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Young people's participation and digitalisation:
opening up space for new forms of political participation?

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Introduction

Young people use digital tools not only to stay informed about political, social and economic issues, but also to express themselves, to communicate, to share information, and to find opportunities for education, employment, learning mobility and political participation. Contemporary forms of youth participation, including engagement through the digital realm, may not always be recognised as legitimate, or even as participation, but at the same time they are determined by the permanent change in young people's needs and interests, and the evolving context.

Digital participation, sometimes called e-participation, can be defined as a postmodern, emergent or future form of participation that takes place online (Forbrig 2005). It involves the use of information and communication technology (ICT), social media and other digital tools to enable young people to influence and engage with political and civic life (SALTO Participation and Information 2023). On the one hand, digitalisation can be perceived in terms of opening up new opportunities for reaching out to different groups of youth, creating networks and organising large numbers of young people (Șerban et al. 2020). On the other hand, it is important to recognise its weaknesses in creating real impact (often labelled as clicktivism or slacktivism) and the fact that it leaves outside the participation sphere those without access to infrastructure or sufficient digital competences.

This paper aims to discuss young people's participation in relation to the increased digitalisation of all aspects of life, including participatory processes. It explores the emergence of new forms of youth activism and participation linked with digitalisation as well as the associated challenges. It has to be noted that even though digitalisation is an important phenomenon, which has further accelerated with the Covid-19 pandemic, there is still little in-depth research about the specificities of digital youth participation and digital activism. Very little is known about the specific tools and platforms that stimulate youth political participation.

The main research question that led to this paper was: What are the current patterns of youth participation connected to digitalisation? Through this literature review, the authors aimed to identify how new trends have emerged and evolved over the past few decades. The findings are based on desk research and analysis of secondary sources focusing on youth political participation and youth activism, with digitalisation as a crosscutting theme.

The paper is organised into four thematic sections. The first section is dedicated to the exploration of existing knowledge around the topic of political participation at large and political participation of young people in particular. The second section focuses on the ways in which digital youth participation takes place, and its benefits and challenges. Thirdly, the paper explores whether digitalisation can play an important role in opening up space for young people's participation. The last section presents a set of conclusions and recommendations addressing the main stakeholders of the youth sector triangle: youth workers, policy makers and youth researchers.

Youth political participation

This section presents an incursion around the existing knowledge on youth political participation, using digitalisation as a crosscutting theme. Political participation used to be defined in a very limited way, only referring to participation in conventional/traditional political institutions such as voting or participation in political parties' activities or participation in youth or regional/national parliaments and assemblies, etc. However, the concept expanded over time, taking into consideration a broader range of participatory activities (Bárta, Boldt and Lavizzari 2021).

The EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership defines political participation broadly as "any activity that shapes, affects, or involves the political sphere" (EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership 2023). This refers to opportunities and spaces where young people have influence on anything that affects their lives such as politics, decisions, relationships, or the active engagement of young people in their communities. The definition of political participation takes into account the activities of citizens aimed at influencing political decisions, mainly focusing on four essential features (van Deth 2001: 5): activity and action of individuals (as opposed to passive consumption, for instance); voluntary nature of the activity (as opposed to activities commanded by law, for instance); citizenship role of the individuals (as opposed to the role of policy makers, for instance); politics and political system as the aim of the activity (as opposed to personal goals, for instance) (Bárta and Lavizzari 2021). Based on these features, three main typologies of political participation were defined through projects and the work of SALTO Participation and Information (SALTO PI):

1. Conventional/traditional political participation – includes institutionalised activities taking place in the electoral arena, such as voting, standing in elections or becoming a member of a political party, youth organisation or a youth or student council.

2. Unconventional/alternative political participation activities which aim at influencing the political domain but are carried out via different means from the narrow avenue of conventional participation, activities which use out-of-the-system approaches to achieve their goals (youth movements, demonstrations, strikes, boycotts or petitions, etc.)

3. Individualised political participation – often takes place at the individual level and as such does not require group, community or mass action. It is mainly linked to activities of the individual, activities that carry a political meaning in various areas, such as animal welfare (veganism), or ethical aspects of the production processes (buycotting) (Bárta and Lavizzari 2021; SALTO Participation and Information 2022).

Youth political participation takes place within the context of a shrinking space for civil society, post-pandemic recovery and economic recession, the advancement of populist ideologies, war, increased inequalities and a rise in global youth movements, while rapid digitalisation and digital transformation are shaping different spheres of young people's lives. Traditionally defined forms of youth political participation seem to no longer be either safe or attractive to young people (Yurttagüler and Deželan 2021). Young people participate in conventional political processes at a lower rate than older cohorts, but they are still active members of society. The latest Eurobarometer on Youth and Democracy (2022) shows that 58% of young people in Europe have participated in one or more ways in the last 12 months (Eurobarometer 2022).

According to the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership survey conducted in November-December 2021, 1 out of every 10 young people (11% of respondents) stated that they are engaged with political parties as members or volunteers, of which only 4.8% are members. 34% of survey respondents stated that they had voted in local, national or European elections in the last 12 months (Yurttagüler and Pultar 2022). This is in line with Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth Eurobarometer (2022) which finds that 39% of young people still consider voting in local, national or European elections to be the most effective action for making their voice heard by decision makers.

New forms of organisations which are mostly project and topic-oriented, non-hierarchical, less institutionalised and closely connected to the lived experience of young people are gaining popularity (Yurttagüler and Deželan 2021). We are witnessing an increase in alternative voices within civil society that grow louder, expand their areas of interest, and primarily take looser forms of organising that do not necessary imply any legal structure (e.g. #metoo movement, Fridays for Future).
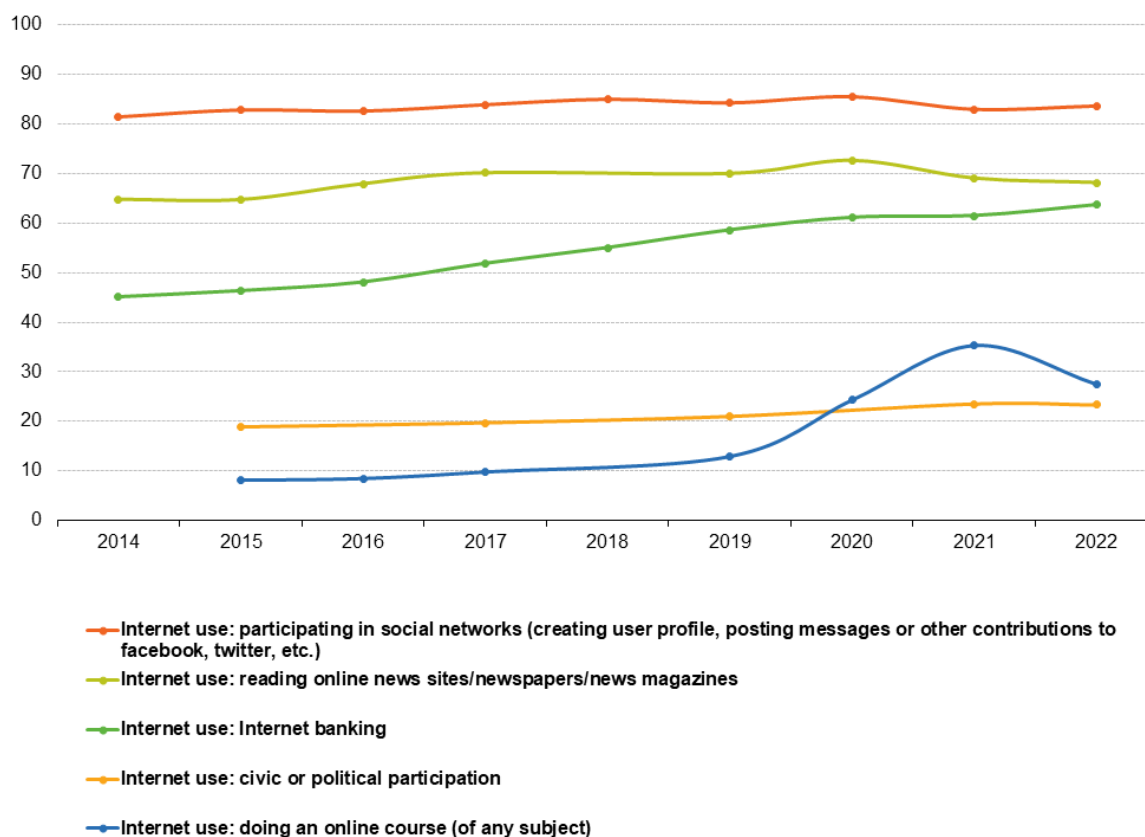
Young people also manifest a preference for contributing to change in their local/everyday activities instead of trying to change central laws and/or policies. At times, their preference for local action is determined by a need to see rapid changes, while in other cases it is an option determined by a lack of trust in governmental or central institutions and authorities. Young people are attracted to online and offline spaces by social rights causes and specific topics related to the promotion of human rights, mental health, health and well-being and access to education and learning. Their interest in topics is often intersectional, meaning that they engage with several interrelated topics at the same time (Yurttagüler and Pultar 2022).

Youth digital participation

At a time when youth political participation is changing and taking new forms, the digital aspect is opening up new spaces and opportunities for engagement, and also posing some new challenges to policy, practice and research on the topic. Digitalisation and the use of digital tools rapidly accelerated during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Eurostat data (2023) shows that 96% of young people in Europe use the internet daily, which confirms the fact that digital tools have become an important part of the everyday life of young people. In 2022, 96% of young people in the EU made daily use of the internet, compared with 84% for the whole population. Between 2019 and 2022, the share of young people in the EU who did an online course more than doubled, from 13% to 28%. A similar increase was observed regarding the use of the internet for banking which has been consistently increasing since 2014, from 45% of young people, to 64% in 2022. Reading news online peaked in 2020 (73%) and has since lost momentum as the percentage of young people reading online decreased by 5%. In 2022, only 23% of young people used the internet for civic or political participation, an activity that has registered a 4% increase since 2015.

Young people's internet use in the EU, selected indicators, 2014-2022
(%)

Internet use: participating in social networks (creating user profile, posting messages or other contributions to facebook, twitter, etc.)

Internet use: reading online news sites/newspapers/news magazines

Internet use: Internet banking

Internet use: civic or political participation

Internet use: doing an online course (of any subject)

Data for 2020 are estimates.
2021: Break in time series.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: isoc_ci_ac_i)

eurostat

Source: Eurostat 2023: Young people's internet use in the EU

On a global scale, the 2020 World Youth Report also suggested that the adoption of digital technologies has positively affected young people's engagement through these tools. Young people request prompt and immediate responses, and they prefer easily accessible and innovative content that is presented in a friendly, fun and creative way (UN DESA 2020).

The novelty and innovation that comes with digital participation should be further explored, while understanding that not all traditional forms of youth participation can take place online. Some forms of youth participation can be recreated in a digital format, for example youth council meetings or youth conferences can be hosted through video chat, and online campaigns and protests can be organised

through the use of hashtags and social media posts. Young people use digital tools and channels to obtain or share information online, by following organisations or movements on social media, to communicate (via Twitter, Telegram, WhatsApp), to create content, to campaign or do crowdfunding/crowdsourcing.

In terms of conventional participation opportunities, digitalisation has created opportunities for young people's participation in formal structures (Alvarez, Hall and Trechsel 2009). For example, digitalisation can facilitate participation and increase accessibility for voters with health issues and disabilities, citizens living in remote areas, and people who care for small children or the elderly. However, this form of digital participation also comes with risks such as technology failures, risk assessments, etc. But, in principle, examples of well-established i-voting procedures – in the case of Estonia [1]– show that i-voting is appealing as a way of increasing voter turnout, but little is still known about whether the system has the potential to attract a significant number of young voters. In other countries, it has been a great tool in young citizens' training on voting, with examples such as Bite the Ballot in the United Kingdom).

During the last decade, various e-participation projects have been realised for promoting youth participation. The EU's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme supported the EUth project – Tools and Tips for Mobile and Digital Youth Participation in and across Europe. EUth aimed to motivate young people's participation by providing tools and support through the toolbox OPIN, a digital online platform where individual e-participation projects can be hosted. The project developed tools and tips for e-participation to offer participants appealing digital and mobile participatory engagement tools and to support initiators in planning and implementing their projects (Rupkus and Franzl 2018).

Although conventional participation practices that utilise digital tools are becoming more frequent, previous research on youth participation in the digital sphere indicates that young people show a preference for unconventional and individualised activities such as liking, sharing, posting non-electoral political information online, signing a petition online and guerrilla communication (Galstyan 2019). The EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership 2021 survey shows that the most prominent online activities are "following different organisations in social media" (37.4%), "sharing opinion in the social media" (30.3%), "creating posts in social media" (18%), creating or signing an online petition (12.8%) and "participating in an online campaign" (9.2%). Young people also engage through online means in order to donate to online

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[1] For more information on Estonia's voting system see: https://e-estonia.com/solutions/e-governance/e-democracy/?

funding campaigns (10.6%) and create online funding campaigns for different causes such as crowdfunding or crowdsourcing (4%) (Yurttagüler and Pultar 2022).

The survey also demonstrates that young people mainly use digital channels for accessing information about social and political issues. 77% of young people stated, "they have engaged in at least one social or political activity online in the last twelve months". They mainly use the internet (72%), TV (57%) and social networks such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube (65%) to access information about social and political issues (Yurttagüler and Pultar 2022). This finding is supported by UNDP's study (2021) which shows that the most frequently used social media platforms to follow developments in social and political issues are Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, with some regional variation (Telegram, Viber and X, formerly Twitter). Facebook-Meta was seen as the platform mostly used by the older age cohort, while the use of YouTube and Instagram is dominant for the younger cohort of youth. The live sessions taking place on Facebook and Instagram are identified as powerful communication and advocacy tools, especially during protests and street movements, but also for debates on strategic issues. LinkedIn is also attractive for professional activities, but less so for activism. Young people mainly use social media to write posts and share images and memes, or for simply receiving content/information. Men tend to be more active in creating content on social and political issues on social media, notably videos, images, memes and humorous content, while also being more present on YouTube than women (UNDP 2021). In some countries, social media groups – such as Instagram groups – offer opportunities for belonging and expression to those groups that cannot gather in public spaces, or they offer an alternative for peer-engagement.

Online groups may also involve those from the apolitical to the activist – for example, the fan activist group the Harry Potter Alliance now activates members around instrumentalist goals for policy changes on immigration, climate change and education (UNICEF 2020).

Young people have different expectations from online information and news: they are primarily driven by progress and enjoyment in their lives, and this translates into what they look for in the news. Much of the excitement and gravitas for younger people is on the periphery of the news space (infotainment, lifestyle, cultural, grass roots, bloggers and vloggers). When looking for information, their filters include what you should know (to an extent), but also what is useful to know, what is interesting to know, and what is fun to know. The differences in the relationships young people have with the news depend on three key areas: the moment, the person and the medium. Four key news moments (dedicated, updated, time-filler and

intercepted) define four types of news consumer: Heritage News Consumers, Dedicated News Devotees, Passive News Absorbers and Proactive News Lovers (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism 2022). These filters and the new media consumer profiles defined within the youth group are also relevant when trying to understand how young people look for information about projects, initiatives and activities that stimulate youth participation. Governmental and non-governmental organisations should take into account these differences among young people's engagement with the new media when they disseminate information, in order to expand their outreach.

Besides online voting, e-participation and use of various social media and digital platforms for participation, other known types of engagement methods mainly considered new or unconventional are:

1) hacking and DDoS attacks: a form of protest aiming to force down online servers and make online services temporarily unavailable;

2) clicktivism and slacktivism: voluntary or invitation-based clicks on certain links, in order to express agreement with certain statements;

3) liquid democracy/LiquidFeedback: a new form of online participation tool which allows collaborative decision making by giving each individual an opportunity to vote on all issues directly, or delegate their votes to a chosen representative;

4) BarCamp: online conference system where the programme and sessions are developed by the participants themselves. This method combines Open Space Technology with effective use of internet-based tools (Pleyers and Karbach 2014).

5) Gamification of formal political processes such as such as [Be an MEP Virtual Reality Experience](#) or [Virtual Role Play Game of the parliamentary processes of the European Parliament](#) (European Parliament 2023).

Young people are interested in being more than users of digital tools and platforms. Therefore, their involvement in co-designing and co-management of the tools and instruments should be facilitated through the use of open platforms and innovative technologies. Digital crowdsourcing platforms such as geographic information systems (GIS) are interactive maps that can support decision makers in collecting citizens' ideas and opinions. Virtual hackathons and online ideation challenges can stimulate youth to generate solutions for complex social challenges. Events like the EU Datathon – the annual open data competition event organised by the Publications Office of the European Union – invites young participants to develop new applications by using open datasets from EU institutions and agencies and allows the

development of new applications and digital products to improve existing services or create new ones in areas such as health, climate change and employment (UN DESA 2023).

It has to be noted that digital skills (ICT skills) are necessary to benefit from digitalisation. The Eurostat survey has explored the percentage of young Europeans aged 16-29 with basic or above basic digital skills in 2021. The EU average stands at 71% but the map also demonstrates the differences between countries: country shares range from 93% in Finland, 92% in Malta, 89% in Croatia and 87% in Greece, and to 49% in the Netherlands and 46% in Bulgaria and Romania, respectively.

Benefits of digital participation

New information technologies have broadened the scope of participation opportunities for young people. Digital tools and platforms have a variety of benefits. Firstly, online tools and platforms, such as messaging, or X (former Twitter) allow young people to organise themselves around common causes and to reach larger audiences. The various social movements and non-governmental organisations and initiatives use digital tools for raising awareness, for fundraising or for online petitions. Among digital tools, it is important to discuss the importance of videogames which can also be used as tools for youth participation. Firstly, SALTO PI prepared a report entitled "[Exploring participation with videogames](#)", which shares examples and guidance on how videogames, which are well-spread and popular among young people, have been used and can be used in the context of non-formal education to explore youth participation in civic society.

Secondly, digital platforms and free internet sources and instruments have also lowered the costs of participation. Except for the costs that come with usage – equipment and connection – young people do not have to spend other financial means to join youth activities and can easily connect with international communities of their interest.

Thirdly, online spaces provide an option for young people to join activities from their safe space – from home – as most public and large-scale online actions do not require additional permission and complicated logistics. The advantage of joining remotely is especially notable in countries where civil society space is shrinking and public participation is sensitive, and where different groups, especially with vulnerable profiles, have limited opportunities to participate or would face legal obstacles on gathering.

Fourthly, digital participation transcends locality, allowing young people to establish connections with voices and networks outside their city or country (UNDP 2021).

Finally, online platforms give space and voice to groups that would have a lower participation rate in traditional forms of participation (e.g. young people with fewer opportunities – young people from isolated and remote areas, young people with disabilities, young people whose health condition would not allow them to travel or join big crowds).

Challenges and limitations of digital youth political participation

Young people are highly active in using new information technologies and are important actors in the digitalisation of societies, but it is important to highlight the challenges related to the use of technology. Firstly, it is essential to underline the existence of inequalities in relation to digitalisation and access to technology. While acknowledging the importance of opportunities for youth participation that digital tools are opening up, at the same time we should be cautious about the potential of the digital sphere to include all young people. Young people facing different types of vulnerabilities are still dealing with reduced access to digital tools, either due to a lack of access and connectivity, lack of equipment or poor digital literacy (Șerban et al. 2020; Șerban and Ștefan 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic experience also demonstrated how digitalisation on its own cannot erase the existent inequalities but can also serve to reproduce them (Darmody, Smyth and Russell 2021; Eriksen, Stefansen and Smette 2022). Researchers have stressed the fact that offline inequalities and/or privileges are reproduced online, or even amplified (Ahmed and Cho 2019, cited in Saifuddin,A and Madrid-Morales, D. (2021)). Taking an example of gender inequalities, UN Women and the United Nations celebrated [International Women's Day on 8 March 2023 under the theme DigitALL](): Innovation and technology for gender equality, and underlined that while "digital technology is opening new doors for the global empowerment of women, girls and other marginalized groups" (Bode, 2017) , there is still a persistent gender gap in digital access. Among the factors impacting on the gender-based digital divide are: access and digital proficiency, cognitive aspects such as self-efficacy, and socialisation dynamics can also affect young women's engagement online. For instance, young men are more likely to share content online, to look for information, read news about politics, while young women more often go online for social interaction and relationship maintenance and these tendencies are, in fact, reproducing gendered patterns in (offline) communication activities and preferences (Bode 2017).

The second challenge is related to the limited digital competences of young people, youth workers, policy makers and system administrators. Developing digital competences is crucial for all actors in the youth sector, and particularly young people, to ensure they are fully equipped to be not merely consumers of mass media and advanced technologies, but also users and content creators. In most of the online platforms and tools addressing young people, they are "beneficiaries rather than co-creators of the developed platforms" (Șerban et al. 2020: 31). It is therefore important to reflect upon how new information technologies and social media are being used and/or consumed by young people. The distinction that Michel de Certeau (1984) creates between "usage" and "consumption" is useful for such a perception change, since whereas consumption refers to being rather passive recipients/consumers, usage implies agency and creativity.

Informed and meaningful youth digital participation requires young people to have sufficient digital, data literacy and media literacy skills and the ability to exercise their human rights both offline and online (Pawluczuk 2020). As underlined by the European Commission, "Being digitally competent is more than being able to use the latest smartphone or computer software – it is about being able to use such digital technologies in a critical, collaborative and creative way" (European Commission 2017, cited in Șerban et al. 2020: 12).

Thirdly, one of the serious challenges of digitalisation is related to the safety of online spaces and the threat of harmful content and online harassment and violence that might easily circulate through new technologies. Hate speech and radical ideas promoting violence can easily circulate on social media, posing a threat to democracy and human rights. Digital activists report feeling exposed to bullying, harassment and hate speech online. This is particularly the case for young women, since 60% of women (compared to 31% of men) feel that their gender is the reason for the reactions to their views (UNDP 2021).

Young activists are often exposed to online harassment risks, hate speech and privacy issues online. As a reaction to this threat, the Council of Europe led an educational youth campaign, No Hate Speech Movement between 2012 and 2018, aimed at combating online hate speech by mobilising young people and youth organisations to recognise and act against these human rights violations. The risks of hate speech online are augmented by the risks to privacy, security of data and potential cyberattacks (UNDP 2021).

Finally, digitalisation can trap young people in echo chambers (Cinelli et al. 2021) and add to the polarisation of societies (Barberá 2020). Research also shows that at times it is harder to reinforce the intergenerational dialogue online. When activists and decision makers are part of different age groups, the opportunities to interact are less limited than in the offline space. In such polarised settings, false information and fake news can circulate easily and can easily make people confused about what is real and not real (Molina et al. 2021; Salvi et al. 2021). The UNDP study on civic participation of youth in the digital world lists fake news as one of the key threats – 85% of young people felt they encountered fake news and misinformation online, which impacts on the development of mistrust towards the digital channels (UNDP 2021).

The European Commission has been working on tackling these challenges since 2012. The European Commission's Communication European Strategy for a Better Internet for Children (COM(2012) 196 final), adopted in May 2012, underlined the importance of protecting children and making children and young people more aware of the risks involved in using the internet. The strategy also highlighted the importance of teaching digital literacy so that children may benefit fully and safely from being online. The strategy was based around four pillars: stimulate quality content online for young people; step up awareness and empowerment; create a safe environment for children online and fight against child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation. Within this strategy, the European networks Insafe and INHOPE were founded, which are co-funded by the EU and provide national Safer Internet Centres. The national centres aim to implement awareness and educational campaigns, run helplines and work closely with young people to ensure an evidence-based, multi-stakeholder approach to creating a better internet. On 6 February 2018, the EU launched a range of new initiatives under the heading Safer Internet Day. They were designed to ensure that children, young people, parents, teachers and other EU citizens become empowered and responsible digital users. The web portal for this initiative provides access to a wealth of information including an online course on child safety with teaching resources for topics such as fake news, cyberbullying and radicalisation.

In October 2022, the European Commission published a set of ethical guidelines for educators (especially primary and secondary teachers with little or no experience of digital education) on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) (artificial intelligence and data in education).[2]

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[2] For details see https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d81a0d54-5348-11ed-92ed-01aa75ed71a1/language-en.

Digitalisation and everyday life politics: opening up space for young people's participation

Researchers had been arguing that there was a need to open up space for different forms of youth participation and not to create hierarchies by classifying some as participation and others as not (Batsleer, Walther and Lüküslü 2020; PARTISPACE Policy brief no. 3). The same is also true for digital youth participation. There is a need to understand how young people use new information technologies for participation and learn from them. In that sense it becomes important to embrace a culture where the older generations accept they can learn from the younger generations. Such a prefigurative culture also has the potential for breeding prefigurative politics in which young people are shaping values, culture and social interactions, and challenging the existing hierarchical and centralised forms of organisation of society, in favour of more participatory, personal and egalitarian methods.

Young people are born into societies with new information technologies and they are used to engaging with these technologies for various purposes (education, communication, information, entertainment, etc.). Therefore, it is an important part of their everyday lives. As already pointed out by the pioneer research (e.g. youthpart, Ourspace, PuzzledbyPolicy), there is no clear separation between online and offline worlds, which can also be translated as no real distinction between online and offline participation.

It is thus important not to consider youth digital or non-digital political participation as different from the everyday life practices of young people. It is also important not to see politics and daily life as two separate spheres (Pleyers and Karbach 2014: 3). Even though digitalisation is a developing phenomenon and that for conventional/formal, non-conventional/non-formal and informal settings of youth participation, internet and social media will continue to play an important role, it is equally important to not fall into a technological determinism. Technology is not a catalyst but rather a tool for youth communication as well as participation. What drives young people to participate and create change in their societies is often linked with "the wish for recognition and belonging" and that experiences of recognition are a powerful factor behind participation" (PARTISPACE Policy brief no. 4). That is why the physical (offline) spaces should not be ignored. Young people often express the need for safe spaces where they feel protected and that they belong there. Even though the boundaries between online and offline worlds are less evident, local initiatives and local youth policies are still important (PARTISPACE 2018; Walther et al. 2021). It is important to highlight that the pandemic did not erase, but on the contrary has shown the importance of locality and physical and public spaces (PARTIBRIDGES project). Rather than perceiving

digitalisation as a phenomenon offering tools of participation, it is also important to perceive it as a phenomenon enabling the creation of new digital spaces of participation for young people.

Conclusions and recommendations

The changing patterns and tools of participation due to digitalisation will remain an important topic of interest for researchers, policy makers and youth workers in the near future. As youth needs and interests are constantly changing, new trends and patterns in political participation are continuously emerging. Societies go through a process in which the boundaries between social and political, as well as private and public, are blurring and the dichotomy between online and offline worlds are no longer meaningful. However, there are also important challenges posed by the digital aspects of participation. The discussions around digital youth participation cannot be disconnected either from the broad discussions around democracy or from the problems of social exclusion and economic and social inequalities. Digital tools and spaces should therefore be perceived, not within the dichotomies of good and bad, but rather as instruments that can either stimulate or hamper youth participation, depending on how accessible and open they are to young people.

The main actors of the youth sector – youth workers and professionals in the field of youth, policy makers and youth researchers – should come up with co-ordinated measures and actions aiming to support young people in their continuous exploration of new forms of digital participation. All stakeholders should be aware of both the advantages and challenges that online participation brings to young people and to understand that a certain set of attitudes, especially those related to living in a culture of human rights and democratic citizenship, are essentially learnt and developed in offline spaces and through interaction. Therefore, the need for in-person activities remains very important. More than that, the combination of activities in offline and online spaces is an excellent option to open up participation spaces for more young people (W(e)-Participate! 2020).

1. Youth workers and other professionals in the youth sector

Youth workers and other professionals in the youth sector have an essential role in helping young people consciously explore the potential participation opportunities of the digital environment, and in educating the general public about digital opportunities and competences needed to participate in digital environments.

- It is very important not to define digital space as dangerous or as a threat per se and therefore perpetuate a digital panic discourse. As digitalisation is not a panacea for all ills, it is also not a creator of all ills. It is important to perceive digital space as a social space where interactions take place, where inequalities exist and where there are opportunities for co-creation, as well as challenges in confronting its potential for bringing harm to individuals and societies.
- Young people should not be perceived as fully competent in using mass media and advanced technologies with a digital natives discourse. It is important to highlight the difference between usage and consumption and not only perceive young people as active consumers of mass media and advanced technologies.
- All stakeholders in the youth field need to develop their digital competences in order to become fully equipped to participate in digital environments. Professionals should develop training opportunities for young people, youth workers, public servants and educators and tailor these opportunities around the changing participation needs and interests of young people.
- Training programmes should also include media information and literacy and how to recognise and address fake news, misinformation, information pollution, hate speech and other security threats online.

2. Youth researchers

Youth researchers have been active in defining and redefining participation, by exploring participatory tools and instruments, the shrinking spaces for participation, the link between democratic transitions and youth activism and digital participation opportunities, especially in relation to those initiatives developed during the pandemic.

- Qualitative research should dedicate more projects and resources to introducing new and creative research techniques on digital youth participation to foster a better understanding of digital participation. Additional efforts should be invested in understanding the limitations of digital participation and defining the challenges that young people are facing in this area.
- Research should move beyond the dichotomy between traditional and new forms of digital youth participation, and explore how young activists are combining the existing online and offline methods and instruments for participation.
- Research should explore the motivations of young people to join online movements, the profiles of "newcomers" and levels of social inclusion in online platforms.

- Researchers should also explore the side impact of policy and practice measures introduced during Covid-19, especially in looking at the ways in which young people organised themselves to continue their civic and social projects.

3. Policy makers

Policy makers have been long discussing the role of digitalisation in young people's lives, but the pandemic accelerated the development of policy measures in this domain. Most of these measures and programmes rather reside in providing access to equipment and to internet connectivity, especially to ensure the continuation of the educational paths of young people.

- More investment should be made into the development of inclusive e-government tools at all levels. This would facilitate the widespread implementation of initiatives such as participatory budgeting or i-voting.

- Investments should be made in developing platforms and online instruments with and for young people. These platforms could also reduce the intergenerational gap in the interaction between young people and decision makers and would also facilitate change in the advocacy patterns from rather confrontational to co-operation approaches.

- Joint initiatives of educational institutions, local authorities and non-governmental structures to support the development of young people's digital skills should become a priority for the public agenda.

- The development of digital competences should be mainstreamed in all educational programmes.

- In order to better understand the impact of policy measures introduced during the pandemic, and to gain a full picture of young people's activism, policy makers should structure dialogue mechanisms both with peers at national and European level and also with stakeholders.

- For transparency and open governance, the civil society sector should have better access to use public information via open data sources and tech tools.

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