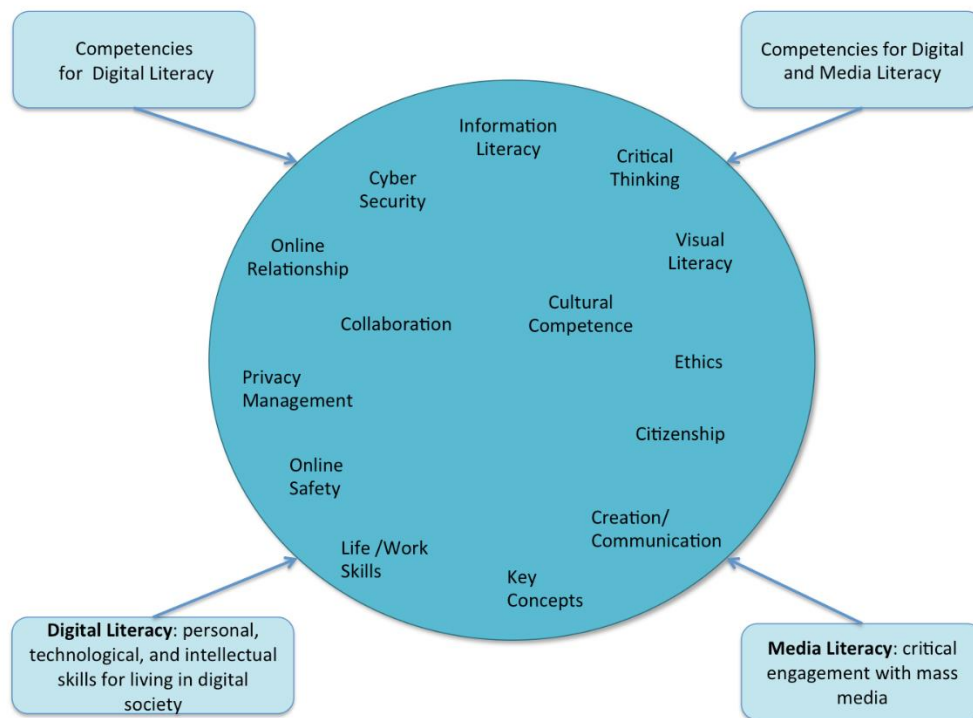
Source: Adapted from MediaSmarts (2017).

What becomes clear is that the competencies captured by digital and media literacy do not only strengthen people's capacity to engage with information as both consumers and producers, but also held to address potential risks related to digital media through critical reflection.

This proves particularly important with view to young people's capacity to identify antic-democratic content, but also resilience towards radical content and practices that increasingly take place in online environments and media.

Based on the fact high emphasis set on critical thinking skills, we made use of the concept of digital and media literacy to capture the broad set of skills needed for young people to use the internet and social media to the fullest, with a critical mind and being aware of potential threats.

2.4. Summary

The chapter elaborated on the key findings of the literature review related to the impact of the internet and social media on young people's participation and active citizenship. The technology mediated activities young people engage in essentially translate into an online extension of their offline practices. As spaces for socialisation, digital media tap into basic needs of young people to connect and interact, which has established the use of digital technologies as the most frequently used leisure activity among young people. Similar to their role as spaces for socialisation, the internet and social media have evolved as venues for civic and political engagement. They opened up a myriad of opportunities for young people to leverage new media to access information, circulate or produce content, investigate, mobilise, engage in discussions or sharing ideas. Young people need to be equipped with a number of core competences and skills which are required fully exploit the benefits of the internet and

social media, which not only relate to technical skills that enable them to access, use and produce content, but also skills that enable them to critical reflect and analyse media content. This proves particular relevant with view on providing equal opportunities for young people, including disadvantaged groups, in order to enhance levels of capital enhancing uses of the internet and bridge the participation divide. In the remainder of this report we take a look at how youth work can contribute to this challenging task.

3. Youth work on the digital era

3.1. The internet and social media in youth work

Working with young people can take place in different shapes and be directed at different target groups. Among the core common features, shared by the majority of youth work activities, is the focus on young people as a distinct population, with needs and aspirations different to those of children or adults. Similarly, youth work is in-between different areas and has many commonalities with other fields such as education, social work, sports or culture, which makes it difficult to determine where one form of policy/ activity starts and the other ends.

Nevertheless, there are distinct features which together make youth work different from other types of activities: it takes place in the extracurricular area, as well as through specific leisure time activities, and is based on non-formal and informal learning processes and on voluntary participation. These activities and processes are self-managed, co-managed or managed under educational or pedagogical guidance by either professional or voluntary youth workers and youth leaders and can develop and be subject to changes caused by different dynamics (Council of the EU, 2010).

As suggested by the EC (2014), the main aim of youth work is to support a young person's personal development with view of their personal empowerment, emancipation, responsibility and tolerance. Youth work further enables young people to better understand the views and concerns of others and those of wider society, which can lead to greater harmony and inclusion.

Figure 8 Aims of youth work
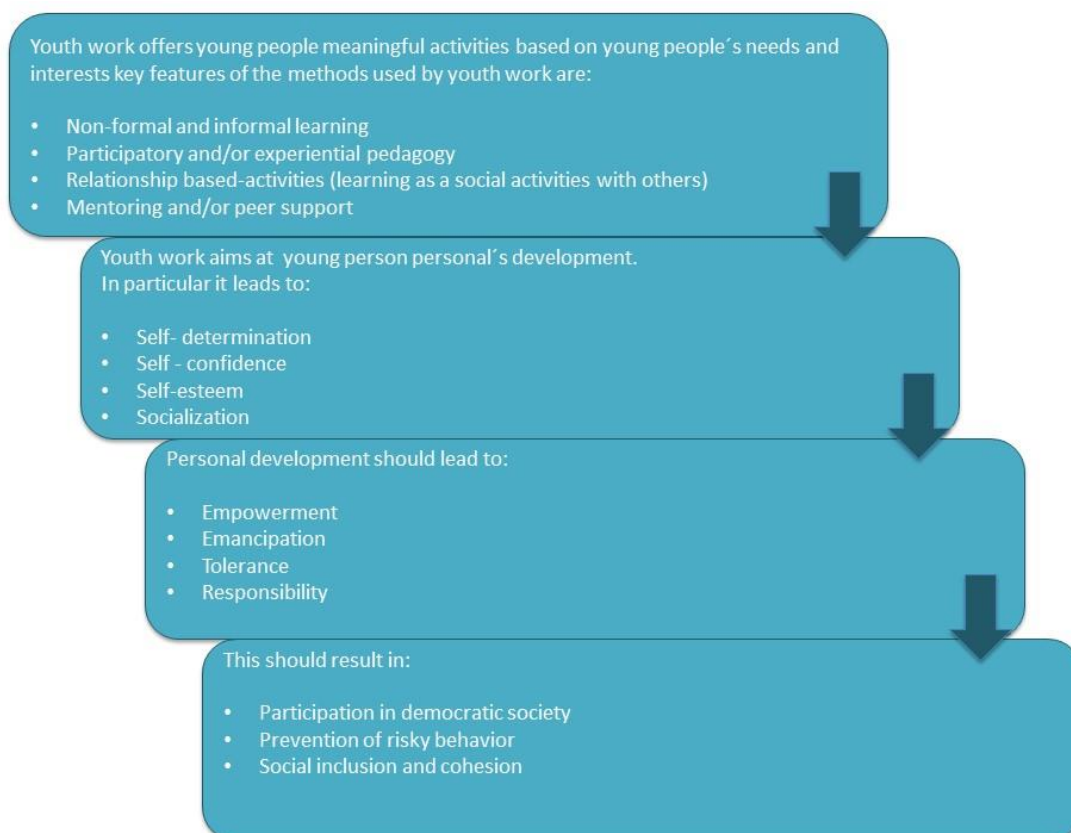
Source: EC (2014)

Youth work had to adapt in recent times to engage with young people on their level, resulting in greater diversity in the forms of youth work services provided to young people, together with more creative and innovative approaches.

In practice this can mean carrying out youth work online, on the street and in open spaces. In particular, digital youth work, in which digital media and technology can either be a tool, an activity or the content (Expert Group on Digitalisation and Youth, 2017), has been subject to increased attention and uptake in particular with view of the importance of online interaction among young people.

While there exist considerable differences concerning the uptake and use of social and digital media throughout the youth work sector (EC, 2015), with many examples of innovative use of social and digital media in the last years (Harvey, 2016), the nature and extent to which it is used largely depends on the youth organisation and on the individual youth worker (Harvey, 2016). As suggested by Verke (2015), the most common uses of internet and social media-based tools in youth work relate to communication with young people; spreading information; provision of advice and guidance; supporting the self-arranged activities of young people; and media education.

The use of digital media in youth work often complements other activities provided within its scope, but has been broadly acknowledged by youth workers as 'highly effective' or 'effective' in terms of supporting citizenship, life skills and thinking skills, and participation and advocacy (Harvey, 2016). Youth workers can play a vital role in building young people's capacity to consider risks and consequences, to make informed decisions, taking responsibility, and they can enhance this work by helping young people to assess and negotiate risk when using technology.

As put forward by Middaugh & Kahne (2013), in a world increasingly saturated with new media and with many young people enacting their citizenship, it is critical to support their ability to act effectively and responsibility within these contexts. Young people often have a need and desire to receive support on how to use digital platforms effectively and engage in productive exchanges—especially exchanges where diverse views clash and may lead to conflict.

This need should translate into increased efforts to integrate new media into the practices of teachers and youth mentors (Middaugh & Kahne, 2013) to fill the gaps that occur within the home and school in supporting young people to understand technology and the risks that might be involved.

As young people's lifestyles are so entrenched in technology, the uptake of the internet and social-media based tools is considered indispensable (Harvey, 2016). It is claimed that if youth work fails to embrace the use of technology and social media, there is a risk of it becoming outdated and irrelevant to young people.

The advantages of youth work in preparing young people for the new opportunities and challenges brought about by digital technologies with the view of developing both digital skills and media literacy are broadly documented in literature (e.g. Kahne, Feezell & Lee, 2012; Levy et al., 2015; Davies & Cranston, 2008).

In particular, digital and media literacy education is associated with gains in the quality and quantity of capital enhancing online activities (Levy et al., 2015) and with higher levels of online exposure to diverse perspectives (Kahne, Feezell, & Lee, 2012).

Also Kotilainen (2009) claims that youth citizenship can be strengthened through three interrelated elements: youth civic participation (including media productions), media publicity, and pedagogy understood as a learning community that involves peers and adults like youth workers, media professionals and administrators. They foster feelings of social influence among young people and are conducive to online participation as

well as traditional civic engagement and can prove effective in increasing cross-generational dialogue.

However, there should not be a one-size-fits-all approach to media literacy education. Media literacy initiatives must be based on a unified understanding of the outcomes associated with them (Mihailidis, 2009). Suchlike approaches are aligned with claims that adopting more interactive, context-specific, motivating and attractive models of civic education support fostering young people's participation (Themistokleous & Avraamidou, 2016). At the same time, they can enhance the potential for empowering young people through creative media training efforts (Podkalicka & Staley, 2009; Montgomery, 2014).

However, a cooperation with partner organisations from civil society, formal education institutions, and other local and international organisations, is considered crucial for youth organisations to provide the type of quality citizenship education they aim for (López-Bech, 2016). This becomes even more evident with view on blurring borders between formal, non-formal and informal learning (EC, 2015).

The involvement of policymakers is as crucial to support the upgrading of existing practices in youth work not only in terms of funding, but institutional structures that provide coordinated support for the benefit of young people. Before elaborating further on this in the next chapter, the remainder reflects on how the internet and social media is used in current youth work activities in view of new effective learning and teaching methods and tools.

3.2. Engaging young people as active citizens

The study comprised an extensive screening of current practices in youth work involving the use of internet and social-media based methods and tools. An inventory of 50 good practices is provided in Annex 1 to this report, together with 12 in-depth case studies (Annex 2) that provide a more profound understanding of the impact of the internet and social media on young people's participation and youth work.

The inventory and case studies reflect the diversity of youth work across the EU. They comprise both initiatives that focus on a capacity building of youth workers in the field of development linked to new technology and media literacy, and the use of internet and social media-based tools in youth work practices.

As highlighted by the EC (2014), youth work provides spaces for political socialisation and citizen development and provides various activities specifically aimed at participation, critical engagement in public life and social activism.

The same is true for digital youth work, for which the Expert Group on Digitalisation and Youth (2017) provides the following definition: *Digital youth work has the same goals as youth work in general, and using digital media and technology in youth work should always support these goals. Digital youth work can happen in face-to-face situations as well as in online environments– or in a mixture of these two. Digital media and technology can be either a tool, an activity or a content in youth work. Digital youth work is underpinned by the same ethics, values and principles as youth work*.

Youth workers can play a vital role in building young people's capacity to exploit the opportunities of the internet and social media, consider risks and consequences, make informed decisions, and to take responsibility for their everyday actions. Despite considerable differences among the uptake and use of social and digital media throughout the youth work sector, there exist many examples of new effective learning and teaching methods and tools.

The inventory of good practices demonstrates the multidimensional nature of incorporating internet and social media-based tools and methods to help empower young people and facilitate their participation in democratic society by providing them with skills and competences that range from soft skills like working in teams, to more technical skills like content creation, coding practices and to critical reflection and respectful online behaviour.

Figure 9 Internet and social media-based tools (n=62)
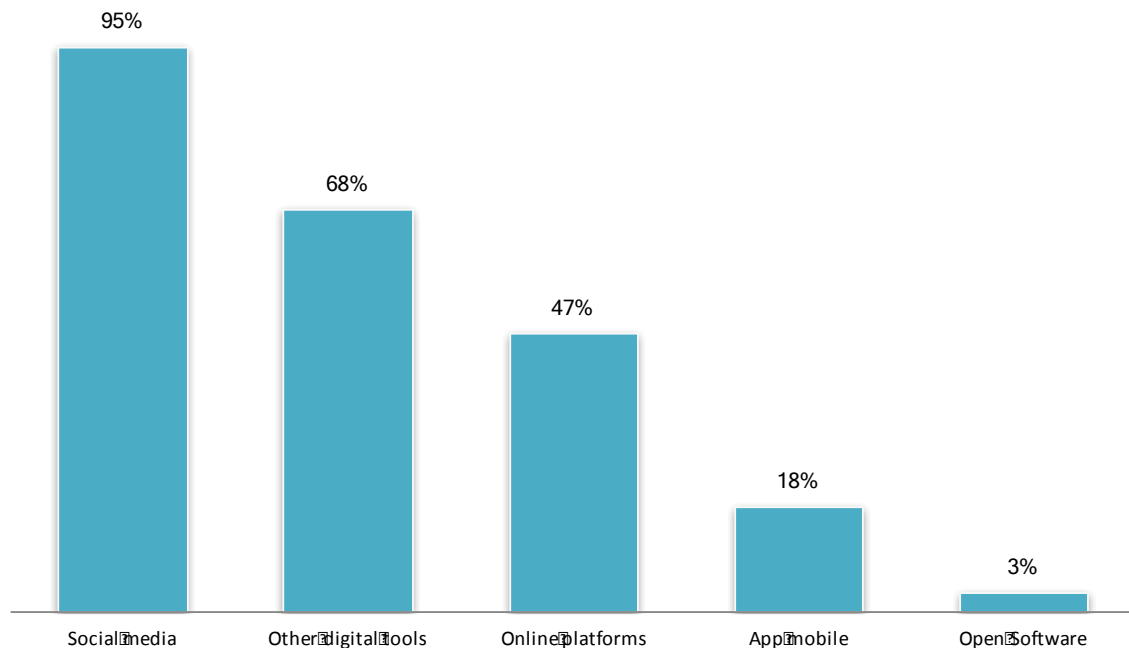
As concerns the main tools applied in the initiatives, a vast majority makes use of social media platforms. The can include websites, Blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, Google+, Linkedin, Whatsapp, Pinterest, Flirck, Vimeo, QR code, or #, which are used both for external or internal communication. External communication includes all those kinds of activities that contribute to disseminating the information about the project, its activities and, especially, its events, using other digital tools for example webinars or MOOCs. The internal communication based on social media is related to the creation of private groups via Facebook or Whatsapp used for coordinating activities.

Table 4 Tools

Category	Tools
Social Media	Website, Blog, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, Snapchat, Google+, Linkedin, Whatsapp, Pintarest, Flirck, Vimeo, QR code, Ask.fm, #, Tumblr, SlideShare, Dribble
Other digital tools	Webinars, MOOC, Podcasts, eBooks, Newsletter, Skype, Minecraft, Giphy, Pixlr, Adobe Connect, Scrach, PowToon, Brabbl, Tricider, Etherpad, Windows Movie Maker, Ping, Evernote, Web Conference tools, Online Toolbox, Digital Storytelling, Project Management Tools, Online Radio, Twitch.tv, Marktplatz.bewegung.jetzt (Online deliberation and proposal forum), Abstimmen.bewegung.jetzt (Online Voting System), Mattermost (internal communication tool), Trello, Giphy GIF Maker
Online platform	eParticipation, e-Learning, ePartool, eTwinning, Coding platforms, , NING, GitHub, GameBox, Online libraries, Step Green (eParticipation SaaS platform), YPart participation platform, Habbo, Padlet, Community forum, Monithon Platform, Change.org, Wikis, Video Story Books
App/mobile	Mobile Applications, Geocaching
Open Software	Open software (e.g. OPIN software)

A common element of the initiatives is the provision of targeted approaches and models that are motivating and attractive for young people. These targeted approaches further enable an increased outreach to disadvantaged groups as they can respond to specific needs and circumstances of each group.

Figure 10 Themes covered (n=62)

- Inclusion
- Empowerment
- Active Citizenship
- Digital and Media Literacy
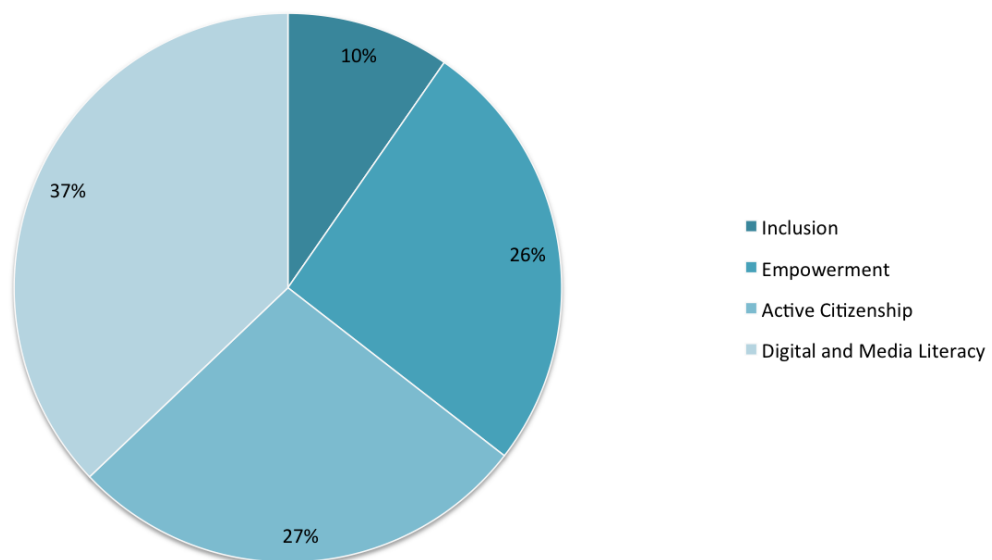
The youth information website **SpunOut.ie** was established by a group of young people that work to empower their fellows to create personal and social change by providing them easy access to relevant, reliable and non-judgemental information online together with a space for young people to have their voices heard and to share their life experiences with other young people. The initiative **#Ask** uses e-Participation to promote young people's empowerment and active participation in democratic life. Rather than expecting young people to access pre-existing discussion platforms, **#Ask** goes directly to the conversations that young people are having on Twitter and acts as a `broker' between the formal content of politicians/policy makers and the more informal content tweeted by young Europeans. Other initiatives involve young people in decision-making in topics of their interest through the use of specifically developed e-Participation platforms such as **Step**, which promotes the societal and political participation of young people in the decision-making process on environmental issues. Similarly, the **ePartool**, a web-based tool developed by the German Federal Youth Council supports young people's participation in policy-making at a national and European level. From 2014 onwards, the tool has been used to facilitate young people's participation in the development of the federal government's strategy on demography, and gathered young people's opinions and views on a range of topics and issues collected through offline as well as online approaches.

Some initiatives set particular focus on the development of specialist ICT-based skills, related to the usage of new media that can possibly open up future job opportunities, in particular, when some form of accreditation is provided. Suchlike initiatives focus on young people's skills development as a means to empower them, such as **Crescere Digitale**, an initiative that promotes the employability of young people who do not study and do not work (NEETS). Selected participants have the opportunity to test their skills gained through participation in the initiative on in a real business environment through a traineeship.

CapitalDigital - Belgium

In the Capital Digital project, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as migrants and asylum seekers, acquire technical and pedagogical skills to teach coding and programming to their younger 10-12-year-old peers. As e-facilitators, they learn to engage children in STEM and coding activities in a playful manner.

This first opportunity of work experience enhances the young person's confidence in choosing a fitting career and finding employment. It allows them to connect with each other in a constructive way and to enjoy the role of educating their younger peers. Moreover, the project encourages young children to enjoy and enhance their IT skills, which are becoming ever more important in the labour market.

The initiative **Ravalfab** offers a series of workshops focusing on programming, robotics and electronics and open source 3D printing. The objective is to enable digital manufacturing techniques to combat poverty as a cause of digital social exclusion in the knowledge society. The initiative sets increased focus on work related to decreasing the digital divide caused by social and economic factors, gender, communication skills, social competences, as well as computational and abstract thinking.

Other examples, such as **Gamoverhate,** include the leveraging of digital media and tools to enhance young people's capacity to critically evaluate media content and reflect on their own behaviour. The initiative was created by gamers, for gamers, with the aim of fighting hate and discrimination in online game environments. It offers workshops for gamers and game professionals, alongside non-formal and game pedagogical approaches, allowing players to deal with hate and discrimination in video game communities on a secure basis. Participants develop community based actions, share good online practices and created of a set of recommendations on the development of better online gaming communities.

#Nichtegal - Germany

The initiative **#Nichtegal** advertises a respectful exchange of opinions on different online platforms and in everyday life. In order to achieve these goals, the initiative conducts workshops in schools, creates campaigning material such as GIFs and a video challenge.

Young people participating in the initiative improve their media literacy competence in a significant way and learn how to evaluate information and opinions on the internet as well as reflecting on their own behaviour. They learn to state their opinions in an objective way and with supporting arguments.

The workshops help young people to become mentors to their fellow students through a creative, peer-led learning process and engage against hatred and intolerance on the internet through publishing and watching videos on YouTube.

Also, the initiative **Media to Be** promotes media literacy among young people. The goal of the initiative is to create a European youth culture that is independent of nationality and origin and is committed to democracy. Young people, mostly from disadvantaged groups, are provided with a space to develop autonomy, individual fulfilment and productivity, and to develop/enhance their media literacy to be able to act as active members in their countries' and regions' (media) culture.

Simbioza Šola – Slovenia

Simbioza School is a project of sustainable collaboration between generations within local communities to promote e-literacy. Through volunteering to teach seniors, young people get to know the local community better and they also learn from seniors using the internet as well as social media and digital tools. This initiative is not only about intergenerational dialogue, but also about encouraging lifelong learning, creative thinking and responsibility.

A relevant number of initiatives make use of approaches that enable participants to become mentors themselves and share their knowledge with other target groups, such as younger peers, but also adults, which leads to impacts and outcomes beyond the participants themselves. For example, the main objective of the **Mediacoach** project is to train people to become Mediacoaches, who share their knowledge and competences as mentors to their target group (children, young people, adults, etc.) and colleagues. The ultimate goal is therefore to increase the media literacy skills and capacity of the participants who eventually teach media literacy to a wider audience. A similar approach is deployed in the **CapitalDigital** project, where young mentors are trained in the basics of coding together with basic pedagogical skills that enable them to transfer this knowledge to other children.

3.3. Digital skills and competence needs of youth workers

Digital competences have become a prerequisite to ensure high quality youth work (Harvey, 2016), but also to reach out to young people increasingly requires the leveraging of social and digital media (Dekelver, Nijs & Maesschalck, 2014).

The focus on skills development, training and qualifications of youth workers has increased in line with the shift towards targeted youth work. The range of skills required is also widening, as youth work moves further towards an interventionist approach and youth workers are expected to deal with challenging patterns of behaviour or social issues, such as special educational needs and cultural diversity (EC, 2015) along the challenges that result among others from globalisation, new technologies, migration, (violent) radicalisation, the recent economic crisis, and rising inequalities (EC, 2015).

However, the digital competences to perform this role are, for most of the youth workers, not acquired during their education (Dekelver, Nijs & Maesschalck, 2014), while the core (soft) skills and requirements for youth work are transferable to the online environments (Davies & Cranston, 2008). As suggested by the SVSYF (2011), the challenge for youth workers is to work out how to understand, adopt and adapt digital media tools for their practice and to:

- Support young people to safely navigate growing up in a digital world;
- Use digital media tools to promote and add value to existing youth work;
- Weave the digital media tools into youth work activities;
- Make the most of the technology for youth work goals.

The most important factors affecting the uptake and use of technology occur at a personal level. They largely depend on personal attitude towards technology and social media, the respective confidence level of practitioners in using it and the ability to actually define digital youth work in a way that matters to them and their practice.

The inventory highlights that numerous examples of initiatives exist that are dedicated to increasing the ability of youth workers to effectively use new technologies in their work, in particular with view to increasing demands directed at their potential impact. The increasing demands related to digital skills are visible in many initiatives. For example, in the initiative **#Ask**, communication experts and youth organisations need to have skills to transform policy documents and tweets into more engaging formats such us short videos and infographics.

Bytes – Northern Ireland

This initiative proves very demanding for the youth workers involved as it requires high skills in digital, ICT and online tools in order make creative usage of these tools.

The staff further require soft skills to work with different target groups. They need to have a type of personality that enables them to get to the level of young people. They also need to be patient and persistent. Sometimes it may take weeks or even months to engage with those involved

A broad number of initiatives are dedicated to equipping youth workers with skills and competences to make their own youth work activities more effective. For example, within the framework of the project **Digital Skills for You(th) (DS4Yth),** training and qualification is provided to youth workers to enable them to exploit the opportunities of digitalisation within their work with young people. The project demonstrates that youth workers are highly aware of the importance of having the right set of digital skills and competences to guide young people in digital world.

SocialWeb-SocialWork – Germany

The initiative SocialWeb - SocialWork provided face-to-face training courses accompanied by online learning units, materials and tools to professionals working with children and young people at risk. It also measured the effects of the training for the improvement of internet safety for vulnerable children. Youth workers were trained how to use the online learning units and with the help of the "learning by doing" approach they gained experience to performing their guiding role in, for example, online chats. Youth workers were trained to be aware of the risks and threats that children and youth are exposed to in online environments and learned how to react and mediate these risks. At the same time, the youth workers learned how to improve the digital skills of their young target group and how to strengthen their resilience to potential risks.

Additionally, the **Youth Work HD** project makes an impact by recognising a set of ICT tools and skills that are important in daily work with young people (online safety, social networks for reaching out to young people, tools for online cooperation, online counselling, open educational resources etc.) and offers youth workers an online platform for their development. The project **Developing Online Youth Information Trainings (DOYIT)** aims to familiarise youth information workers, youth workers and trainers with new training and learning methodologies in order to be able to utilise an online setting to conduct their work with young people. The project includes innovation in training methodologies and tools, especially e-learning methods and virtual cooperation.

Generation0101 – Croatia

The level of the competences required by youth workers in the Generation0101 initiative is very high. Youth workers were trained on e-journalism, web design, video development, community web radio, easy coding, online collaboration, and mobile app development.

Youth workers were trained on how to use new digital tools and choose one or more that suits the occasion. With these competences, youth workers could achieve better results, outreach and impact on young people's lives.

3.4.   Summary

Youth work can play a vital role in supporting young people's active citizenship and participation, in particular with view on the myriad of new opportunities that arise from the internet and social media. Youth work has the potential to fill gaps in knowledge and skills that occur within the home and school in order to support young people to benefit from their time spent online, be aware of potential risks and have the skills to mediate these. In inventory of practices and the case studies demonstrate the multidimensional nature of incorporating internet and social media-based tools and methods to help empowering young people and facilitate their participation in democratic society. All initiatives support the mastery of certain competences related to digital and media literacy through training and practice, which has an important empowering effect.

In particular, they can help in levelling the playing field as regards the capital enhancing activities of internet use. It supports young people becoming agents of change themselves, while opening up a pathway to inclusion. At the same time, participation in youth work activities supports young people to acquire soft skills, capabilities to work in teams, organisational and conflict management, intercultural awareness, leadership, planning, organising, coordination and practical problem solving skills, self-confidence, discipline and responsibility.

Leveraging the opportunities of internet and social media-based tools can further increase the outreach and impact of initiatives. Young people can act as multipliers and e-facilitators that transfer their knowledge gained to wider audiences.

4. Conclusions

4.1. Successful initiatives pathway

The main conclusion or common denominator that we have found in our research about the Impact of the Internet and Social Media on Youth Participation and Youth Work is that successful initiatives use ICTs to remove barriers and/or equal the ground of participation (leaping the knowledge gap), create new platforms and projects shared by broad and multi-stakeholder communities (synchronising multilayer spaces) whose outputs and outcomes positively impact on the community and, at the same time, achieve reasonable levels of economical and especially social (self-) sustainability (leveraging the quadruple helix).

In the figure below we have drawn a scheme that aims to synthesise the common points that we have found in our review of cases and that are also pointed at in the literature.

Figure 11 Government as a platform
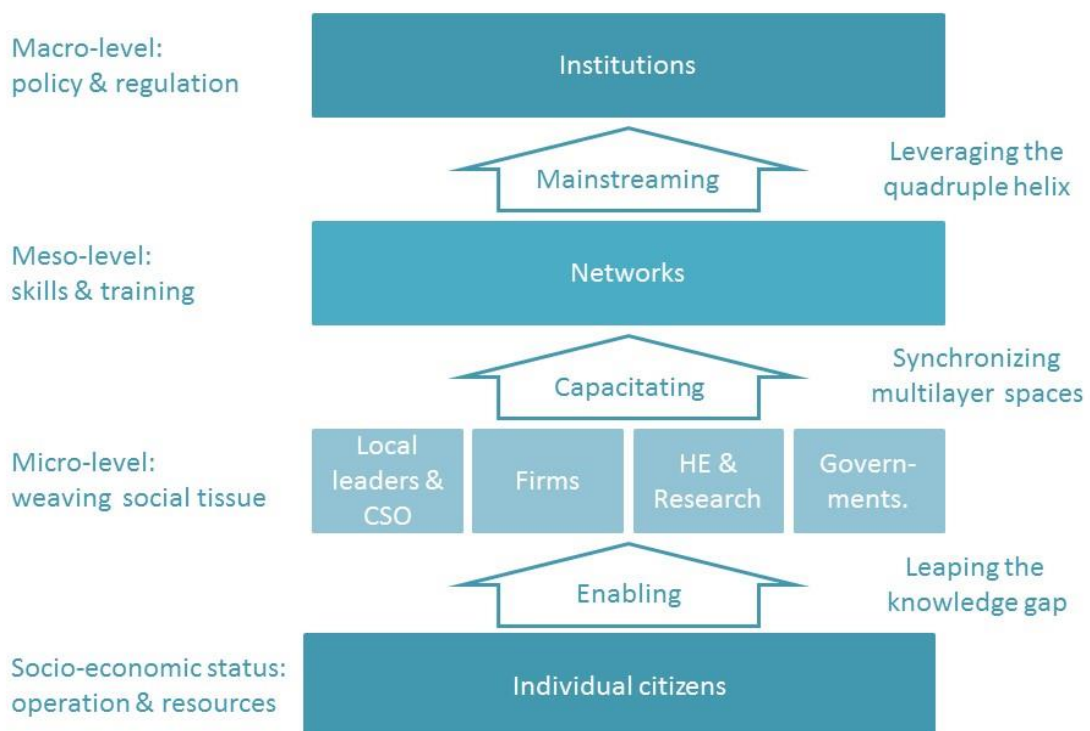
Source: Own elaboration

The point of departure: socio-economic status and the knowledge gap hypothesis. In 1970, Tichenor *et al*. showed how mass media consumption did not necessarily have an evenly distributed positive impact on people's knowledge. On the contrary, the impact depended on the point of departure, being much more significant on more highly educated segments of society. Thus, exposition to information depended on socio-economic status and did not add up to the pre-existing knowledge levels of the population but had a multiplier effect: educated people will do better, uneducated people will do worse.

This "knowledge gap hypothesis" has proven true not only related to information coming from mass media, but from other knowledge devices such as public libraries (Neuman & Celano, 2006), the internet in general (Bonfadelli, 2002; Selwyn et al., 2005; Van Deursen & van Dijk, 2013), instructional technology (Warschauer *et al.*, 2004; Warschauer, 2008; Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010; Horrigan, 2016; Patterson & Patterson; 2017) or social media and e-participation platforms (Yang & Zhiyong Lan, 2010; Anduiza *et al.*, 2012; Robles et al, 2012; Schlozman, 2012; Gainous *et al.*, 2013).

Successful youth participation and youth work usually address this situation as a first stance. When addressing inequalities is not their first stance – such as in the case of projects explicitly addressed to youth employment– most projects include accompanying measures that aim at levelling the ground so that, according to their means, all players can engage in equal conditions.

At this level, which we call the point of departure, it is important that there are instruments that contribute to leaping the knowledge gap by providing basic and operational resources that enable objective choice (Welzel *et al*, 2003).

Programmes such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and, most specifically, the Employment and Social Innovation programme (EASI) contribute notably to this stage. In general, this stage is especially suitable for policies and programmes that address basic needs of the youth in particular and the citizenry in general. Beyond the obvious fact that individual development and progress is good per se, it needs to be highlighted once more that further measures to empower youth will only work as desired if there are preceding levelling initiatives. Thus, informal education initiatives or employment programmes should be thought of as a pre-requisite of higher level measures so that these can act as appropriate multipliers.

The micro level: enabling the social tissue. Once individuals are in (more or less) good conditions to be active citizens, what naturally comes is that they coordinate to collectively promote initiatives. The more intertwined these citizens and their respective collectives are, the more resilient, sustainable, scalable and replicable their initiatives are. If basic conditions are a requisite for levelling participation and thus avoiding the unwanted outcomes of the knowledge gap, a tight social tissue increases the possibilities of success of a given social initiative.

Projects that plan ahead in this train of thought, design devices to enable social tissue creation or to strengthen the existing one. Financial resources, facilitators (such as social workers in general or youth workers in particular), members of the administration or researchers that bring in background and context, etc. contribute to this goal.

Not surprisingly, initiatives that enable participants to meet face-to-face are more common at this stage, as they are welcome as better weavers of this social tissue. On the other hand, at this stage it is also worth noting that local leaders easily emerge when grassroots movements are fostered.

Being crucial the strengthening of the social tissue, local leaders and grassroots movements, the role of public institutions has to be stealth: the government thus becomes a platform that provides context, facilitates and fosters interaction while staying in the background. Attempts of the government to move to the forefront are usually perceived as patronising or intrusive, and may thus have a discouraging effect. The case study on GameOverHate demonstrates this dilemma. The involvement of national governments, or even the EU, has been a challenge in this initiative, as any involvement of public authorities, including through the provision of funding, could create controversy or may prove alienating to the members of the target groups. The

online communities that are target of the initiative claim to be non-politicised spaces, with the result that too obvious involvement of public institutions could eventually have a deterring effect on young people's participation in the initiative.

At the European level, programmes such as the HORIZON 2020 framework programme or the programme for the competitiveness of enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises (COSME) can have a decisive impact in enabling this weaving of the social tissue. At this stage, internet and social media initiatives should be addressed towards access to information and knowledge management, especially in knowledge-intensive sectors of both the productive economy and the civil society. Digital skills on building digital personae or digital identities are key at this level so that the weaving of the social tissue can go beyond the local arena and, as we will see below, overcome barriers of time and space and enter the field of networking.

The meso level: weaving the networks. Citizens are usually part of different collectives and collectives usually operate at different levels or layers. Networks contribute to the exchange of knowledge between scattered individuals and collectives which would otherwise act as isolated nodes.

But not only do networks contribute to the articulation of collectives, but also to the diversification of the typology of individuals and collectives involved in a given initiative. Networks become useful instruments to articulate multi-stakeholder partnerships –formally or tacitly– and, if well balanced in their nature, these networks can promote interactions and exchanges between governments, higher education and research organisations, the industry and civil society organisations.

The Quadruple helix model of innovation (European Commission, 2016) posits that only such kinds of interactions between these four types of actors can really produce innovations that do respond to the needs of the society at large.

We have found that the synchronisation of layers is achieved by successful projects by means of networks. This synchronisation is most of the time achieved by means of online platforms and other digital constructs. The inventory documents many examples of successful collaboration of partnerships and networks that pool knowledge, expertise and ultimately, outreach such as EUth, which involves eleven partners from eight different countries that work together on increasing the number of young people involved in political decision-making and thereby enhancing their trust in the European political institutions. Similarly, the initiative Smart Pupils comprises nine partners and the active involvement of the local governments funded through the Erasmus+ programme in 2015.

At this point, digital and media literacy become a key aspect for further developments. On the one hand, because networks (either facilitated by digital means or not) have a logic that is much different from industrial hierarchical models. On the other hand, because, when powered by digital platforms, the mere operation of these networks requires capacitating in a broad range of digital skills.

Programmes such as Erasmus+ or the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) have proven to be very helpful in providing not only resources through basic infrastructures upon which others can build, operate and facilitate their networks. Networks, in a knowledge society, heavily rely on the gift economy and the ability to concentrate and distribute information that can be applied locally as knowledge. It is thus worth bearing in mind the complex constellation of literacies and competences that can be labelled as digital and media literacy skills: technological literacy, informational literacy, media literacy, digital identity or e-awareness are just some of the names and concepts that are part of a set of skills that enable or foster other ones like creativity, team working, leadership or critical thinking and problem solving – or, in other words, XXIst-century skills (Ananiadou & Claro, 2006; OECD 2016a, 2016b).

The macro level: mainstreaming and institutionalisation. If weaving the social tissue was the way to leverage the potential of now equal and individual citizens, institutionalisation is the way to leverage the potential of quadruple helix-like networks.

Many projects aim at raising their goals at the upmost level and seeing them going mainstream. Only institutions, through regulation and policy-making can realise this aspiration.

Of course, most projects do not get to see their designs mainstreamed, especially during their limited time-spans. Thus, their proxy goal to mainstreaming and institutionalisation is visibility. Successful projects are strong in advocacy and awareness rising, and they do it in two opposite directions. Firstly, as we just stated, by looking "up" towards the institutions, by showcasing and modelling, by comparing with other related projects. Examples included in our case studies include Simbioza Sola, whose vision of its module of intergenerational cooperation is to get included into the formal curricula of primary and secondary education level, as well as international awareness and acknowledgement.

Secondly, by looking "down" to their communities, by assessing and evaluating their impacts, providing feedback to their citizens. Here, the example of the initiative Have Your Say demonstrates the shaping of discussions around hot topics among young people, giving them the opportunity to influence youth policy and to be active in society.

This double aim –mainstreaming by "looking up" and laying strong foundations for social sustainability are typical of successful projects.

It is interesting to note how this stage is both the end of the process but also the beginning of a virtuous circle. On the one hand, it aims at creating social infrastructures –policy, regulation, institutions– so that the benefits of the projects can become structural and not temporary, as embedding them in established and stable social structures are the best bet for replication, scalability and sustainability at large.

On the other hand, by establishing a dialogue with the citizens and looking for the individual impact, they address –this time with a top-down approach– the socio-economic layer where the whole process began in the first place.

4.2.   The role of youth policies and programmes

Given the changes of the media landscape brought about by the affordance of the internet and digital technology, policy makers at both EU and national level are confronted with several challenges to adapt policies that foster engagement and active citizenship of young people. The importance of youth work within national and European policy is constantly growing and new policy papers, on a European as well as a national level, are continuously assigning new roles and tasks to youth work; it should improve social inclusion, build civil society, enhance employability, prevent health risks, etc. (EC, 2015).

In that regard, the EU Youth Strategy sets out a framework of cooperation for EU member states to provide more equal opportunities for education and job market, and to encourage young people to actively participate in society. This should be achieved through specific youth initiatives targeted at young people to encourage non-formal learning, participation, voluntary activities, youth work, mobility and information, as well as the mainstreaming of cross-sector initiatives that ensure youth issues are taken into account when formulating, implementing and evaluating policies and actions in other fields with a significant impact on young people, such as education, employment, health and well-being.

The European Commission (2014) recognised that methods of non-formal and informal learning are increasingly penetrating into formal education, while schools frequently cooperate with organisations doing youth work for certain extra- curricular activities, but also activities that are part of the formal education process. While this proximity can have a range of advantages for a young person's development and learning, in some cases of youth work focusing on some young people, in particular those who have a negative experience of school education, needs to be distinct from schools and offer an environment that does not remind them of the school setting.

The fact that the formal education sector is becoming informalised, while non-formal learning is simultaneously becoming more formalised, may give rise to some tensions with the inherent diversity of youth work (EC, 2015). In particular, it requires new teaching skills and constant evolution of the profiles of youth workers but also school teachers. In that regard, findings from Harvey (2016) reveal that youth workers often request more frameworks and strategic direction in how to use technology to support their youth work.

A holistic approach to education, individualised methods, professional coaching and experience- based learning is assumed to prompt individuals to take a step back from routine and promote change (EC, 2015) The EC stressed the need for a new balance between the principles, policy priorities and the evolving and complex needs and aspirations of young people. At the same time, the evidence arising from greater formalisation would offer insights into the strengths and merits of youth work (EC, 2015).

Youth work is attributed a great role in providing opportunities for involvement of young people to influence and change public policies and actions which impact on them (EC, 2015b). In this regard, youth workers and youth work organisations in partnership with young people can act as advocates and work to influence policies and decisions that affect their lives. Although there is a widespread sense that demands of the young are not attended, and that politics takes place on the margin of their interests and needs, schemes such as the structured dialogue with young people put in place by the European Union is an interesting institutional mechanism aimed at including the voice of young people in the decision-making process.

The structured dialogue involves consultations with young people and youth organisations at all levels in Member States, at EU youth conferences organised by the European Council presidency countries and at the European Youth Week, involving more than 50 000 youth leaders and young people (EC, 2015). The consultations conducted on a thematic priority set for each work cycle (18 months) feed into joint recommendations addressed to the European institutions and national authorities, while enabling young people's voice heard in the European policy-shaping process.

The thematic priority for the consultation process 2014- 2015 was 'empowering young people for political participation'. National working groups organised this participatory process at national level. Among other things, the consultation revealed that a multi-dimensional support is necessary to ensure a) constructive and effective participation, as well as cooperation with youth, government and other actors, b) democratic and well-organised youth organisations, c) financial assistance to carry out projects and d) transmission of information necessary to make informed decisions.

However, increased emphasis should be dedicated to the fact that youth participation principally takes place outside institutions and formal procedures – which reinforces the benefits of traditional views and actions of youth work. This also calls for an exploitation of multiple and mostly informal methods that are linked to young people's experience and context, including increased attention to the importance of the internet and social networking as new spaces for socialisation and participation.

In fact, participation has become the main theme in youth policies and, in general, everything in connection with the young. Policy documents stress the need for young people to participate, the benefits of participation and the consequences of participation in the development of political life. However, as reinforced by the EC (2015), participation can be learnt only by participating. Therefore, a shift has to take place from education about participation to active involvement of young people as active citizens.

Given the merits of youth work in supporting young people to become active citizens and engaging them in decisions and actions that affect not only them, but also their community, greater emphasis and support should be dedicated by policy makers to support the creation of innovative methods in youth work, including those digital tools that support the upgrading of existing practices in youth work.

As suggested by Harvey (2016), ICT is an effective learning and communication tool for young people, it deserves a better appreciation by policy makers and coordinated support for the benefit of this generation of young people. EU and national policies and funding provisions have the potential to frame and shape the practice of youth work.

Numerous examples reveal that the involvement of governments is essential for the success of initiatives (e.g. in #NichtEgal, the Minister of Family Affairs acts as a patron, and the initiative is supported by many other actors, such as the Grimme Institute or the No-Hate-Speech Movement), but their involvement cannot only be limited to short term funding as has been demonstrated in many initiatives subject to this study (e.g. the initiative Bytes had to downsize its activities due to a lack of funding).

Given the fact that many youth organisations find themselves in a situation where funding becomes linked more closely to measurable outcomes, they are often caught between competing priorities, namely providing individual support to individual needs and targeted group-based approaches to remain competitive (EC, 2015).

4.3. Policy recommendations

From digital skills to digital empowerment. When we aim at seeing who is doing what in terms of e-participation (and in political participation in general) it is quite usual to look at the capacities that individuals have to perform a given action and how many of these actions actually took place. In other words, and in the field of e-participation, we look at the level of digital and media literacy of individuals in a community and how they engaged in the e-participation initiatives that were offered to them. This perspective has, at least, two issues that need being addressed.

The first one is quite obvious and has been the focal point of some initiatives like United Nations Administration Network's (UNPAN)'s series of e-Government surveys (UNPAN, 2016). That is, that not only citizens but also the Administration (and everything that spins around it: all other powers, political parties and lobbies, etc.) need to be e-ready. This e-readiness should, at least, be taken into consideration in two different fronts: whether there are the technological infrastructures available and whether public servants can use them and have the appropriate digital skills (Peña-López, 2010).

But these skills – both at the citizen and the public-sector levels – are not only about achieving a sufficient degree of knowledge in handling some specific hardware. First of all, there is the capacity (Sen, 1980) to make conscious and subjective choices in one's own benefit (not just "using"); second, there is the power to make choices that are effective, that can actually take place and make an impact (or, at least, increase the potential for that impact) (Welzel *et al*., 2003).

This is crucial, because we do know that the digital divide in politics (Robles *et al*., 2012) affect the outcomes of policy-making, but it is much more complex than just a matter of access (Cantijoch, 2014). We have growing evidence that the internet and politics engage in a virtuous (or vicious, depending on the spin) circle (Colombo et al., 2012) that either leads to more empowerment and political efficacy, with an increase of internet usage, and back to empowerment and efficacy – or just the opposite in cases of lack of internet and/or different attitudes toward participation.

Thus, if the digital divide actually shifts to differences in usage (Van Deursen & van Dijk, 2013) and not just in a matter of intensity of engagement, it is crucial to accurately map and assess how both individuals and institutions are ready for e-participation, and how and what initiatives have been put in practice to improve the e-readiness of the actors that participate in politics.

But this is only half the equation: how ready actors are. What about what they are doing and, more interestingly, where and how they are doing it?

From digital participation to digital governance. The other half of the equation is where institutions and people put their e-readiness at work. But if the very concept of skills, capacities and effective usage has changed, so have the concepts of "places" and "means" in the digital age. Many institutions nowadays have their design rooted in the scientific and the industrial revolutions.

The advancements of science (including the ethics and philosophy of the Enlightenment) and the advancements of technology provided solid ground where to build, among other things, liberal democracies and the institutions that make them up: parliaments, governments, the judiciary system, political parties, lobbies and civic organisations, etc. But most of these grounds exist no more, or at least they have been direly transformed in their inhibiting potential, especially in what implies coincidence of time, space and the cost to coordinate interactions, exchanges and transactions in general (Benkler, 2002).
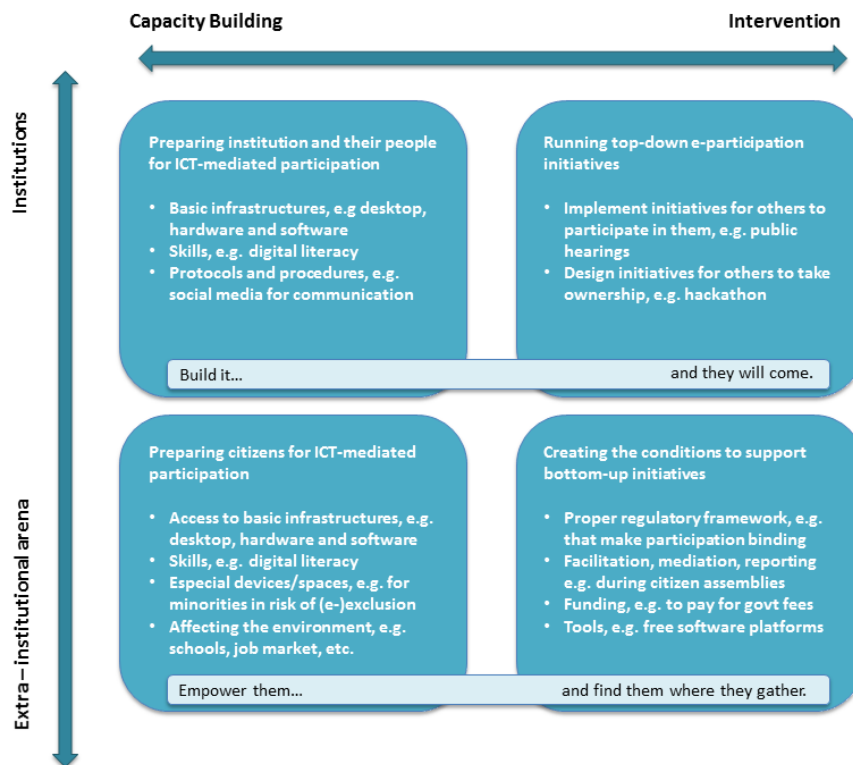
In this new landscape, networks emerge instead of hierarchical organisations, creating new institutions and reshaping the old ones (Benkler, 2006). In political participation, this means the creation of new spaces and strategies for information, communication and civic action (Castells, 2009, 2012) that, notwithstanding, often fall outside of the mapped territories and below the line of the radar of democratic institutions.

These new, unmapped territories range from what has been called lurking (Nonneke & Preece, 2003) or slacktivism (Christensen, 2011) to para-institutions (Peña-López *et al*., 2014), but it is arguable that these new e-participation extra-representative or extra-institutional practices are as legitimate and useful as other traditional ones (Peña-López, 2013).

On the one hand, because it may be interesting to approach these initiatives not as an "exit", in terms of Albert O. Hirschman (1970), but as citizens moving away from institutions that do not answer to their needs and into other new institutions that may, that is, they are voting with their feet (Tiebout, 1956) but not in terms of municipality but in terms of democratic institutions. Still today we see reactions (again in the sense of Hirschman, 1991) that tend to redirect extra-institutional participation towards institutions that tend to silent these initiatives because they harm democracy or because they are useless.

The figure below maps and characterises all the initiatives that, after having built capacity on actors (individuals or collectives, institutions or distributed networks), not only aim at attracting them to traditional ways of participation but enable new spaces and actions by creating the conditions to support bottom-up distributed e-participation initiatives.

Figure 12 Online participation: from capacity building to empowerment

Capacity Building   **Intervention**

Institutions

Preparing institution and their people for ICT-mediated participation

- Basic infrastructures, e.g desktop, hardware and software
- Skills, e.g. digital literacy
- Protocols and procedures, e.g. social media for communication

Build it...

Running top-down e-participation initiatives

- Implement initiatives for others to participate in them, e.g. public hearings
- Design initiatives for others to take ownership, e.g. hackathon

and they will come.

Extra-institutional arena

Preparing citizens for ICT-mediated participation

- Access to basic infrastructures, e.g. desktop, hardware and software
- Skills, e.g. digital literacy
- Especial devices/spaces, e.g. for minorities in risk of (e-)exclusion
- Affecting the environment, e.g. schools, job market, etc.

Empower them...

Creating the conditions to support bottom-up initiatives

- Proper regulatory framework, e.g. that make participation binding
- Facilitation, mediation, reporting e.g. during citizen assemblies
- Funding, e.g. to pay for govt fees
- Tools, e.g. free software platforms

and find them where they gather.

Source: Editor's own elaboration

In the horizontal axis initiatives are mapped according to whether they aim at building capacity on actors, and thus imply an indirect impact, or whether they perform a direct intervention in the field, thus pursuing the goal of having a direct impact on the target groups' lives.

In the vertical axis, initiatives are mapped depending on the level at which they are implemented. At the upper level, initiatives are featured that are led by institutions or implemented at the institutional level. These aim at improving the institutional design and performance. On the contrary, those initiatives that happen or are fostered outside of institutions, namely at the grassroots or the individual citizen, level are mapped at the lower level.

Although vertical sequences can be found, it is usual to find initiatives that work in pairs running along the capacity building + intervention axis. A typical project at the institutional level consists in creating some e-participation infrastructures and then running top-down e-participation projects. We have labelled this pairing "Build it... and they will come". We borrowed the motto from Phil Alden Robinson's film "Field of Dreams" (1989). The quotation has been often used in development and participation studies to challenge the idea that the mere creation of infrastructures or participation initiatives would automatically lead to citizen progress or engagement. Our research shows that despite successful initiatives in this line, economic and most importantly, social sustainability, require something else.

This ´something else` refers to what is labelled as "Empower them... and find them where they gather" in the second pairing, which has a strong relationship with what is described in Figure 12 in the two lower layers: empowerment as an enhancement of capabilities by improving the socio-economic status and the weaving of the social

tissue; and acting where the different actors gather or, in other words, leveraging the power of networks and the quadruple helix model of (social) innovation.

When we analyse how the internet and social media influence young people's active citizenship, the lower pairing does matter in many ways. First of all, the sense of ownership of the digital infrastructures and how to use them (skills) for one's own purposes is crucial. Unlike institutional initiatives, which are often seen as something that belongs to another sphere, initiatives rooted in the community can be owned, hacked, re-purposed. In other words, they allow people to get empowered instead of being dependent of the wills of the government or the elected representatives. Put simply, they become citizens, not just users or beneficiaries of some public expenditure.

As mentioned earlier, this empowerment comes not only with the infrastructures, but with the skills and capabilities to appropriate them. Appropriation, which goes beyond the mere sense of ownership, implies that the set of skills is not tool-driven but goal-aimed. What matters is what skills one requires to do what, and not what skills one requires how to operate something. Among the many skills, digital and media literacy competencies are worth being highlighted, as core skills required of citizenship in the digital age, have enormous practical value, as they facilitate a beneficial use and navigation of the internet. They work together in a spiral of empowerment (Hobbs, 2010), while facilitating people's active participation in lifelong learning through the process of consuming and creating messages. What becomes clear is that the competencies captured by digital and media literacy do not only strengthen people's capacity to engage with information as both consumers and producers, but also held to address potential risks related to digital media through critical reflection.

This is particular relevant as the communication landscape has become so complex that citizens need skills to grab and understand the ecosystem of meaning[4] in which they are operating, which can include many different contents, media forms and channels.

At the same time, they need to be able to contextualise themselves in the accelerated path of change of today's society, also referred to as e-awareness (Peña-López, 2010). In this sense, social media are both tools and (virtual) spaces that contribute to make sense of this ecosystem of meaning and e-awareness: they contextualise one's own (digital) identity, they probe to forecast the most immediate future and they are an open gate towards knowledge embedded in constructs and people.

Public institutions have something that individuals usually lack: a broad vision over individuals and their context. From their privileged point of view extending over the overall communication landscape, public institutions can, through their policies and programmes, contribute to naming and framing issues, identifying the relevant actors, feeding actors with the relevant information, facilitating appropriate exchanges between approaches and positions, easing negotiation, fostering decisions, and setting the ground for appropriate accountability. As the landscape can only grow with time, the later it is appropriately measured and facilitated, the more difficult it will be to establish bridges between capacity building and intervention, and between institutional interventions and distributed and networked civic actions.

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[4] Moloney (2014) defines this ecosystem of meaning as "storyworld".

4.4. Key take-home messages

- **Digital and media literacy** has become a personal and institutional enabler as important as basic literacy. But, unlike basic literacy, digital literacy is a multifaceted set of skills that goes from the very definition of one's own identity online, understanding the meaning and veracity of information, the different formats and supports of such information beyond mere text, managing the devices that can process (retrieve, store, create, disseminate) information, to the meta-reflection on how these skills affect one's lives. **Training** on digital skills is still far from having been mainstreamed in elementary education plans the way it should.

- Among all the different components of what we understand by digital and media literacy, **media literacy** is, arguably, of crucial importance when it comes to youth and their participation both in democratic institutions and the job market. Their **social and cultural profile and environment** is one of digital communication and production in many different formats, platforms and spaces.

- If digital media has changed the landscape of communication and production, initiatives for civic engagement or empowerment should address this liquid and flexible reality. The concept of **transmedia** stresses the importance of the ecosystem of meaning that provides a comprehensive approach to a given issue. Policy makers have to take into account not only that media literacy includes the transmedia factor, but also that **policies put into practice do have to address the whole ecosystem of meaning of the collectives** that a certain policy is addressing. This includes formats, spaces, digital communities and tools, the way they relate is shaped and communicated, or the identification of relevant stakeholders and prescribers, among other things.

- All work done in citizen development, social and political engagement and emancipation should be preceded by a thorough analysis of their digital skills and the according levelling measures in this field, as one would do with basic literacy, but not only. **Work on the inhibitors of effective usage of digital technologies** should come before –or at least be complementary to– any kind of digital literacy initiatives. Beyond literacy, effective usage is the outcome of individual resources, emancipative values and freedom rights. Policies that aim at leapfrogging these issues have a high probability of failure. Digital literacy initiatives per se usually have poor impact. Policies should first target effective usage, then set specific development goals (e.g. civic engagement, employability) and, last, work on the digital literacy skills that are required to reach these specific goals.

  Empowerment comes not from mastering new tools, but being able to use them for transformation. Creation, collaboration and distributed decision-making (autonomy on one's own decisions, sovereignty over one's own environment) make digital skills not a mere instrument but a transformation tool that provides the outcome with social sustainability. Thus, **digital transformation goes beyond individuals**: for citizens to deploy all their potential, organisational, institutional and systemic changes are also needed. Institutions need to have digitally skilled professionals, be aware of the ecosystem of meaning in which they are operating or may be having an effect, and transform and adapt themselves to this new reality and profile of their (young) citizens.

- In an always changing society, and at an accelerating path, acquiring new skills is a short-term goal: the long-term goal is advancing the change and being

able to control it. **Governance over the change** –and the institutions that lead it– is the only way that the once excluded can avoid dispossession again.

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Annex 1: Inventory of Good Practices

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Annex 2: Case Studies

Annex 3: Full List of Data Source

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