

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



Synthesis Paper¹: Analysis of the Digital Transformation of Society and its Impact on Young People's Lives'

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¹ This paper is a synthesis version of the full paper 'Analysis of the Digital Transformation of Society and its Impact on Young People's Lives' (Norqvist, 2018), published at the Council of Europe website. References will be found in the full paper.

Executive Summary

This paper aims to offer some analytical and strategic implications of the digital transformation of society and its impact on young people's lives. The purpose of this paper is to explore the intersection between young people's lives and the digital transformation of society, incorporating the purpose of enhancing social inclusion. In order to do so, 16 different policies, mainly from the Council of Europe and the European Union were selected and analysed. From the analysis, conducted in such a way that the underlying or explicitly interpreted problems in specific policies are made visible, four main themes were derived. The themes focus on understanding the digitalisation through perspectives on technology, explaining the understanding of isolated or integrated attitudes, and bringing forward the broad palette of instruments that are offered through national policies to support readiness for ongoing digitalisation. Moreover, the example of digital youth work is used to understand transformation of organisations. The themes generated two main implications, also considered as outcomes or syntheses.

The first implication is understood from a leadership and governance perspective. It implies that the understanding of, and support for, the relation between various levels of decision making and participation, described as chains of command, can be one starting point in supporting digital transformation. More specifically, it can be a mapping of and a more profound understanding of chains of command in national, regional and local contexts. This can be helpful in order to know to whom the 'right type of questions' should be addressed, or possibly to discover 'bottle-necks' that hamper or block digital transformation. To analyse chains of command may also reveal how different levels of decision making cooperate and the dialogues between them. This may be useful for instance in order to form or align to various national or international strategies or to understand if and how young people can access services or decision-making processes. All with the ambition to develop *transformation readiness*, resulting in a situation where young people can access the 'right information at the right time' and being able to choose when to use technologies or not.

The second implication focuses on *context-based negotiations of the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs)*. More specifically, and to highlight the importance of contextualising ambitions for digital transformation, it means that a deeper understanding of e.g. 'small decisions' in everyday work that 'really matters' need more attention. The assumption is based on the fact that the use of ICTs in e.g. various organisations today is a result of step-by-step developments throughout history, due to factors like different needs, knowledge, political, economic and technological structures, trends etc. This can for example raise questions that, if social inclusion is the purpose, engage in discussing how ICTs are used in relation to specific purposes and in what sense they may support the view of social inclusion. Hence, can the use of ICTs alter viewpoints of social inclusion, or can viewpoints of social inclusion alter viewpoints on how ICTs should be used?

The final conclusion of the paper suggests an integrated attitude between the governance and leadership perspective of transformation readiness and the perspective of context-based negotiations that may result in the 'small decisions' of everyday work, including the situation where individuals can choose when to use technologies or not, and the purposes of which they are used. The result of the integration between perspectives can be seen as a constructive meaning or even an alignment between e.g. users and decision makers; policy and practice; or international and local viewpoints, in this paper with the purpose of enhancing social inclusion.

Introduction

This analytical paper is a contribution to the 2018 symposium *Connecting the dots: Young People, Social Inclusion and Digitalisation*, organised by the partnership between the European Commission (EU) and the Council of Europe (CoE) in the field of youth. In relation to the topics of the symposium, this paper offers interpretations and implications based on policy, reflected through research. Rather than offering solutions the paper serves as a contribution to dialogue regarding digitalisation and youth. The guiding question of this paper is formulated as: How can implications of digital transformation of society be related to young people's lives in order to incorporate understandings of social inclusion? The more specific purpose of this paper is to explore the intersection between young people's lives and the digital transformation of society, incorporating the purpose of enhancing social inclusion.

The 16 policies, identified in this paper and analysed, are largely representing the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe (CoE), in addition to other bodies such as the OECD (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation). The particular policies are selected because of their relation to the digital transformation of society and the influence it may have on young people's lives. In general, the policies below can also be considered as policies that encourage digitalisation and the use of digital technologies in order to access and enhance e.g. community services with a purpose to support democratic ideas, values and processes.

The specific approach that inspired the analysis of policies is a tool or resource that support critical interrogation of public policies. It is, simplified, developed to making underlying or explicitly interpreted problems in policies visible, in order to e.g. reveal possible presuppositions or assumptions that underpin the writing of policies or supports a process on how to think differently about the problems represented to be in policies. The analysis generated four themes that reflect the author's choices on how to take on the challenge to analyse the digital transformation of society and its impact on young people's lives. The chosen themes are considered as possible arguments or suggestions of research fields that can open up for dialogues and deeper understandings of the intersection between young people's lives and the digital transformation of society, incorporating the purpose of enhancing social inclusion.

Main themes

The first theme focuses on the understandings of the digitalisation through perspectives on technology. It brings forward historical aspects of digital technologies and digitalisation with regard to societal developments and relations to e.g. the (global) economic crisis or needs to improve education as

arguments to develop and use technologies to e.g. improve effectiveness or to develop education in order to meet societal needs. The digital transformation of society refers to a process where humans are re-shaping the way society 'works' by ways of interpreting and understanding society, including the usage of digital technologies in everyday life, resulting in a situation where established conceptions of how e.g. how society works are challenged.

The second theme has been derived with regard to a number of examples of conceptions related to the field of youth. They are expressed in a dualistic way, possibly to understand as two negotiated and distinct parties bringing forward isolated or integrated attitudes. The examples can be understood through expressions like borders, distances or gaps between e.g. formal and non-formal education, distance education, social inclusion or distance participation have to be overcome or bridged; young people must be reached; the digital divide affects young people's lives etc. The isolated and integrated attitudes are a theme because they can possibly explain how or why individuals think, feels or act in a certain way with regard to e.g. digitalisation or social inclusion.

The third theme focus on the broad palette of instruments that are brought forward in selected policies. The instruments in this case are interpreted as ways to support readiness for ongoing digital transformation. The need to develop competencies and literacies seems to be prioritised and this can be one way of making digitalisation useful, to be able to understand technologies such as ICTs and to come to a situation where young people can choose when to use ICTs or not. On the other hand, risks and destructive actions are challenging ethics and democracy via e.g. cyber-bullying, hate speech, discrimination, harassment and cyber-hate. This situation is a reality for young people and is briefly discussed in this theme.

The fourth theme that has developed in the analysis process is related to transformation of organisations that support the younger generations, understood through foremost the example of digital youth work. As a 'door-opener' to support transformation of organisations, understandings of chains of command are brought forward. The chain of command in this paper describes a sequence from decision makers at international, intergovernmental level – decision makers at national level – decision makers at local and regional level – Youth organisations – Youth workers – Youth. This analytical paper considers chains of command since similar approach can be taken in order to understand the problem of how to make policy ambitions related to the digital transformation realised in local contexts of youth work, aiming to enhance opportunities for social inclusion of young people.

The main part of this synthesis paper contains the synthesis of the four themes and ends the paper with conclusions and implications for youth work and youth policies, including some possible future research themes.

Analytical and strategic implications

The implications of this paper are presented as some possible ways ahead for the youth sector, including youth work, youth policy and youth research. The two implications can be understood as building on each other, be overlapping and to some extent integrated into each other, including use of technologies and the purposes of which they are used

Transformation readiness

The reason for this implication is based on the situation that young people and humans in general are (constantly) going through a process of re-shaping the way society 'works' including patterns for information and communication. It is a known problem: that preconditions for taking part in this transformation differ between contexts such as lack of access to internet or high friction for information ('slow' or no internet). However, this implication is not primarily about that even though it is included in the problem. Instead it focuses on how organisations, and to some extent individuals, can be prepared for the digital transformation of society, like for instance; how are youth work organisations prepared for digital transformation? This implication is firstly understood from leadership and governance perspectives and in a sense, it is about how to prevent a situation where 'you build the railroad when the train has left the station'. A question that is in place is, whether individuals and organisations in various contexts are ready for the digital transformation in ways that the policies propose? Because, being ready doesn't only mean having appropriate technologies and a fast internet connection. There also need to be a readiness for processes and systems that make this transformation possible.

A starting point that might be a door-opener for supporting transformation readiness is deeper understandings of how to support and possibly develop existing chains of command. More specifically, it can be a mapping of chains of command in national, regional and local contexts in order to e.g. know who takes what type of decisions. This can be helpful in order to know to whom the 'right type of questions' should be addressed, or possibly to discover 'bottle-necks' that hinder e.g. digital transformation. To analyse chains of command may also reveal how different levels of decision making work together and the dialogues between them, in order to form or align to various strategies. Furthermore, it will likely also facilitate questions concerning leadership in the sense that problems will be visualized regarding how to describe, analyse, explain, understand, design, lead and govern structures, cultures, functions and processes where young people can learn and actively participate in community and society. Hence, to make the most out of digital transformation to have an impact on young people's lives means to understand how to support *transformation readiness*, what it means and how to get there.

Access is a word often used in this paper and in policies that offer strategies and initiatives related to digitalisation, youth or human rights. It often refers to having access to information or communication by being connected to internet. What this paper would like to highlight is that the concept of access also can be interesting to understand for organisations and individuals that strive towards transformation readiness. What does access really mean? What kind of access to what kind of contexts using what kind of technologies? Who wants access to who and in what ways are young people given access? And, as highlighted earlier (cf. fig. 3), can young people today be considered as involved in digital transformation or not, with the ‘right type’ of access, in a situation where they can choose to use technology or not, guided by adequate skills and knowledge?

Opening up for future questions to research, some examples:

How do organisations and decisions, at various levels of decision making, support digital transformation in relation to social inclusion of young people?

How are organisations in various countries and contexts structured (including chains of command) in order to support digital transformation?

What are key elements to make individuals and organisations ‘transformation ready’?

What is access?

What kind of access do young people need and to what kind of contexts?

Who wants access to who and in what ways are young people given access?

[Context-based negotiations of the use of ICTs](#)

The first implication is considered to firstly be understood from leadership and governance perspectives. The second implication will focus on context, more specifically to highlight the importance of contextualising the digital transformation, interested in understanding ‘small decisions’ in everyday work that ‘really matters’. The implication is based on the fact that use of technologies develops differently in different contexts and that the technologies that are used in relation to digitalisation, in general, are understood to be information and communication technologies (ICTs). The use of ICTs in e.g. various organisations today is a result of step-by-step developments throughout history, due to factors like e.g. different needs, knowledge, structures, economy, trends etc. This implies that the various use of ICTs is negotiated in relation to e.g. these factors and that the use of ICTs is ‘adjusted’ to its distinct context, at least if the contexts that are compared have different needs or structures.

With respect to the issue that this paper has presented understanding of the developments of technology in relation to digitalisation and the impact of young people’s lives, it is important to underline that deeper understandings about how ICTs are used must be related to purposes that the individual or the organisation have with the use. Hence, the use of ICTs themselves cannot be ‘de-

contextualised'. With this in mind it can be interesting to make visible the negotiations of the use of ICTs in relation to purposes and aims of their use. To understand how meaning is constructed or how problems are solved may also reveal how the use of ICTs are aligned with the purposes and aims of their use. If e.g. social inclusion is the purpose, how are ICTs used in relation to this purpose and in what sense does it support the view of social inclusion. Furthermore, can the use of ICTs alter viewpoints of social inclusion, or can viewpoints of social inclusion alter viewpoints on how ICTs should be used?

Integrated in this understanding of context-based negotiation of the use of ICTs lies an assumption that the role of education is important. To be able to move discussions and negotiations forward the need of 'new' knowledge is inevitable. A need for education can raise awareness and enhance digital competences in order for youth to e.g. navigate safely in the social media landscape, with privacy protected where they understand impacts of algorithms, programming and underlying purposes in flows of information.

To learn from concepts about transformation such as transformative learning or transformative leadership can probably give some hints of how to design the education that is needed. Key words in several policy documents present solutions where responsibility, common core values, role modelling, abilities to both support and confront, personal care, empowerment, participation or creativity are developed. This reveals that the nature of transformation implies that it is not enough to transmit or transfer adequate knowledge – it must be constructed by the actors involved in the transformation. Again, the need to understand context-based negotiations of the use of ICTs underlines the need to understand contexts where the ICTs are used and for what purposes, including the voice of the actors that are involved. In this paper it can be the voice of young people in local and regional contexts, involved in the small decisions in everyday work. However, in relation to the implication of transformation readiness one might ask who the actors really are that negotiate the use of ICTs that has an impact on young people's lives?

Opening up for future questions to research, some examples:

How can negotiations of the use of technology be understood, especially with regard to the concepts of digitalisation and social inclusion?

What are examples of arguments that show alignment between use of technology and certain purposes and aims of organisations?

Who are the actors that negotiate the use of technologies that has an impact on young people's lives?

What are examples of 'small' decisions at the local and regional level that has made an impact of young people's lives from the perspective of social inclusion?

What problems and possibilities arise, in local and regional contexts, with regard to access and social inclusion?

Conclusions and further dialogues

This analytical paper ends with a conclusion that aims to open a dialogue about how digital transformation can have an impact on young people’s lives, incorporating the purpose of enhancing social inclusion. The two implications above are presented in figure 6 including the choice to use technologies and the purposes of their use.

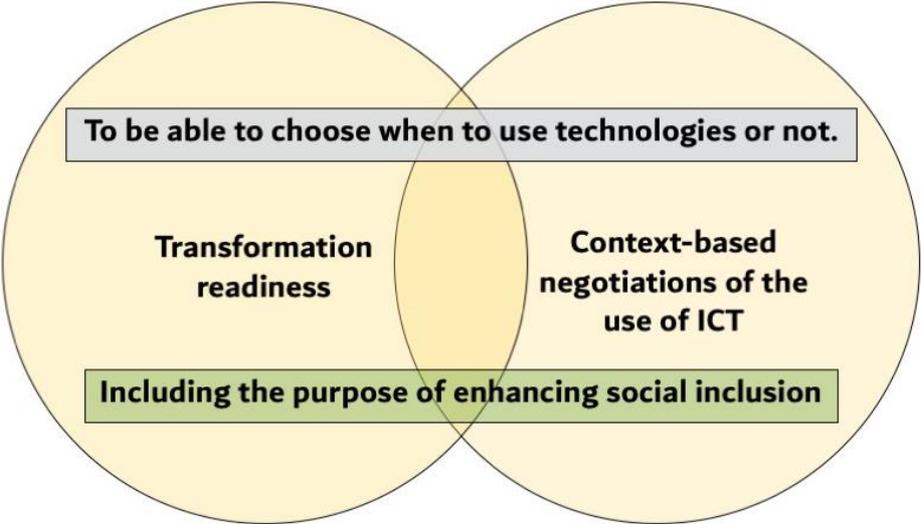


Fig. 1. Opening up dialogues about digital transformation and impact of young people’s lives, incorporating the purpose of enhancing social inclusion.

The figure implies an integrated attitude between the governance and leadership perspective of transformation readiness and the context-based negotiations made in the ‘small decisions’ of everyday work. The result of the integration between perspectives can be seen as a constructive meaning or even an alignment between e.g. users and decision makers; policy and practice; or international and local viewpoints. The ability to choose when to use technologies or not, and the specific purpose to enhance social inclusion are elements that must be present in both processes of striving towards transformation readiness and the context-based negotiations of the use of technologies, at least if the purpose is to understand and explore the intersection between young people’s lives and the digital transformation of society, especially incorporating the purpose of enhancing social inclusion.