

NECMETTIN ERBAKAN
UNIVERSITY

DIGISMARTS:

DIGITAL, SOCIAL MEDIA, ACTIVISM, RIGHTS, TRAINING AND SKILLS

*A REPORT ON YOUTH WORK INNOVATIVE AND CREATIVE
DIGITAL ACTIVISM EXEMPLARS*

107

Necmettin Erbakan University, Turkiye

2023

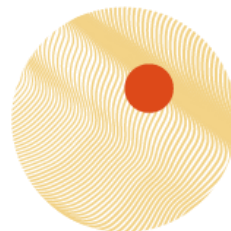
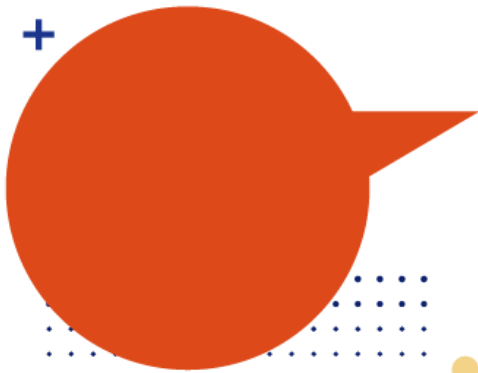




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Introduction

This report yields creative digital activism practices that were directed and led by Necmettin Erbakan University, Family and Youth Centre with the rest of the consortium. The creative digital activism projects were developed with and implemented by young people who are marginalised and youth workers in each country. These projects were the products of the skills and earlier work packages that were consolidated in a compelling and thrilling manner. To inspire youth workers and young people alike in other countries, this report will demonstrate the excellence possible through digital creativity and transversal digital skills for activism.

The Erasmus + DigiSMARTS project revolves around equipping youth with digital skills to promote their engagement in citizenship to facilitate social and political change. It prioritizes supporting the broad European youth workforce by providing them with free, online, open-access materials that will guide them on how to implement online activism projects step-by-step. The project consortium consists of Higher Education Institutions and NGOs in the field of youth-related services including Birmingham City University (UK), the Western Balkans Institute (Serbia), CARDET (Cyprus), Necmettin Erbakan University (Turkiye), TURKU University of Applied Sciences (Finland), and Polygonal (Italy). The project targets the youth workforce across Europe as well as policymakers along with young people themselves who are involved in the project through advisory committees and digital activism activities. Hopefully, the project will facilitate the expansion of new digital activism projects and the pool of skilled youth workforce competent in the digital world.

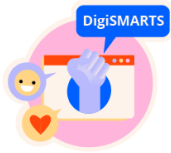
Youth Work Innovative and Creative Digital Activism

Practices

This section will summarise written and audio-visual digital youth activism exemplars run across partner countries including Turkiye, Finland, Serbia, Cyprus, United Kingdom, and Italy as the final step of the DigiSMART project. Each consortium developed and implemented a creative digital activism project by utilising the skills and educational resources provided by earlier work packages following the framework provided below.

They first determined a social issue which is relevant for the excluded youth in their respective countries. The digital skills that should be included in the exemplar were led by findings from the IO1 individual reports. The final report from the first output reflected the views of youth and youth workers on which digital skills and resources they hold and what needs to be improved in terms of





their digital skills, and the causes they advocate. Therefore, the report demonstrated the needs of youth and youth workers alike to engage in effective digital activism activities and their current practices in the respective country. The choice of activism activities and a short description on engaging excluded youth groups in the digital activism activities were also described when applied. Partners demonstrated which methods are employed to train youth and/or youth workers in digital skills needed for creative and effective digital activism examples. Digital activism project implementations were summarised along with monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of each exemplar.

Turkiye

Background

There is evidence showing that the mental health of university students is deteriorating worldwide (Kadison, & DiGeronimo, 2004; Macaskill, 2013). University mental health services are overwhelmed with student referrals and there are long-standing waitlists for students waiting to get care. Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, these needs became even more apparent. There are similar findings coming from many parts of the world since the beginning of the pandemic (Nurunnabi et al., 2020). University closures, moving back to live with their parents, economic hardships caused by the pandemic, being adapted to the online learning environments, and being isolated from friends and support systems all seem like triggering emotional issues for youth. All of these led university students to decide to run a digital activism project on student mental health to share their experiences, try to create a feeling of community around young people struggling with the same problems and raise awareness on the topic.



Given all students have strong emotions and motivation to take action regarding this matter. When we look at the characteristics of students who want to engage in activism and raise awareness about the mental health of university students, it can be said that some of them are involved in creating



digital content through various channels. They feel more comfortable expressing themselves through digital materials. They examined the open-access educational materials available on the DigiSmart platform. Through these materials, they gained knowledge about different types and tools of activism. Inspired by the step-by-step vlogging content on the platform, they decided to produce

podcasts on the topic they want to advocate for. We shared some guiding resources with them regarding this matter.

They considered the involvement and contribution of NGOs and similar supports. The students wanted to establish communication with institutions and organizations that could provide them with opportunities to reach a larger audience and create higher-quality content from a technical perspective. They reached out to the Social Innovation Agency (SIA), which is based on collaboration between universities and local administrations and works on social projects. They contacted the officials of SIA and obtained permission to create content in the podcast studio specifically set up for podcast production. All the content was prepared free of charge with technical support provided by the SIA platform (<https://www.sosyalinovasyonajansi.com/hakkimizda.html>).

The DigiPodcast Project

The students of a university located in Central Türkiye initiated a digital activism project on the mental health issues of university students. The students started broadcasting a podcast series about mental health problems and their underlying factors.

During this process, university students examined the materials on the DigiSMART platform and gained knowledge about different toolboxes. Subsequently, they gathered in online meetings and received a brief training on podcast production. Students who had previous experience in creating complex digital materials like podcasts shared their expertise. In ongoing online meetings, they



brainstormed which mental health problems were common among university students and discussed the emotional, instrumental, and environmental factors underlying these problems. They then divided tasks among themselves and started creating content related to the chosen topics.

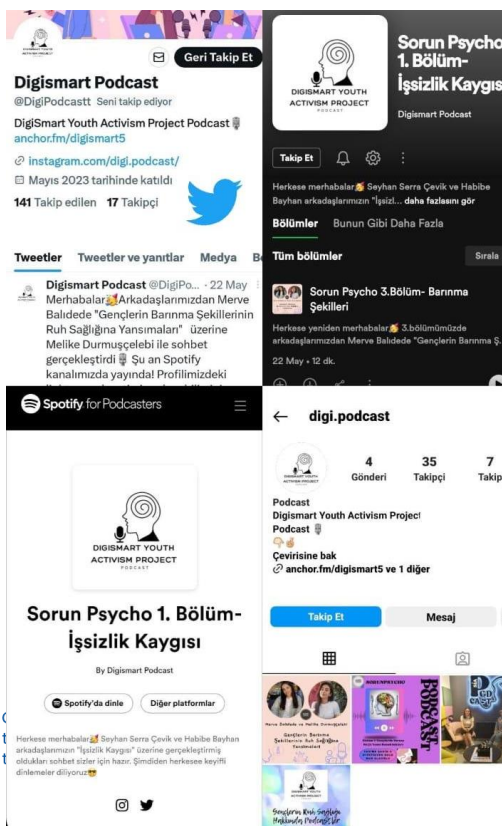
While preparing the podcasts, they incorporated the subjective experiences of university students. Additionally, they invited different experts related to the selected topics to their podcasts. The interviews they conducted with the experts also contributed to the content. People contributing to their content were also asked to fill in consent forms

related to the scope of broadcasting and copyright matters before the recording.

The created podcasts addressed a wide range of issues among university students, ranging from concerns about unemployment to economic worries related to housing, as well as stress-related eating problems. For example, in a podcast they published on the relationship between housing options and the stress levels of university students, the students shared their own housing experiences on living in government-funded student halls and provided insights based on those

experiences. Regardless of which specific issue they focused on, current university students have been greatly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The activists created accounts on different social media platforms to increase the visibility of their produced podcasts. They published their prepared podcasts for free on Spotify. They also made announcements of their podcasts on their other social media accounts. **Here are their social media accounts:**



Spotify Podcasters: Digismart Podcast



Link: <https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/digismart5>

Instagram: digi.podcast

<https://www.instagram.com/digi.podcast/>

YouTube: Digismart Podcast

Barriers and Enablers

Student activists had high self-confidence in generating digital content and were receptive to quick learning, as seen in their reviews of DigiSmart online educational materials. University students were aware that issues such as mental health were a common concern among many students in the country, and they recognized that reaching out to them through digital tools would make it easier. They believed that the tools used in their activism, addressing their shared problems, should be digital and not limited by the boundaries of traditional methods. These tools would connect them with other young individuals who had similar experiences regardless of where they live. Issues were alike.

Activists had a clear understanding that in order to reach a larger audience, the content they would produce needed to have a certain level of technological infrastructure. Their main concern was that if they recorded podcast episodes using their mobile devices, the audio quality might not reach a certain standard. They discussed alternative solutions, such as using different audio editing programs, but recognized that it would require them to educate themselves by leveraging open-access videos and blog entries. They also wanted to explore different alternatives and sought to benefit from a podcast production studio operated by an agency collaborating with universities and local governments. They communicated their activism project plans to the authorities, but initially, their requests were not accepted. They organized a face-to-face meeting with the officials and tried their luck again. The fact that the activists were university students, mostly from the social sciences





field, worked to their advantage when the agency decided to open its resources to the students. However, if they were not university students and faced a different disadvantage, it remains unknown whether they would have had access to the same infrastructure resources. In that case, they would have needed to rely on the tools at their disposal and develop their skills in different technologies. Alternatively, they would have to reach out to institutions that could provide funding for their activism projects and strive to obtain the necessary technical infrastructure for producing complex digital content using the financial resources they acquired.

Finland

Background

In Finland, citizens' abilities and possibilities for influencing are recognized as basic rights and the political system is based on representative principles, which are widely accepted in the society. Even young people tend to have a rather conservative and traditional view of politics, for example, they rank voting as the best way to influence politics (Myllyniemi, 2014). Civic activism in Finland is widespread, and there are long traditions of being oriented towards official organizations and associations, even though certain new and more informal forms of activism have also come about (Allaste & Saari 2020).

Young people may influence in official instances, such as student associations in schools, student organizations in universities and members of local councils and youth councils in municipalities. There are also plenty of social associations related to some specific issues, such as animal rights, environmental matters and LGBTQIA+ rights. Political youth organizations are quite an important part of the Finnish political system and joining these provides also a channel to take part in decision-making. Overall, youths are encouraged to be societally active in social media and be part of different organizations.

Youth work is carried out as a municipal service and in non-governmental organizations. In addition, parishes have their own youth work activities. According to research, youths' activity, and their willingness to influence and do voluntary work have grown in Finland. The reasons behind this are mainly globalization and digitalization. Youth work actors utilize digital means actively and consider the reinforcement of youths' digital skills as one of their main tasks. Finnish youth work actors consider youths brave and broad-minded and find young people's media literacy skills good. Youth workers appreciate youths' active participation in society and their willingness to influence but are on the other hand concerned about their increased usage of social media (Verke 2021).



Development and Implementation of a Digital Activism Project

The Council of Europe has required the member countries to highlight the activities of the Human Rights Council and human rights. The city of Turku is chosen to implement activities highlighting human rights as required by the Council of Europe for the member countries. In line with this purpose, Turku University of Applied Sciences (Turku UAS) cooperated with various organisations in coordinating a Human Rights Day, which was conducted in the city centre on May 4, 2023. A series of scientific seminars for the professionals, and informal events for the citizens, especially for the young people were held as part of the event. Turku UAS implement their digital activism project as

part of its role in the Human Rights Day in accordance with the goals of the DigiSMARTS project.

The project aimed to increase knowledge of human rights, specifically focusing on inclusion and safety among young people. In accordance with the DigiSMART, all the steps taken in the project were run by young people, i.e. Turku UAS students. The steps followed in development and implementation of the human rights awareness project are as follow:



1. A social media campaign for young people was carried out by students during the spring term in the city of Turku's Instagram account. The themes of the social media campaign were inclusion and safety, as there has been violence and disruptive behaviour in Turku's city centre, the aggressors, and victims both being youths themselves.

2. A webinar called "Youths' digital participation as a human right" were carried out inviting youth organisations, and other professionals working with young people, as well as for students studying youth work. Students presented the content, and outputs of the DigiSMARTS project.



3. A digital survey about human rights was carried out with 854 young people. In the survey, youths were encouraged to bring out their own experiences and views on human rights. Young people's experiences of safety in their own environments and the right to be themselves were selected as specific themes. "Kerro kantasi", a co-creative digital platform, is utilised as a tool for young people to express their views on human rights.

4. A human rights event aimed at young people was planned and carried out in the main shopping centre in Turku on the Human Rights Day on May 4, 2023. Organizations working with young people, such as the police, outreach youth work and several NGOs, participated in the event and presented their activities.

In the event, there was also a stage, in which different actors gave short speeches about the youths' human rights from the perspective of their own work. A national YouTube celebrity was recruited to host the event, to attract youths to come. The fields of the participating NGOs relate to the promotion of the disabled's, sexual minorities' and immigrants' position in society, and organizing preventive services supporting these groups.

3 viikkoa sitten



turkukaupunki

Seuraa



249 tykkää tästä

turkukaupunki Euroopan neuvoston ihmisoikeuspäivän nuortentapahtuma Hansa... lisää

3 viikkoa sitten

The Project Insights

Accessing and engaging with the target groups were stated as the main challenges of the project. The webinar was aimed at those working with young people. This event was marketed on Turku UAS's social media channels as well as through e-mail. In total, the invitation was delivered to 33 youth organizations and four municipality-level youth groups.

The target group of Human Rights Day and the survey were young people aged from 13 to 19, living in the city of Turku. Encouraging young people to participate in the Human Rights Day event required careful consideration when promoting the event. The event was marketed on

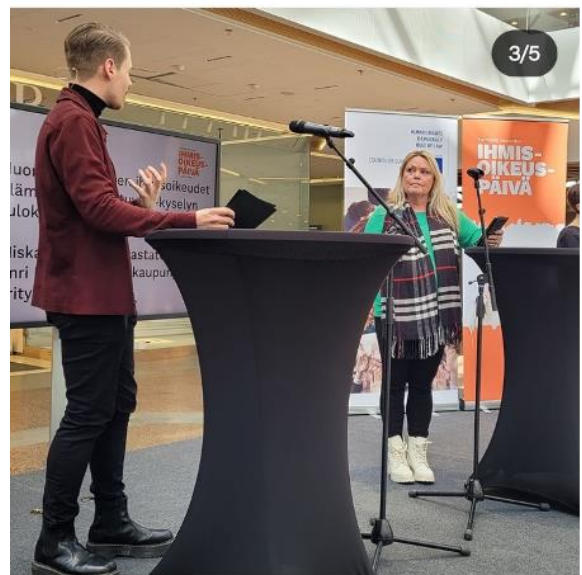
the City of Turku's social media channels and Human Rights Day's own website. Although there was a consideration that these channels were probably not the most suitable options for accessing the target group, they were chosen by the city of Turku. As to the survey, TURKU UAS asked the schools to use their own information channel to encourage young people to answer it. However, it has not known how many schools actually sent the link to their students.

The success of the project was especially related to cooperation between different actors: the City of Turku representatives, and students and teachers (who are also involved in the DigiSMARTS project) from the Turku UAS. The success of the project came from the content produced and the answering rate of the survey. The social media campaign on Instagram was of high



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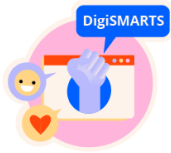
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quality and informative. The implementation of the webinar was smooth, and the content supported the all-encompassing theme well. The number of responses (854) in the survey aimed at young people was gratifyingly large. It was not possible to count the number of visitors to the Human Rights Day event due to the venue (shopping center). However, dozens of young people were present, getting information about human rights, inclusion, and activism, as well as about the activities of the participating organizations. Naturally, also random customers in the shopping centre also came to listen to the speeches and popped by to discuss with the organizations' representatives.

The key learning experiences were defined as follows:

- Defining the issue: It is important to first find out which themes matter *to* young people to become active in society, what kind of topics would they like to take a stand on and with what methods. Which issues are young people themselves interested in developing? In Turku UAS context, human rights turned out to be an issue, which youths consider as important.
- Communication: When targeting activities for young people, it is important to use channels preferred by them. According to the report, young people use TikTok for fun, but if they want more official information, they look for information on Instagram. Communication should also be timely, young people spend the most time on social media between 3 and 9 p.m. Therefore, marketing should be targeted close to the time when young people are expected to invest or participate.

Serbia

Background

Young people should have the right to determine their futures and actively participate in a democratic society. While it is considered a fundamental right for young people, it is known that they face various obstacles. Young people can be excluded and socially marginalized from participating in inclusive democratic processes. For instance, policies concerning the use of natural resources are of utmost importance to young people. Environmental crises will have the most significant impact on the living conditions of today's young people in the future. Current work revolves around using creative digital tools based on skills and knowledge introduced by the previous steps of the DigiSMARTs project, its activities and results by consulting and cooperating with the youth excluded from determining their future of the environment.





The term social exclusion refers to restricted or denied full access to rights, opportunities and resources which should be available for all. Being excluded from fundamental human rights such as housing, workforce, and democratic processes such as civic participation define social exclusion. The current exemplar focuses on the right of young people to determine the future of the environment in which they will live, as they are often excluded from it.

These ideas have been translated into action through a video titled "HOW TO," which will be presented in the next section, where we will systematically explain the steps involved. The content of the video is based on all previously formulated intellectual outputs IO1 to IO6 to create an output for IO7.

- IO1 was based on a needs assessment for the youth workforce on digital activism, so it provided background on the needs and challenges that young activists face when planning to take action actively for social, environmental or political issues.
- IO3 was an introduction to digital activism and digital exclusion concepts. It explored the digital Technologies available for use, and more importantly, provided ideas for the methods of planning a digital activism project. The HOW TO video aimed to provide a comprehensive and fun tool for young people to give them a road map for planning for a digital activism action.
- With the support of IO4, ideas on how to guide the youth to create social media identities and communities, to exist in the digital world, with an aim to launch a digital campaign on environmental issues.
- Creative ways of using different mediums such as poetry, animations, and digital storytelling was inspired by materials presented within the IO5. These would help the youth enhance their environmental campaign and make it more appealing.
- IO6 was helpful to introduce the youth to the practical way of their campaign. After the content of the project is determined, they could engage in crowdfunding to support their campaigns.

The HOW TO video will contribute to the IO7 by including a written part explaining the procedure, motivation, target groups, implications, replication potential in some other fields of activism, evaluation report based on the obtained feedback and possible recommendations for some future actions which are created in English and provided with Serbian subtitles.

Creating the "HOW TO" Video



The idea behind this project was described as to provide the young with creative and informative guidelines which would have an audio-visual form rather than a textual one, and all with the aim of introducing potential young activists to different avenues of action, as well as possible steps to be taken in order to start making a difference.

In the process of devising such audio-visual material, WEBIN have gone through all previous project results, drawing the most important and useful information from each previously designed intellectual output. The contribution, thus, has a form of a HOW-TO video intended for young activists to follow to be able to initiate their own digital activism campaigns. The procedure for creating the video included the following:

- Drafting the scenario: the scenario was based on key information taken from all previous intellectual outputs produced by the project consortium; thus, one can assert that the approach to this particular contribution was comprehensive
- Selecting and utilizing adequate software for video creation and editing
- Selecting and utilizing adequate software for audio creation and editing
- Subtitling the video and producing the final video
- Piloting the video among the young people interested in activism in general (13 young people participated in the process of piloting; the pilot participants were heads and employees of youth organisations, as well as volunteers and independent activists cooperating with different youth organisations across Serbia; we sent our invitation for participation in the piloting process to all key youth organisations, and we got responses from 13 young people).
- Receiving feedback from participants in the piloting process (the participants received a Google Form questionnaire which they filled in after watching the HOW-TO video);
- Analysis of the received feedback with the aim of producing some valuable recommendations for future actions

The result of the contribution is a HOW-TO video which has a form of a so-called whiteboard or doodle video, narrated in English with the possibility of being subtitled into partner languages. The video covers all segments of a potential digital activism campaign (in this case oriented towards environmental issues, but easily applicable to all other potential activism topics), from the initial idea to possible methods of securing funding to ensure quality results and sustainability of the implemented campaign.

Youth Views on the HOW TO Video.





The video created initially was piloted with 13 young activists from all over Serbia (5 male and 8 female) aged between 15 and 26 years. Among the participants, 7,7% were working as a director/president in a youth organization/NGO, 15,4% were employees in a youth organization/NGO, 69,2% were volunteers in a youth organization/NGO, and 7,7% were independent young activists.

In general, respondents provided fairly positive feedback when it comes to the offered video instruction. Among 13 respondents, the most of them totally agree that the video offers new insights and information regarding the topic of digital activism (N=11), video represents the topic in an interesting and intriguing manner (N=10), the video instruction introduces the topic in a gradual and logical manner (N=12), the presented video can be useful if they decided to engage in the topic of digital activism (N=9), and "they will recommend the video to everyone interested in the topic of digital activism (N=10); whilst rest of them also agree the aforementioned statement in 'merely'. Thus, one can assert that all respondents believed that the video was innovative and useful, made in an interesting manner, and presented in a logical and gradual way, as well as that it was worth recommending to other individuals or organisations interested in digital activism.

The survey also included three open-ended questions. When asked what they liked the most about the shared video, respondents replied in the following manner: concrete advice; presenting the risks one can encounter in the domain of digital activism; good and bad sides of digital activism; useful advice; the applicability of the video; advice regarding the way how to initiate a campaign; information about crowdfunding; do's and don'ts of a digital campaign; presenting the problems and offering solutions.

When asked about the least appealing aspects of the video instruction, respondents offered the following answers: the choice of animations could be different (one respondent stated that animations appear to be intended for the youngest), and the video could be shorter. There were additional comments, though, stating that the quality of the video is good and that this could compensate for its length. Generally speaking, respondents participating in the pilot session sent rather positive feedback regarding the HOW-TO video created as a sort of instruction and guide for young activists to become more independent when engaging in digital activism campaigns.

Tips and Recommendations

The following has been recommended in engaging with young people in the direction of digital activism:



- 1) Young people and inexperienced activists/volunteers do need help regarding the methods and approaches in the field of digital activism, and from this standpoint, the presented video was welcomed as a valuable guide through the necessary steps for devising potential digital campaigns
- 2) When creating tools for digital activism it would be more desirable to have several short videos rather than one long (a series of videos explaining one segment of digital activism); however, since we are dealing with project deliverables, this contribution encompasses all project outputs in one place
- 3) Youth activists welcome concrete advice and a hands-on approach, especially when it comes to methods and manners of funding which is a segment of (digital) activism that creates the biggest barrier to potential activists.

Cyprus

Background

In Cyprus, limited access to affordable and safe housing disproportionately affects young people from low-income families, those who have experienced homelessness, and individuals facing housing discrimination. Housing affordability is a major concern, particularly in urban and densely populated areas. The high cost of rent and scarcity of affordable housing options pose challenges for excluded youth with limited financial resources or unstable living conditions. The lack of affordable housing often leads to precarious living situations, further marginalizing them from society.

Discrimination in housing also impacts youth, with certain groups like immigrants, refugees, and ethnic minorities facing unequal treatment or barriers when trying to secure housing. Discrimination based on ethnicity, nationality, or social background contributes to exclusionary practices, making it difficult for these young people to find suitable housing options.

"Amplifying Voices for Affordable Housing" initiative is a digital activism project which has been run as part of the DigiSMARTS in Cyprus. The initiative aims to empower excluded youth by addressing the limited access to affordable and safe housing. Through collaborative efforts, young people and youth workers participate in forum discussions and explore digital activism to bring about positive change. This initiative aligns with the goals of the DigiSMARTS project, specifically its work package IO7. It serves as an example of youth-engaged digital projects by effectively utilizing digital tools and skills taught in earlier educational resources. The initiative focuses on various topics related to affordable housing, targeting marginalized groups such as refugees, women, disabled individuals,



students, and those facing economic challenges. By giving voice to these marginalized groups, the initiative aims to address their needs and promote community-driven solutions.



The initiative utilizes the DigiSMARTS Platform and social media platforms like Facebook to facilitate discussions and engagement among participants. The platform's forum section provides a virtual space for participants to share ideas, personal stories, and collaboratively develop strategies. The initiative aims to educate and empower excluded youth about forum discussions, enabling them to express their ideas and influence policy changes. By fostering a safe and inclusive environment, the initiative aims to equip young people with the skills and confidence to actively participate in shaping their communities.



Amplifying Voices for Affordable Housing

Eight participants successfully engaged in a forum discussion as part of the "Amplifying Voices for Affordable Housing" initiative. They shared their insights and contributed to addressing the issue of affordable housing for youth. The process involved several steps:





1. Outreach and Invitation: Personalized emails were sent to potential participants, including youth workers and excluded young people. They were invited to join the forum discussion and a dedicated event was created on Facebook to provide information and encourage participation.
2. Presentation on Forum Discussions and Digital Activism: Participants received an overview of forum discussions and their role in digital activism. The importance of their contributions and the potential impact on policy changes and community-driven solutions were highlighted. Guidance was given on managing discussions and dealing with hate comments.

Importance and Impact of Forum Discussions

Forum discussions have the potential to:

- Foster Inclusive Dialogue
- Generate New Ideas and Solutions
- Build Communities and Networks

Forum discussions empower individuals to:

- Use digital platforms and tools for social and political change.
- Express their opinions, raise awareness about important issues, and mobilize collective action.
- Amplify their voices and perspectives on various social, political, and environmental issues.
- Be heard and contribute to a more inclusive and democratic society.
- Create advocacy and grassroots movements
- Support, share information, and organize collective actions towards specific causes or policy changes.

Definition of Discussion Forum

Information Technology
Gartner Glossary

“An environment where participants can pose issues for discussion and respond to any contribution, thus creating threaded discussions that can spawn a discussion tree where the discussion branches out in many directions or subthreads.”

Key features of a discussion forum :

- Collaborative Environment
- Knowledge Sharing (exchange of information, insights, and resources)
- Community Building (build networks and relationships among like-minded individuals)
- Inclusive Participation
- Idea Generation (creative solutions and strategies through collective brainstorming)
- Continuous Engagement (ongoing and in-depth reflection and dialogue).
- Valuable repository of searchable information.
- Anonymity and Privacy (self expression freely without fear of judgment or retribution)

<https://www.gartner.com/en/information-technology/glossary/discussion-forum>

3. Accessing the Forum Discussion: Participants were guided to access the dedicated forum discussion section on the DigiSMARTS Platform, specifically focusing on affordable housing in



Cyprus. They were encouraged to explore existing topics and create new ones related to housing affordability, policies, homelessness, and marginalized communities.

4. **Engaging in the Discussion:** Participants were invited to express their ideas, share personal stories, and contribute to collaborative strategies for addressing housing issues. They were encouraged to interact with other participants' comments and maintain a positive and constructive tone.
5. **Completion of the Questionnaire:** After actively participating in the forum discussion, participants were asked to complete a brief questionnaire. The questionnaire aimed to gather feedback on their experience, insights gained, and suggestions for improvement.
6. **Project Duration and Closure:** Participants were requested to engage in the forum discussions for a specific period of time. They were reminded to communicate respectfully and positively throughout the project. They were informed that the DigiSMARTS platform remains accessible as a resource for further exploration of digital activism and youth engagement. The initiative was conducted under the Erasmus+ project DigiSMARTS, and participants were thanked for their contributions.

Youth Views on the Project

The post-forum discussion questionnaire aimed to gather feedback from participants of the "Amplifying Voices for Affordable Housing in Cyprus" activity. All eight participants completed the questionnaire, which consisted of six close-ended questions. The results of the questionnaire are as follows:

All eight participant:

1. Mentioned an increased understanding of forum discussions and their role in digital activism.
2. Felt that the forum discussions provided a safe and inclusive space for expressing their opinions.
3. Felt comfortable expressing their ideas and views during the forum discussions.
4. Found the forum discussions engaging and meaningful.
5. Mentioned that the activity inspired them to take action or participate in future digital activism projects.





In addition, participants expressed positive attitudes towards future participation in forum discussions or other digital activism initiatives. Three participants (37.5%) were likely to continue participating, two participants (25%) were very likely to do so, and three participants (37.5%) had neutral attitudes. The feedback collected from the questionnaire will inform future digital activism initiatives.

Barriers and Enablers

The "Amplifying Voices for Affordable Housing" digital activism initiative encountered barriers including limited awareness, technological challenges, and time constraints. Enablers consisted of personalized invitations and a comprehensive presentation on digital activism.,

Barriers:

- ***Limited Awareness:*** One of the primary barriers encountered was the limited awareness among the target audience about the role of digital activism. This resulted in a smaller initial pool of participants and required more effort in outreach and engagement activities to reach the desired number of participants.
- ***Technological Challenges:*** Some participants faced technological challenges, such as limited internet access or technical difficulties in navigating the DigiSMARTS platform. These challenges hindered their active participation and required additional support and guidance to ensure their effective engagement.
- ***Time Constraints:*** Participants, particularly youth workers, faced time constraints due to their other professional commitments. Balancing their regular responsibilities with active participation in the forum discussions posed a challenge, and some participants were unable to contribute as frequently or extensively as desired.

Enablers:

- ***Personalized Invitations:*** The personalized email invitations sent to potential participants played a significant role in generating interest and encouraging their participation. The direct communication approach helped establish a connection and conveyed the importance of their involvement in addressing affordable housing challenges.
- ***Comprehensive Presentation:*** The presentation on forum discussions and digital activism provided participants with a comprehensive understanding of the project's purpose, goals, and the significance of their contributions. It equipped them with the knowledge and skills





necessary to engage effectively in the forum discussions, handle hate comments, and conduct constructive discussions on the platform.

Lessons learned for future projects involve early engagement and awareness, a user-friendly platform, flexibility in participation, and continuous support. Tips and recommendations for individuals engaging in forum discussions or digital activism projects include staying informed, seeking collaborative spaces, being respectful, sharing personal experiences, engaging in active listening, contributing thoughtfully, embracing diversity, engaging beyond the forum, collaborating and networking, and providing feedback. These insights aim to enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of digital activism initiatives.

The United Kingdom

Background

The idea of "thunderclap events" which are online activities where people unite digitally to petition organizations or raise awareness about issues are outlined in this section. These events leverage the power of numbers within a short timeframe to create a greater impact on policies or practices. The steps for organizing a thunderclap event are suggested based on input from young people. The history of thunderclap events is explained, highlighting their use of coordinated social media activity to amplify messages. The original Thunderclap platform, though now focused on marketing, was known for its ability to simultaneously publish posts to increase visibility. The concept of flooding social media with content for a cause remains relevant even without specific apps. Thunderclaps are effective for coordinated online action, particularly in youth activism concerning various topics like inequality, crime, employment, the environment, and discrimination. The next section outlines lessons learned from diverse experiences in running thunderclap events, offering recommendations for steps and considerations. This part does not based on a real life Thunderclap exemplar but provides a road map for running an online activism act as such.

Indeed, by adhering to the steps outlined above, which have been developed in collaboration with young advisors, it will be possible to ensure the success of a well-executed thunderclap event. The crucial factor is to involve young individuals right from the start, allowing them to have a sense of ownership and influence throughout the event's lifecycle. This participatory approach empowers young people and guarantees their perspectives are at the heart of the entire process.

Steps for undertaking a Thunderclap based on youth advice and voices





- 1. Centering Youth Voices and Advisors:** The primary focus in youth-related thunderclap events is to give young people, particularly those from colleges, high schools, and higher education institutions, a central role. Their voices should guide the event's planning, execution, and consultation on necessary steps.
- 2. Committee Formation:** Establish a committee that includes young individuals and potentially key stakeholders. Encourage involvement and ownership from all committee members. Consider a leadership structure, which might involve rotating leadership roles among committee members at different stages. Define roles clearly to ensure everyone understands their responsibilities.
- 3. Initial Planning and Target Audience:** Select a topic that resonates with young people and is relevant to their experiences. Engage young people and collaborators in defining the project's vision and objectives. Topics related to youth activism, such as digital inequalities, crime victimization, unemployment, mental health, wellbeing, and racism, were suggested. Collaboratively decide on the focus of the event.
- 4. Geographical Scope and Target Audience:** Determine whether the event will have a global reach or focus on specific geographic areas. Consider which stakeholders you want to influence through the thunderclap – local authorities, national governments, or international organizations. This decision affects the event's effectiveness.
- 5. Choosing Platforms:** Choose suitable platforms for the thunderclap event based on your target audience's preferences and engagement patterns. Be aware of platform usage statistics among your audience. Selecting the right platform can impact participation rates and youth engagement.
- 6. Recruit Ambassadors:** Consider recruiting real-world and online/social media ambassadors who can help promote the event within their networks. Leverage existing connections and build new ones to increase support and outreach.
- 7. Incentives for Participation:** Evaluate the need for incentives to encourage participation. Incentives can range from monetary rewards to recognition and acknowledgment. Tailor incentives to align with the preferences of your target audience.
- 8. Cost-Effective Execution:** Plan for a cost-effective event that effectively reaches and communicates with youth. Prepare your networks and connections to spread information and encourage engagement. Address any gaps in your network by involving individuals who can help market the event.





9. **Pre-Event Communication:** Build momentum leading up to the event by maintaining interest and engagement. Use platforms like Twitter and YouTube to keep the target audience informed and involved. Consider creating groups or posting videos to update participants.
10. **Designing the Message:** Carefully craft the message you want participants to convey during the thunderclap event. Clarify the purpose and expected actions. Provide clear instructions on creating and sharing messages, ensuring that participants know whom to tag and what content is appropriate.
11. **Sustainability:** Consider the sustainability of the event and its impact. Depending on the issue and objectives, the thunderclap event might be a starting point rather than an endpoint. Provide resources, websites, or landing pages to sustain participants' interest and involvement beyond the event.

Italy

Background

We have engaged the youth of local rural community of Cori, a small village 60 kms away from Rome, where Polygonal is positioned. We have engaged a group of young people to actively reflect on climate change, and how to digitally be engaged in this topic. What we did was to:

- Understand the concept of environmental activism, through examples and video projection
- Understand how to craft data and how to monitor them as a basis for environmental activism
- Reflect on how to concretely put into practice environmental work and apply in everyday life.

Youth views and the local activities

As Polygonal, we run the local library and historical archive of Cori municipality, and that is where we held the local debates (some photos below).



We have engaged three educators to discuss three different points, like the digital presence of young people, the possibility of development hacking tools that can reuse data and make sure to understand how data and open data can be used.

Young people expressed worrying regarding:



1. The gap between the digital advocacy and the concrete work at local level – how to engage more people? How to motivate young people enough to, for example, clean a neighbourhood?
2. The necessity of having also physical groups to nurture digital advocacy, like in the form of meetups
3. The lack of recognition of youth work in Italy, as it often ends up in a volunteering work, and where organising is complicated.
4. The digital gap of young people – beyond using Instagram and TikTok, what can also be done?

Tips and Recommendations

With DigiSMARTs project, engaged young people have had the opportunity to hear about very interesting concepts and dynamics, and the suggestions which were collected from educators and young people regarded:

- The necessity of bridging digital activism with offline work, as many times green activism is limited to an individual dimension (like buying organic products or purchasing second-hand products), and not being involved in the actual social dimension of the community.
- The necessity of improving digital skills of young people to become creators, and not just digital consumers of Tik Tok or other platforms. This was especially evident with the discussion about the reflection on data and how to boost digital campaigns and data representation

Conclusion

This report aimed to summarise the digital youth activism exemplars that were developed and implemented across partner countries including Turkiye, Finland, Serbia, United Kingdom, Italy and Cyprus as the final step of the DigiSMART project. In Turkiye, university students broadcasted a podcast series about mental health problems and their underlying factors. They advertised these podcasts by creating accounts on various social media platforms. These podcasts addressed a wide range of issues among university students, ranging from concerns about unemployment to economic worries related to housing, as well as stress-related eating problems. In Finland, four activities were carried out by university students towards the human rights theme, including social media campaign on inclusion and safety, a webinar on youths' digital participation as a human right, and a digital survey to address experiences and views on human rights. Finally, a human rights event aimed at





young people was carried out in a shopping mall. In Serbia, a HOW TO video was created and piloted with young people. This video provides the young with creative and informative guidelines with the aim of introducing potential young activists to different avenues of action, as well as possible steps to be taken in order to start making a difference. In Cyprus, young people successfully engaged in a forum discussion as part of the "Amplifying Voices for Affordable Housing" initiative. They shared their insights and contributed to addressing the issue of affordable housing for youth. The UK partners provided a solid road map for running a thunderclap putting the perspective of youth at the core. In Italy, young people were gathered at Cori municipality to run debates on conducting digital activism actions on climate concerns.

The insights of each partner country gained throughout the development and implementation of their projects were summarised including the enablers and barriers of the presented projects, as well as recommendations and further conclusions for the future organisation working with youth towards digital activism project. In Turkey, the high self-confidence of the leading students in creating digital content and utilising DigiSMART online educational materials that were produced in earlier work packages was defined as enablers of producing the podcasts. However, students had initial difficulties in accessing technological infrastructure to create their activism content. In Finland, accessing and engaging with the target groups were stated as the main challenges of the project. They recommended using the most preferred channels, such as social media to access to and engage with young people. Our partner defined that cooperating with different actors, e.g. city of Turku, students, teachers and the DigiSMART team helped them to successfully implement their activities. In Serbia, our partner team recommended using visual material, e.g., short videos, to provide a guide for young activists. In Cyprus, digital activism initiative encountered barriers including limited awareness, technological challenges, and time constraints. Enablers consisted of personalized invitations and a comprehensive presentation on digital activism. In Italy, young people raised some concerns about running an activism project digitally on climate. These were linking digital advocacy with local actions and motivating youth participation, utilizing physical meetups to enhance digital advocacy efforts, recognizing the complexities of youth work in Italy, and addressing the digital gap among young people beyond popular social media platforms.

Reporting to digital activism tools has become increasingly important in youth activism for several reasons, including accessibility, mobilisation, visibility, innovation and amplifying marginal voices. Digital activism tools provide a platform for youth activists to reach a wide audience, transcending geographical boundaries and socioeconomic limitations. These tools also facilitate the rapid mobilization and organization of youth activists. Online platforms allow activists to connect with like-



minded individuals, form communities, and coordinate efforts more efficiently. Moreover, the digital realm offers a vast audience and the potential for viral reach. Through compelling content and storytelling, they can capture attention, spark conversations, and influence public opinion on critical issues. Digital activism tools empower youth activists to think creatively and explore innovative approaches to advocacy. Finally, digital platforms provide a space for marginalized voices to be heard.

It's important to note that while digital activism tools offer numerous benefits, they are not without limitations. The digital space can be crowded, and capturing attention amidst the vast amount of information is a challenge. Moreover, certain communities may lack internet access or face digital divides, limiting their participation. Nonetheless, digital activism remains a powerful and essential tool for youth activists to drive change, engage with others, and make their voices heard on a global scale.

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