RAY-DIGI

Research-based analysis of European youth programmes

Exploring successful approaches to digital youth work

2021 – 2024

Written by

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Research report

October 2024

Our research project RAY DIGI on the role of digitalisation in youth work and non-formal learning in the context of the European youth programmes aims to explore dimensions of digitalisation, document the progress of digitalisation in the European youth programmes, and develop recommendations to strengthen and support digital dimensions in youth work.

This RAY-DIGI research report summarises the transnational analysis of 64 case studies, spanning 41 countries*.

* **European countries involved in the case studies:** Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye and United Kingdom. **Non-European countries involved in the case studies:** Bolivia, India, Kenya, Morocco and Zimbabwe.

The research work underpinning this report was designed and implemented by Youth Policy Labs at transnational level and by the RAY Network partners from Belgium (Flemish Community), Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, North Macedonia, Netherlands, Portugal, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, and Türkiye at national level.

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Where available, national research reports can be requested from the respective National Agencies and their research partners

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EXPLORING SUCCESSFUL APPROACHES TO DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

RAY DIGI: FINAL REPORT

WRITTEN BY

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BERLIN, OCTOBER 2024

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1 — INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies potentially have an influence on all dimensions of youth work. First and foremost, digital technologies significantly impact young people, their habits and needs, as well as their values and attitudes. In addition, digital technologies also have a considerable influence on youth workers, both as individuals and as professionals. And last but not least, digitalisation[1] also shapes and transforms youth work practices and settings and the societal contexts in which youth work operates. In short, digitalisation adds yet another chapter to the ever-evolving, and ever "unfinished practice" (Davies, 2005) of youth work.

One of the most influential conceptualisations of the role of digital media and technologies in youth work has been the notion of digital youth work. It originated in the context of European youth work[2] and was defined by the *Expert Group on Risks, Opportunities, and Implications of Digitalisation for Youth, Youth Work, and Youth Policy* that was established during the European Union Work Plan for Youth 2016-2018 (European Commission, 2017).[3]

The concept of digital youth work as defined by the expert group is based on these main pillars:

- Digital youth work means proactively using or addressing digital media and technology in youth work.
- Digital youth work is not a youth work method – digital youth work can be included in any youth work setting (open youth work, youth information and counselling, youth clubs, detached youth work...).
- Digital youth work has the same goals as youth work in general, and using digital media and technology in youth work should always support these goals.
- Digital youth work can happen in face-to-face situations as well as in online environments – or in a mixture of these two. Digital media and technology can be used either as a tool, an activity, or a content in youth work.

For the study at hand, we set out to explore the concept of digital youth work as a practice: We studied successful digital youth work projects within the European Youth Programmes and beyond. Based on over 60 case studies, this report takes a holistic view of digital youth work by exploring perspectives from both youth workers and young people. It examines successful digital youth work practices, digital competences of youth workers and young people, structural success factors of digital youth work, as well as how young people and youth workers envision the future of digital youth work.

WHO SHOULD READ THIS REPORT – AND WHY?

If you are a youth work practitioner, this report will provide you with a deeper understanding of how digital technologies impact youth work practices, values and goals (chapter 3). You will gain insights into young people's digital realities and how they are translated into digital youth work (chapter 4). Annexed, you will also find reflection tools that were developed based on our research. These tools will enable you to reflect young people's digital competences in your work and to plan future digital youth work projects.

1 While the term digitisation commonly refers to merely turning things digital (e.g. communicating digitally instead of writing a letter) digitalisation in addition also takes the societal implication of digital technologies into account.

2 Anne Kivimäe (Kivimäe, 2019) provides an excellent summary of how digitalisation was reflected in European youth policies resulting in the conceptualisation of smart youth work or digital youth work. The trajectories of the term digital youth work in Nordic countries and its introduction to European policies is reflected in (Kiviniemi & Tuominen, 2017)

3 The expert group's recommendations can be found at https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/fbc18822-07cb-11e8-b8f5-01aa75ed71a1.

If you are a youth work strategist, our research will provide valuable insights into the motivations of youth workers and young people to engage in digital youth work (chapter 3.1). In chapter 3.4, we propose a training approach for enhancing youth workers' digital competences that aims at alleviating the reluctance some may feel towards digital youth work. Chapter 4 delves into the contributions of European youth work to young people's digital skills and identifies which competences need strengthening. Finally, chapter 5 offers insights into the structural success factors of digital youth work, while chapter 6 provides you with a forward-looking perspective on the future of digital youth work.

If you are a young person, our research will give you insights into how young people experience digital youth work (chapter 3) and how digital youth work could contribute to your digital competences (chapter 4). And last but not least, chapters 5 and 6 will equip you with inspiration and context to join the conversation about the future of digital youth work.

If you are a youth work thinker, you most likely will enjoy the conceptual perspective our research offers: By reflecting on the (troubled) relationship between non-formal youth work and digital technologies (chapter 3) we can refine our understanding of how digital technologies influence the approaches, values, and attitudes within non-formal youth work. Based on our analysis, we propose a definition of successful digital youth work practices (chapter 3.5). If you are keen to do even more conceptual thinking, please read our analytical overview of how digital competences are understood in the field of non-formal youth work (chapter 4.4).

If you are a patient reader, you will most likely read the report from cover to cover. If you are an effective reader, the paragraphs above will guide you on where to begin and how best to focus your attention. However, if you are undecided and unsure about how much of your valuable time you would like to dedicate to digital youth work research, we suggest starting with the 10 lessons on digital youth work that follow.

But no matter who you are, and which approach you take, we do appreciate you taking the time to ponder these lines and wish you an insightful reading adventure!

10 LESSONS ON DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

RAY DIGI is a research project exploring dimensions of digitalisation in European youth work. As part of this project, we conducted 64 case studies on successful digital youth work projects within the European youth programmes and beyond. In focus groups, young people and youth workers explored key aspects of digital youth work, such as motives and inspirations, experiences, success factors, and visions for digital youth work. The following are the main lessons we gleaned about digital youth work:

1. Digital technologies attract people to youth work!

Digital youth work attracts both youth workers and young people with a similar appeal as non-digital youth work. For instance, young people are particularly motivated to join digital youth work by the prospect of spending time with friends or making new ones. However, some youth workers and young people highlighted that they might not have engaged in youth work if it were not for the digital technology aspect.

2. Successful digital youth work is inextricably rooted in non-formal youth work!

All digital youth work projects studied as part of our research can be described as great examples of non-formal youth work. Key features and values of non-formal youth work, such as being a relational, youth-centred, and empowering practice, are also pointed out as successful pedagogical features of digital youth work. Our research showcases that digital technologies and non-formal youth work can build meaningful synergies.

3. Successful digital youth work practices can be defined!

Successful digital youth work practices a) apply approaches, attitudes, and values of non-formal youth work to explore digital technologies and phenomena with young people b) utilise digital technologies to strengthen features and goals of non-formal youth work and c) translate aspects of non-formal education into digital environments.

4. Digital youth work ≠ online youth work!

Digital youth work can happen in online environments. However, many successful digital youth work happens face-to-face. For instance, both young people and youth workers value offline settings when creatively engaging with digital technologies in a hands-on manner. Further, digital technologies often foster positive group experiences on-site, e.g., when gaming or recording a podcast together. The meaningful combination of online and offline is often described as a key success factor of digital youth work.

5. Not just insecure!

In discussions around digital youth work, youth workers' insecurities in using digital technologies are often described. However, to explain the reluctance of some youth workers to engage in digital youth work, one must go beyond the notion of insecurity.

Most of the concerns raised about digital technologies are related to core youth work values. For instance, many fear that online environments might hinder building trust with young people or exclude some from participating in youth work offers. Youth workers' training needs to take these concerns seriously.

A focus on how digital technologies can be used to strengthen features of youth work and on how to alleviate the limitations and risks they present for non-formal learning could result in more youth workers embracing digital youth work.

6. Successful digital youth work relates to and expands young people's digital realities!

Young people and youth workers agree that digital youth work should relate to young people's digital realities. However, they also agree that digital youth work should not simply replicate these realities but has to reach beyond them. For young people, the added value of digital youth work often is having access to digital technologies, gaining new competences, or the experience of using digital technologies purposefully.

7. Successful digital youth work strives for a holistic approach!

The notion of going beyond just using digital technologies is often stressed when discussing digital youth work. Youth workers, for example, aim at fostering attitudes such as a critical mindset or awareness. Another topic highlighted is the distinction between using digital technologies vs. actually understanding digital technologies. Therefore, we suggest the use of the concept of digital competences as defined by DigComp, the European digital competence framework for citizens. It describes digital competences as a combination of skills, knowledge, and attitudes.

8. Focus on information and data literacy, privacy and safety, and digital well-being!

Young people indicated a need for support with regard to information and data literacy, privacy and safety, and digital well-being. At the same time, our research suggests that these are competences that are not given high priority within the European youth programmes.

9. Do not forget about the structural dimensions of digital youth work!

Adding a meaningful digital dimension to youth work requires investments in digital infrastructures and capacities as well as new types of funding schemes. Digital technologies and products are typically not a one-time investment but require long-term maintenance. Another main structural challenge of digital youth work is the lack of digitally skilled and confident youth workers.

10. Overcoming Covid-19 in digital youth work: Building back stronger!

The Covid-19 pandemic was a decisive moment for digital youth work. For many, it was the first encounter with digital technologies in youth work.

> *However, the pandemic does not provide a blueprint for successful digital youth work.*

Understandably, going online was often merely an ad hoc reaction to pandemic restrictions. After the pandemic, however, there is a need for strategic planning. While the involvement of digital technologies during the pandemic aimed at ensuring access to youth work in times of social distancing, youth work should now aim at providing young people with access to digital technologies and skills.

In addition, digital youth work spaces need to be diversified. During the pandemic much of youth work moved online; however, both youth workers and young people are expressing a strong desire for on-site encounters. Furthermore, the pandemic led to a high degree of digital fatigue. Overcoming this fatigue will be a major challenge to digital youth work's near future.

2 — RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1 CONTEXT

This explorative study is part of the research project on the role of digitalisation in youth work and non-formal learning in the context of the European youth programmes – RAY DIGI. The research project aims at systematically researching digitalisation in the context of European youth work and developing recommendations to strengthen and support the digital dimensions of youth work. This document is the final report of module 4 of RAY DIGI.[4] The results presented are intended to feed into the research objectives of RAY DIGI and aim at helping to answer the main research questions of the overall project:

- What are the key gaps between the relevance of digitalisation in young people's lives and its lagging translation into youth work practice, and how can these gaps be reduced?
- What are the competences necessary for youth workers to add meaningful digital dimensions to their work with young people, and how can youth workers be supported in developing these competences?
- What are the competences necessary for youth workers to enable young people to effectively deal with the digital dimensions of their lives, and how can youth workers be supported in developing these competences?
- How can youth work be supported in building and cultivating a unique character for non-formal learning in digital/ online environments?

2.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study at hand represents the most comprehensive analysis of (European) digital youth work projects to date: it is based on 64 case studies conducted across Europe. One case study consists of desk research and two focus groups: one in-depth group interview with project teams and one with young participants. Both young people and project teams were invited to reflect on various aspects of digital youth work, such as:

- Motives and inspirations to become active in digital youth work
- Overall success factors of digital youth work based on their experience
- Experiences and perceptions of digital youth work, settings, features, values, and (pedagogical) attitudes of successful digital youth work
- The relationships between digital youth work and non-formal education
- Gaps between young people's needs and realities and current youth work practices
- The future of digital youth work and visions for its development

The focus groups were conducted based on guidelines that proposed a semi-structured approach with a list and descriptions of topics.

2.2.1 SAMPLING

The sample was composed in cooperation with the national RAY DIGI partners. Each partner identified successful digital youth work projects carried out in their national context. All projects are from within the context of Erasmus+ Youth and beyond and align with the definition of digital youth work provided by the Expert Group (European Commission, 2017).

To supplement the sample, the RAY transnational research team conducted additional case studies. The focus of these were 1) adding more national contexts and 2) including more case studies from outside the European youth programmes.

The final sample consists of a total of 65 case studies (54 conducted by national partners + 11 conducted by the RAY transnational research team). Slovenia contributed with six case studies; Finland and Germany with five; Flanders (Belgium), Estonia, Ireland, Portugal, Romania and Türkiye with four; Italy and Poland with three; and Czechia, Greece, Lithuania and Malta with two case studies.

2.2.2 DATA ANALYSIS

In the analysis of the national and transnational reports, a two-staged qualitative coding methodology was applied. Initially, an open coding phase facilitated the inductive construction of a preliminary coding frame. Subsequently, this framework was refined and expanded by consulting the RAY DIGI research partners. The qualitative data analysis was conducted by means of computer-assisted qualitative coding.

4 For detailed information on all research modules of RAY DIGI, please visit the RAY DIGI project website: researchyouth.net/projects/digi/. RAY DIGI was implemented in cooperation with the strategic national agency co-operation on digital youth work. The RAY DIGI research activities fed into the outcomes of the SNAC: oph.fi/en/education-development-and-internationalisation/long-term-cooperation-projects/digital-youth-work.

2.2.3 RESEARCH ETHICS AND DATA PROTECTION

The RAY Network uses the Code of Ethics of the International Sociological Association (ISA) as a guiding ethics framework, which is available online at www.isa-sociology.org in English, French and Spanish. National research partners may choose to use a non-conflicting code of ethics as a reference; for example, the code of ethics of their national association of sociology.

National research partners are responsible for ensuring compliance with the national implementation of the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) during their work on the national research components, while the transnational research team will ensure compliance during its work on the transnational research components.

2.3 CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

Our sample includes stakeholders from 34 European countries, along with five non-European countries[5]. A majority of these projects (about 67%) received funding from the European youth programmes, while a smaller but still significant portion (around 33%) originates from outside this framework.

As described above, each case study was intended to be based on two in-depth focus groups: one with project teams and one with young participants. However – and this has to be pointed out as a limitation of our study – recruiting young people for interviews has proven to be considerably more challenging. Thus, only roughly 60 percent of all case studies (35) actually include interviews with young project participants. As a result, our sample consists of 64 focus groups with project teams and only 35 focus groups with project participants.

The projects studied can be clustered according to the definition of digital youth work proposed by the Expert Group (European Commission, 2017). As cited above, the role of digital media and technology in digital youth work is characterised as either being a **tool** for, the **content** of, and/or an **activity** in youth work[6][7]:

- **Around 34%** of the projects studied **predominantly use digital technologies as a tool** for youth work. In these instances, digital technologies serve an instrumental role. Digital technologies are applied to enhance or amplify youth work practices or to provide access to youth work. Typical examples from our research sample would be online workshops, the usage of websites, social media platforms or apps, or the application of digital tools to facilitate youth work processes (e.g. digital tools that foster collaboration or participation and reflection).
- **Roughly 24%** of the projects within our study **predominantly address digitalisation as a content** of youth work. These projects typically engage young people in understanding and navigating digital phenomena. Topics are e.g., privacy and data protection; disinformation and information literacy; forms of digital violence and digital well-being; or aspects of digital youth cultures.
- **Approximately 42%** of the projects **applied digital technologies predominantly as an activity** in youth work. These initiatives actively involve young people in direct interaction with various digital technologies. This includes a wide range of activities, such as digital gaming, mastering new digital tools, acquiring coding skills, engaging in tinkering or maker activities, and creating digital content.

Another **key distinction** in our analysis relates to the spatial dimension of the projects studied:

About a quarter of the projects examined were conducted mainly in **offline settings**, while **roughly 20%** relied almost exclusively on **online spaces**. The **majority of projects** used both online and offline spaces, thus **taking a blended approach**.

5 **European countries involved in the case studies:** Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye and United Kingdom. **Non-European countries involved in the case studies:** Bolivia, India, Kenya, Morocco and Zimbabwe.

6 In reality, this distinction is often not clear-cut. For instance, numerous projects that offer hands-on experiences with digital technologies also take time to reflect on these technologies. In this case, digital technology would also be the content of youth work. Hence, we have categorised the projects according to which aspect is more salient.

7 Please note that the distribution of project types in our sample most likely does not represent youth work realities across Europe. Since this is a study of best-practice projects, the distribution rather provides a hint as to what kind of projects are considered successful.

3 — EXPLORING (PEDAGOGICAL) FEATURES AND EXPERIENCES OF SUCCESSFUL DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

> *Young people are satisfied with digital youth work if it effectively engages them, addresses their interests and needs, provides opportunities for personal growth and skill development, fosters a sense of belonging and connection, and maintains a safe and inclusive online environment.*
>
> **– ROMANIAN REPORT –**

Digital youth work pursues the same goals and values as youth work in general. It has thus been deliberately positioned within this sphere, simply characterised as a youth work practice that proactively utilises and addresses digital media and technology. We propose to take this conception seriously. In this chapter, we are therefore going to explore the impact and role digital media and technologies have on youth work practices, on individuals in the non-formal youth field, and on their goals, values and attitudes.

Before tracing the effects of digital technologies on youth work, it is essential to establish a deeper understanding of this field in general. Kiilakoski and Kauppinen (Kiilakoski & Kauppinen, 2021) state that defining youth work is a "perennial problem". They elaborate that youth work is, however, increasingly defined by the notion of non-formal learning.

Non-formal learning is often described by contrasting it with formal education. It is simply defined as learning that is not taking place within formal educational institutions. However, Corney et. al (Corney et al., 2023) condensed global perspectives on non-formal learning by identifying features and pedagogical beliefs shared across diverse youth work cultures:

- Participation in non-formal education is **voluntary**.
- Non-formal learning and education is **intentional** and **planned** but **flexible**, **adaptive**, and **potentially unpredictable**.
- Non-formal education with young people is **youth-centred**, i.e., directly **based on young people's interests and needs**.
- Non-formal education is **experience-based and process-oriented**.
- Non-formal education's objectives are **not set by an external** mandated **curriculum**.
- **Methods** used **are diverse** just as the contents and areas where non-formal education is applied.
- Non-formal education aims for **empowerment** and **emancipation** and challenges **exclusion**.
- It also aims for social and **personal development** and tends to privilege **soft skills over hard skills**.
- Non-formal education is often described as a **relational practice**.
- Frequently, non-formal education is conceptualised as a **value-driven**, **critical practice** that **counters hegemony**.

In the following we will take a closer look at the effects digital technologies have on these core features of youth work. We will do so by first looking at the motives and inspirations of both youth workers and young people to get involved in youth work (chapter 3.1). Chapter 3.2 then investigates key (pedagogical) features of successful digital youth work projects and the role digital technologies play in these projects. We will then condense our findings by proposing a new training approach for digital youth workers (chapter 3.4) and a definition of successful digital youth work practices (chapter 3.5).

3.1 MOTIVES AND INSPIRATIONS

3.1.1 YOUTH WORKERS MOTIVES AND INSPIRATIONS

As part of our focus groups we asked youth workers across Europe and beyond about motives and inspirations that prompted them to engage in digital youth work. While working with young people and facilitating non-formal education can be inherently motivating, there are specific factors that draw individuals to engage with digital media and technologies in youth work settings:

DIGITAL YOUTH WORK AS AN ENTRY POINT INTO THE YOUTH FIELD

> *Youth work, involving both professional and voluntary roles, attracts individuals with diverse (educational) backgrounds. This also holds true for digital youth work: Existing digital youth work projects have involved not only youth workers, but also other pro-*

> *fessionals, such as programmers, mental health practitioners and digital artists. Future research should consider an analysis of existing characteristics of those facilitating digital youth work to provide more clarity on this topic.*

– PAWLUCZUK & ȘERBAN, 2022 –

Our research did not explicitly focus on the educational or professional backgrounds of those delivering digital youth work, but our interviews confirm a diverse range of backgrounds among digital youth workers. Most had prior experience in non-digital youth work, while for others, digital youth work served as an entry point into the field. These individuals, often with technical backgrounds, were motivated to share their knowledge with young people. They highlighted a lack of spaces for young tech enthusiasts to connect and discuss digital technology and culture. They felt that this type of opportunity had also been missing in their youth, and this gap prompted them to create such spaces by engaging in youth work:

> *The organisers themselves oftentimes had the experience in their youth that their passion for technologies wasn't reflected in their circles and they didn't have anyone to turn to with their questions. Creating a network of like-minded young people seems to be one of the most important aspirations.*

– TRANSNATIONAL REPORT –

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

> *Motives to start and get involved in the project are related to giving (or gaining) capacities on digital non-formal education [...]. Gamification, serious gaming and non-formal education principles were important sources of inspiration.*

– PORTUGUESE REPORT –

Individuals with prior experience in youth work are drawn to digital youth work for various reasons, including a desire for both professional advancement and personal growth. Engaging with and involving digital technologies in youth work settings offers the possibility to try or learn something new and to rethink or innovate youth work practices. However, some youth workers interviewed stated that they are simply enthusiastic about digital technologies and are thus motivated to involve them in their work with young people.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

> *During the covid-19 pandemic, when events were not allowed to be carried out in person, there was a high demand for online / digital forms of youth work.*

– SLOVENIAN REPORT –

> *The fact that the digital transition is a main priority for the European Commission was also a factor."*

– PORTUGUESE REPORT –

> *The main factor that drove us towards digitalization was the pandemic. Once we saw the benefits of digitalization during the pandemic, we wanted to continue in this direction."*

– TURKISH REPORT –

Many youth workers interviewed integrated digital technologies into their practices by choice, often driven by intrinsic motivations or youth-work-centred reasons. However, it is important to keep in mind that the Covid-19 pandemic was a significant external factor for many in the youth field, prompting them to adopt digital technologies as a matter of necessity. Strategic decisions of youth work organisations or sectorial policies were also mentioned as external motivations.

AMPLIFYING YOUTH WORK THROUGH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

> *One of the inspirations for creating this project was also to find a tool through which the intercultural competence (a very complex and hard-to-communicate topic) could be presented to a wider audience [...], and hence the video making was chosen as the tool.*

– CZECH REPORT –

> *Youth work organisations are not digital enough for this generation. Everyone involved in youth work still has a lot to learn. That's why the project leader initiated this project.*

– GERMAN REPORT –

> *It allowed us to reach young people outside of normal office hours [...]. It also addressed the rural isolation problem that was happening on the ground in terms of youth information.*

– IRISH REPORT –

> *Another motivation was to change the narrative: Usually, within social services for young people, gaming is seen as something negative and topics around addiction are at the foreground. The project, however, wants to stress that most gaming is not problematic and that gaming is actually a good tool to connect with young people.*

– TRANSNATIONAL REPORT –

Digital technologies are often seen as powerful tools to better achieve key objectives and features of youth work as described in the introduction to this chapter. Among those are the aim to better align with young people's needs and habits, to empower young people, to be an advocate for youth issues, or to foster experiential learning and positive social relations. Inclusion and participation also play a prominent role: challenging digital exclusion and providing access to digital technologies and skills was often emphasised as an important motivational factor for youth workers to engage in digital youth work.

3.1.2 YOUNG PEOPLE'S MOTIVES AND INSPIRATIONS

The RAY network's data on young people's motivations to join a European youth work project (Böhler et al., 2022) shows that aspects of personal growth are paramount: The desire to have *new experiences* is the top ranking item, followed by aiming for *personal development* and *learning new things*. Other important factors are *to get to know other cultures* and *to have fun*. Looking at the motivations described within the focus groups, digital youth work seems to attract young people with the same features. However, when analysing the motivations described in our research material, **social factors** and **aspects of digital technology and skills** were most prominent:

SOCIAL ASPECTS

For many young people interviewed, the social aspect is a key motivating and inspiring element in digital youth work activities. While the digital nature of the project is not always the primary factor in their decision to participate, the social component is often the key driver. Human interaction was pointed out to be crucial, especially after times of isolation during the pandemic:

> *It needs to be noted that the interviewee explicitly says he attended the project activity mostly out of the urge to get back among people after a long period of solitude due to the pandemic.*
>
> **– CZECH REPORT –**

Peers and youth workers are an important factor to join a project. The prospect of spending time with friends, making new friends, and experiencing oneself in a group has always been a core motivation to participate in youth work activities. This also holds true for digital youth work.

It is important to highlight that the social and the digital dimension are not mutually exclusive but rather intertwined. Engaging with technology can facilitate and enable meaningful social experiences (see also chapter 3.2). For tech-oriented young people, digital youth work can also offer a unique opportunity to connect with like-minded people:

> *When being asked about their motivation to get involved [...], the community aspect was crucial for all young people interviewed: "The idea of finding people who are part of the same bubble and have the same interests is actually exactly why I joined [...]", an interviewee stated. Focus group participants described their bubble as nerdy, open and engaged. The project gave them access to a group of like-minded people, they – apart from online friendships – did not have access to before.*
>
> **– TRANSNATIONAL REPORT –**

DIGITAL ASPECTS

For some young people, access to and engagement with (new) digital technologies is the key motivational factor to get involved in youth work:

> *As one of the research participants [...] mentioned, if not for the opportunities to access technology, he would not have stayed at the youth center in the very beginning.*
>
> **– LITHUANIAN REPORT–**

> *Prompted to join the youth project through an IT group, one young person initially joined the youth centre by working on a small wind turbine building project within a group setting, he had the opportunity to work on computer-based programmes such as Scratch and Rasberry Pi. This young person then transitioned into music production after learning about the studio through a friend, supported by his youth worker to write songs about his experience of his local community and his life.*
>
> **– IRISH REPORT –**

> *There is a sense of pride among young people that at the youth center they get to try out new technologies. To some, this is the main motivator to stay in the activities.*
>
> **– LITHUANIAN REPORT –**

Young people are sometimes attracted by certain appealing digital technology (such as 3D printing) or by the prospect of gaining a specific digital skill (for example, programming or producing videos). To put it on a more abstract level, the underlying motivation can often be described as learning something new or challenging oneself. Engaging with digital technologies is an opportunity to do so:

> *Young people are motivated to use digital tools by the opportunity to discover new aspects of themselves and their hobbies (for example a young person studying to become a DJ highlighted how doing this hobby made them discover new nuances in music). Young people appreciate the opportunity to challenge themselves through new hobbies and acquire new skills [...] Young people prefer to develop their digital competences in a youth center rather than at home or at school as they have sufficient support from youth workers and other peers.*

– ESTONIAN REPORT–

Additionally, as reflected in the quote, finding a new (digital) hobby plays a role for some young people when taking part in digital youth work activities. Others are motivated to join digital youth work by the prospect of gaining new skills for their activism. Finally, pedagogical approaches that are inspired by digital cultures (e.g. gamification, hackathons) can also be highly attractive for young people.

3.2 KEY (PEDAGOGICAL) FEATURES OF DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

As delineated above, all aspects of non-formal youth work are evident in our interviews. In the following, we will delve into the most salient features identified in our research, focusing on how digital technologies impact these aspects of youth work. We will illustrate how digital youth work effectively applies non-formal approaches to engage young people in exploring digital technologies. Additionally, we will illustrate how digital technologies, in turn, can meaningfully support the values and objectives of youth work. However, we will also examine the challenges, contradictions, and ambiguities pointed out by youth workers in their interviews.

3.2.1 PROVIDING AND CREATING (SAFER) SPACES IN DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

> *We chose not to work with a login. [...] we chose a webtool and not an app. Young people do not have infinite data and space on their cell phones.*

– FLEMISH REPORT –

> *The online chat system was designed to minimise onerous technologies, with a simple user design (UX) for youth workers and young people. "You click a button to open a chat, and you click a button to respond.*

– IRISH REPORT –

The quotes above reflect the creation of new youth work spaces. The first stems from an Erasmus+ project from Flanders, Belgium, aiming at creating an e-participation platform for young people. The second describes a youth information project in Ireland designed to empower young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to access information and support through a simple access point. As illustrated by these excerpts, the project teams were highly aware and made thoughtful, deliberate choices when designing the new spaces, ensuring that they were accessible and also fulfilled young people's digital needs. Creating and providing spaces that meet the needs of young people is one of the core elements of youth work – no matter if an activity takes place in an on-site setting or an online environment.A large number of digital youth work projects, such as those actively involving young people in hands-on experiences with technology, predominantly take place on-site. Creating offline spaces that nurture non-formal learning is a competence that youth workers usually already have. Thus it is not surprising that creating offline spaces for digital youth work did not present any major challenges within the focus groups conducted. Many projects managed to create offline spaces that nurture non-formal digital education.

The notion of safe(r) spaces was highlighted as an important aspect for online and offline digital youth work spaces:

> *A successful approach to digital youth work is one that "gives participants the opportunity to experiment and learn [...], as well as "a safe space to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of these tools*

– PORTUGUESE REPORT –

> *Digital impacted pedagogies [...] to give participants a safe space to debrief and ventilate their frustrations, insecurities, and doubts, many of them having to do with having to work with digital tools that are new to them, and with the technicalities these tools entail. The value of experimentation in a safe and non-judgmental context looks especially important when working with digital tools.*

– GREEK REPORT –

> *Digital safety and privacy is a pre-condition for having positive experiences online.*

- TRANSNATIONAL REPORT –

> *From the perspective of the project participants, successful approaches to digital youth work require voluntary participation, consent and the development of a safe space.*

– IRISH REPORT –

As described previously, offline spaces were perceived as less challenging environments for digital youth work; on the other hand, living up to the goals and values of non-formal learning in online spaces was pointed out to be more difficult:

> *The negative aspect of such implementation of the workshops [moving it online] is that they lack the experiential part to some extent, the contact and face-to-face conversations.*
>
> **– SLOVENIAN REPORT –**

> *Online workshops were well received, there were many participants. However, something was missing that is possible in analogue, but not in digital: personal connection, exchange during breaks, informal learning.*
>
> **– GERMAN REPORT –**

> *When we asked the interviewee to consider what separates face-to-face activity from online activity, the interviewee found two situations. It is easier to convey emotions when you are in the same space as opposed to behind the screen. Similarly, it is easier to settle unclear issues and conflicts when everyone is in the same physical space.*
>
> **– FINNISH REPORT –**

Both young people and youth workers expressed a strong desire for meeting face-to-face. Youth work – a relational practice that aims for experiential learning – faces significant hurdles when moving exclusively online. Building relationships, having informal encounters, or feeling that one is part of a group are features of youth work that are more difficult to realise in online settings. Many of the objections raised with regards to digital youth work have to do with the risk of losing the relational (see also chapter 3.2) and experiential (see also chapter 3.2.3) nature of youth work in online settings.

However, youth workers also found ways to actively address the limitations of online settings by (creatively) bridging online and offline in order to, for instance, preserve the unique experiential character of non-formal learning:

> *Workshops on sustainability are practical, interactive [...], live online, with participants receiving a pack of ingredients and raw materials in advance so they can participate in the workshops experientially.*
>
> **– SLOVENIAN REPORT –**

> *Points of connection between digital aspects and non-formal approaches to youth work arise, on the one hand, in the possibility of preparing digitally in the project, gaining first impressions of people and spaces. The real meeting is then necessary to get haptic impressions, to create trust and mutual understanding. For decision-making and game situations, online tools can be used again. Learning from Corona means linking both areas, analogue and digital.*
>
> **– GERMAN REPORT –**

Looking at our research material, also thanks in part to the pandemic, we can state that there is a high sensitivity amongst youth workers regarding the advantages and disadvantages of different digital youth work settings. Young people and youth workers interviewed consistently highlight the importance of making deliberate choices when it comes to digital youth work spaces. In addition, they stress the importance of leveraging the benefits, navigating the challenges, and effectively blending online and offline environments:

> *They decided deliberately to do the project hybrid because in the hybrid model young people had the opportunity to work during the time they wanted.*
>
> **– GREEK REPORT –**

> *The training of youth workers needs to include the development of their digital skills, so that they are able to conduct youth work online and to understand the benefits and limitations of digital youth work.*
>
> **– MALTESE REPORT –**

> *Discussions surrounding hybrid learning environments highlight the importance of balancing traditional and digital teaching methods for enhanced educational outcomes.*
>
> **– TURKISH REPORT –**

3.2.2 DIGITAL YOUTH WORK AS A RELATIONAL PRACTICE

> *Here [in a virtual escape room] I could be myself, I could fail without getting a bad grade and I learned new things while playing with my friends. It was fun.*
>
> **– ROMANIAN REPORT –**

> *Human interaction is of great value in youth work as it is the only way to build trusting relationships and encourage young people to open up. Youth workers expressed their fear of the loss of human contact in [digital] youth work*
>
> **– ESTONIAN REPORT –**

> *Participants experienced digital youth work as a unique blend of learning, creating and social interaction. They appreciated [...] and valued building meaningful relationships with peers and mentors.*
>
> **– IRISH REPORT –**

Digital youth work is, just like non-digital youth work, a relational practice. Fostering positive relationships among young people and building trusting relationships between youth workers and young people are important features that were described in various digital youth work practices studied.

A relationship with a foundation of trust between youth workers and young people was highlighted as even more important when it comes to digital youth work. Some interviewees argued that a relationship built on trust makes it more likely for young people to open up and seek help when it comes to digital risks. Not being judgemental about young people's digital skills, habits and behaviours was described as important in this regard.

While online environments are described as being more challenging for building relationships, there are plenty of ways digital technologies foster and maintain human connections. For example, using digital technology as an activity (playing digital games, tinkering, working on a digital project) is described as bringing about positive group experiences. In addition, online spaces, such as forums or video conferencing tools, are often used to keep in touch with a group while not being in the same place. Or digital technologies are applied to overcome social anxieties and thus are an enabler for positive social experiences:

> *For me, the digital and the gaming aspect was huge. Because of my background... it all gets a bit personal now... Well, my situation was that, because I have been outside of work or student life for so long, ahm, I was kind of shut-in, so I didn't have recurring social experiences outside of close family. The idea of getting together physically but playing through a digital network probably made it seem less intimidating because there is still a screen between you and the other person even though you are in the same space. The game was a tool to make it feel a little bit more accessible for the situation I was in.*

– TRANSNATIONAL REPORT –

> *The role of technology was highlighted by the youth participants and by the youth workers as a key element in fostering emotional connections for those who struggle from regular in-person meetings for various reasons.*

– IRISH REPORT –

3.2.3 NON-FORMAL LEARNING IN DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

"The most useful digital competences are usually acquired through experience [...]", a Polish youth worker pointed out during a focus group describing an approach that a substantial number of interviewees across Europe and beyond share. Digital education in non-formal youth work settings is often described as creative, collaborative, and experiential. In particular, engaging hands-on with digital technologies seems to work well in non-formal learning environments:

> *While doubting that working digitally with young people would fundamentally change their pedagogical belief system, the focus group participants pointed out that there are some pedagogical features and attitudes that are favoured and or important when working with young people on digital issues, such as learning-by-doing: Technology is not something you can fully understand theoretically, an interviewee explained. Hands-on exploring and tinkering was considered to be an important educational feature of [name of the project].*

– TRANSNATIONAL REPORT –

Working hands-on with digital technology is often described as a creative, active, and self-directed pedagogical approach. "Trying more than achieving" is a notion mentioned in the Flemish report, encapsulating the process-orientedness of digital youth work practices. The role of youth workers here is often described as a facilitator or fellow explorer rather than an instructor. It is often stressed that the curiosity to explore digital technologies together with young people is more important than the youth worker's digital skills.

Experiential, creative, and self-directed learning are features of non-formal education in general. These attributes became especially salient when exploring projects that applied digital technology as an activity or content in youth work. Here, methods and approaches of non-formal education were successfully applied to engage young people with digital technologies and phenomena. However, when digital technologies were used as spaces to meet and interact, they were also described as hampering factors for the experiential character of non-formal youth work.

A high sensitivity regarding the impact of digital technologies on non-formal learning and the ability to navigate them was pointed out to be a key competence of a digital youth worker:

> *Project team members noted the challenge that lies in balancing the structured nature of digital tools with the creative and exploratory aspects of non-formal education. The importance of having a solid foundation in traditional youth work before venturing into digital youth work was highlighted*
>
> **– IRISH REPORT –**

> *The challenge lies in harmoniously blending non-formal education methods with digital platforms. This involves maintaining the essence of non-formal education - interactivity, personal engagement, and experiential learning - while leveraging the vast potential of digital tools.*
>
> **– TURKISH REPORT –**

YOUTH-CENTEREDNESS

> *Constantly adding to our suite of digital tools and programmes and linking these new tools back to the needs of young people. IT has to be addressing a need or else we are just playing around with technology.*
>
> **– IRISH REPORT –**

A key value of non-formal education is youth-centredness. The idea that youth work – compared to formal educational institutions – is not based on a externally mandated curriculum but on young people's individual needs, interests, and experiences, was also a recurrent feature described for successful digital youth work:

> *The flexibility, versatility and openness of youth work offers, the possibility to pay attention and adapt quickly to the environment of young people, allowing for a quick response to new trends or needs.*
>
> **– FLEMISH REPORT –**

> *Formal education does not meet young people's needs in terms of learning digital skills and competences. It is very often outside school that young people learn these things. It is therefore the role of non-formal education to fill this void and to teach what is not taught at school.*
>
> **– POLISH REPORT –**

The ability to swiftly react to new trends and challenges was repeatedly highlighted as an important advantage of out-of-school youth work with regards to digital education.

Additionally, actively relating to digital youth cultures was pointed out to be important:

> *Another aspect to take into consideration, is to take young people's digital cultures into account in the project practice, a choice that allows them to avoid any top-down approach or any judgment about the tools to be used.*
>
> **– ITALIAN REPORT –**

> *When I talk to parents who don't quite understand it [digital youth culture] exactly either, I actually explain that digital youth culture is everything that takes place online and young people do online these days.*
>
> **– TRANSNATIONAL REPORT–**

> *That's kind of nice for me, to be able to shape that, to encourage and empower young people, to stand up for their maybe niche interests or not so niche interests. And to embrace that and to say "it's beautiful and great these subcultures exist, that this youth culture exists" and to connect young people and say "Hey, you are not the only person who is interested in this!*
>
> **– TRANSNATIONAL REPORT –**

Youth work is often theoretically described as being a prime environment for young people to gain digital competences because it is a youth-centred practice. Ideally, digital youth work would relate to young people's digital cultures and needs, provide spaces to pursue their individual digital interests, and be flexible in reacting to new trends and emerging needs. These ambitious objectives lead to a dilemma: To truly live up to the value of youth-centredness, there is a demand for highly skilled digital youth workers. The youth field, however, is often described as lacking the necessary capacities (in terms of human and financial resources). For more insights into the structural dimension of digital youth work, please refer to chapter 5.

DIGITAL YOUTH WORK AS A PARTICIPATORY, INCLUSIVE, AND EMPOWERING PRACTICE

The topics of inclusion, participation, and empowerment are central to youth work in general. However, these topics appear to hold even greater significance when it comes to digital youth work. First and foremost, fostering participation of young people in designing and implementing digital youth work was considered a good practice. Particularly because digitalisation is described as deepening generational gaps, the involvement of young people was pointed out to be crucial at all stages of implementing digital youth work.

Digital technologies were also described as being an enabler for young people's participation in society. Often, the youth work projects studied aim at enabling and empowering young people to use digital technologies in an emancipatory manner. That means using digital media and technologies to bring about positive change for themselves and their community:

> *The key role of youth work is to support the empowerment of young people through these projects and enhance their capacity to be active in a society that is becoming more digitalised and technologised. To achieve this, youth work must reach into the world of young people's experience, and operate in the environments inhabited by young people, including digital cultures and environments. An even more important role for youth work involves preventing a digital divide between young people, by ensuring that they have access to digital technology, and by enhancing their technology-related skills.*
>
> **– GREEK REPORT –**

Furthermore, shifting the perspective from merely avoiding digital risks to an enabling perspective was mentioned as an essential factor with regards to the digital empowerment of young people:

> *We are committed to media education that focuses on opportunities of media and strives for creatively using it. We of course have all the risks in mind [...] but it's more about enabling kids to navigate the internet safely.*
>
> **– TRANSNATIONAL REPORT –**

> *The opportunity to make new friends, learn new skills in a safe space, to learn how to use new technologies and how these technologies can potentially have a positive effect on their lives.*
>
> **– MALTESE REPORT –**

In terms of inclusion, digital technologies are perceived as both enablers and barriers: Youth workers stated that they managed to include new and also marginalised target groups into youth work by utilising digital technologies.

On the other hand, especially during the pandemic, youth workers also became acutely aware that social inequalities are also translated into digital inequalities. There is a fear among some youth workers that, especially when conducted online, digital youth work can lead to excluding young people from youth work:

> *The essential is [...] also how young people can participate in digital youth work. Digital transformations also require young people to have tools, and not all of them have access to them.*
>
> **– FINNISH REPORT –**

DIGITAL YOUTH WORK AS A CRITICAL PRACTICE

In interviews with numerous youth workers, a common emphasis emerged: the necessity to move beyond merely imparting technical hard skills. Instead, they expressed a desire for young people to critically reflect on the impact of digitalisation on societies. A positive goal for digital youth work is often described with the term critical digital citizenship.

Many interviewees are undecided when it comes to their own attitudes towards digitalisation in general and its impact on young people. Many recognise the empowering potential of digital technologies and their integration into youth work. Digital youth work, for example, is perceived as something that can foster active citizenship:

> *Digital youth work is an empowering agent that helps young people express whatever they think and speak up for themselves. Digital youth work gives a voice to young people [...]. It also provides young people with ways to fulfil their potential through self-determination.*
>
> **– MALTESE REPORT –**

However, another recurrent theme within the interviews is the importance of recognising and addressing the negative impacts of digitalisation:

> *We cannot keep them from it [the internet], because otherwise they will grow in a world that they will not understand. We as youth workers need to enter it, not get youth outside of it. And support them in understanding the advantages, but especially the disadvantages.*
>
> **– ROMANIAN REPORT –**

The negative impacts of digitalisation are especially evident in areas such as safety and privacy, disinformation and algorithms, digital exclusions, forms of digital violence, and digital capitalism. Consequently, some youth workers are reluctant to encourage young people to spend even more time online:

> *However, some conflicting values were highlighted: for example young people are encouraged to experience life without the web and computers but digital youth work seems to attract young people to do the opposite.*
>
> **– ESTONIAN REPORT –**

The ambivalence youth workers feel towards digitalisation is sometimes also reflected in their perceptions of young people's digital behaviours and needs. Young people are often negatively portrayed, for example, as passive consumers that are in need of orientation:

> *The project team also mentions that the self-assessment of young people tends to be high, however, this relates to using digital media, as, when it comes to under-*

> *standing and critical-related competences they might be more of a consumer.*
>
> **– ITALIAN REPORT –**

> *Most youth only see this curtain: social media, Netflix, the consumerist curtain, and they do not go past it, they use what they are told to use.*
>
> **– ROMANIAN REPORT –**

The negative view held by some youth workers of young people's digital behaviours is noteworthy and worth further exploration. It seems to conflict, one could argue, with the values of non-formal youth work. Typically, youth work advocates for a resource-oriented, empowering perspective on young people. However, considering youth work's role as a critical and counterhegemonic practice, this could be seen as a trade-off between values rather than a departure from them. While some youth workers may de-prioritise the value of empowerment and emancipation, they emphasise the importance of maintaining youth work as a critical practice.

However, it often isn't a matter of choosing one over the other. Many youth workers strive to achieve both: helping young people to harness the empowering and emancipatory potential of digital technologies while also guiding them to navigate and critically address the risks, ambiguities, and negative impacts these technologies can bring about.

3.3 NOT JUST INSECURE!

Discussions about digitalisation and youth work often highlight the ambivalence with which the youth field, particularly youth workers, relates to digital technologies. Lasse Siurala (Siurala, 2022), a digital youth work researcher, even claims to observe a polarisation within the youth field when it comes to integrating digital media and technologies into youth work. This ambivalence was also clearly observed in the focus groups conducted as part of our research. While some youth workers see non-formal youth work as a perfect environment for digital education, others see only a slight connection between digital technologies and youth work:

> *Moreover, results show that non-formal education/youth work, due to its playful, and active nature, is a good environment to develop digital competences. The flexibility, versatility and openness of youth work offers the possibility to pay attention and adapt quickly to the environment of young people, allowing for a quick response to new trends or needs.*
>
> **– CZECH REPORT –**

> *The project team recognizes the difficulty in changing youth worker's and other non-formal education professionals' perception that non-formal education and learning should always be face-to-face. "This is still an unknown world for us, and it is hard. There were many doubts and fears, many people still think it is not possible to do non-formal education in a digital format.*
>
> **– PORTUGUESE REPORT –**

> *Many youth workers do not see the connection between non-formal learning and digital offers as strongly. Some of them also belong to an older generation (mid-40s) that is not very digitally active.*
>
> **– GERMAN REPORT –**

> *The four case studies used different approaches, formats and settings. However, they all had non-formal education values and methodologies as common pillars. One of the key findings, we believe, is how well non-formal methodologies fit together with digital work, despite the worries of some of the project leaders. As these projects show, digital has the potential to be creative, fun and engaging, and to be a useful and practical source of learning, so it is not surprising that it fits non-formal education rather perfectly.*
>
> **– PORTUGUESE REPORT –**

The troubled relationship between non-formal youth work and digital technologies is often also explained by the insecurities youth workers feel when engaging with new technologies in their work (Pawluczuk, 2019; Pawluczuk et al., 2019). These insecurities were pointed out multiple times in our focus groups. However, the reluctance some youth workers in our research felt about engaging in digital youth work went beyond insecurities. For instance, some youth workers are worried about the impact digital technologies have on the core values of youth work. They fear that digital technologies might hinder building trusting relationships, exclude young people from youth work, or hamper experiential learning. In short, youth workers do not necessarily oppose digital technologies as such, but rather are wary due to insecurities as well as concerns about abandoning core youth work values.

Youth workers training on digital youth work needs to take these concerns seriously. Focusing on how digital technologies can be used to strengthen features and values of youth work as well as how ambiguities in this regard can be navigated, could help more youth workers with coming to terms with digital youth work and adding a meaningful digital dimension to their youth work.

3.4 PROPOSING A DEFINITION OF SUCCESSFUL DIGITAL YOUTH WORK PRACTICES

In this chapter, we explored key (pedagogical) features of digital youth work. We were able to show that successful digital youth work is inextricably rooted within the field of non-formal education and that digital technologies and youth work can build meaningful synergies. Therefore, based on our research, we propose the following definition of successful digital youth work practices:

Successful digital youth work practices:

a) apply approaches, attitudes, and values of non-formal youth work to explore digital technologies and phenomena with young people,

b) utilise digital technologies to strengthen features and goals of non-formal youth work, and

c) translate aspects of non-formal education into digital environments.

4 — EXPLORING YOUNG PEOPLE'S DIGITAL REALITIES, NEEDS, AND COMPETENCES

The discourse around digital youth work is often centred around the competences and pedagogical approaches of youth workers. In contrast, little is known about the ways in which digital youth work relates to young people's digital realities and needs or what digital competences young people gain by taking part in a digital youth work activity.

Therefore, we will first examine young people's digital habits and needs (chapter 4.1) and their translation into youth work (chapter 4.2). In chapter 4.3 we will explore how the European youth programmes relate to young people's digital needs and contribute to young people's digital competences. Finally, based on our research, we will propose a digital competence reflection tool that will help youth work practitioners and young people to plan, evaluate, and reflect on digital youth work activities from the perspective of digital competences (chapter 4.4).

4.1 YOUNG PEOPLE'S DIGITAL REALITIES AND NEEDS

Digital media and technology are an integral and ubiquitous part of young people's daily lives. When asked about their digital habits and experiences, the young people in the focus groups mainly focused on descriptions of activities and practices that relate to **leisure time, learning and education**, and **family and friends**.[8] Other aspects such as **work life** and **active citizenship** played a less prominent role.

These are common descriptions of how young people within the RAY-DIGI focus groups delineate their usage of digital technologies:

> *When asked about the online activities they enjoy, young people mentioned: listening to music, communicating with friends, playing games, watching youtube videos, watching how the games are played, watching movies, watching TikTok.*

– LITHUANIAN REPORT –

> *The most important things I do online are socializing with friends and family through social media and messaging apps, learning through online resources (such as video tutorials, educational games or learning platforms), and having fun through video games and interactive applications.*

– ROMANIAN REPORT –

> *For the participants the three most important things they are doing online are reading news, talking to friends and watching movies.*

– GERMAN REPORT –

Based on these accounts, **building** and **maintaining relationships** is one of the most important reasons young people use digital media and technologies. **Having fun** and **being entertained** were highlighted as additional important features that digital technologies offer young people when it comes to their **leisure time**. **Searching and tracking down information, learning, discovering new things**, and **expressing oneself** were also identified as key aspects.

When asked about young people's needs in regards to digital technologies, three topics emerged as being particularly salient: **digital well-being, information and data literacy**, as well as **privacy and safety**.

4.2 TRANSLATING YOUNG PEOPLE'S DIGITAL REALITIES AND NEEDS INTO DIGITAL YOUTH WORK PRACTICES

There is a consensus among young people and youth workers that digital youth work should relate to young people's digital realities. However, as previously mentioned, there is also a shared understanding that digital youth work should not simply replicate these experiences. In contrast, successful digital youth work is expected to bring an **added value and has the experience** to do so, such as providing **access to digital technologies**, learning **new skills** or experiencing how to **use digital technologies purposefully**.

Often, this added value is also connected with progressing from merely an observer or consumer approach to **reflecting, understanding,** or even **producing digital media and technologies**:

8 Holmarsdottir et al.'s qualitative study on young people's digital everyday's lives also highlights the importance of leisure time, learning, and family for young people's digital realities (Holmarsdottir et al., 2024).

> *We used Youtube and Facebook in a way we are not using them in our everyday lives. I have never made a professional video before, and here, not only did we do that, but we also published online for a wider audience to see. This was my first video that reached so many people.*
>
> **– POLISH REPORT –**

> *[Our] day-to-day activities are not represented in the activities at the youth centre [...] we are not sitting on our phones here [....]. The digital activities organized at the youth center are more advanced in technological aspects and include tools that are not available to young people elsewhere [...].*
>
> **– LITHUANIAN REPORT –**

> *Participants also mentioned that they see similarities in communication and learning (between the youth work activity and their personal life in online platforms), but the focus shifts to purposeful collaboration and addressing social issues. While entertainment is enjoyable online, the satisfaction in youth work comes from the sense of community and working with others to create positive change and meeting new people in real life.*
>
> **– GREEK REPORT –**

> *I was happy that I could combine learning technical aspects of video content creation with a meaningful message about human rights and tolerance.*
>
> **– POLISH REPORT –**

4.3 YOUNG PEOPLE'S DIGITAL COMPETENCES

One way to capture the added value of digital youth work is to explore how the digital youth work projects contribute to young people's digital competences. Generally speaking, based on the qualitative and quantitative data collected by the RAY network, it is evident that the European youth programmes are a valuable opportunity for young people to improve their digital skills. As part of the latest RAY monitoring survey[9] (first survey round of the ongoing Erasmus+ programme generation 2021-2027), participants of the European Youth Programmes were asked which competences they gained by taking part in a project. As a reference, the survey builds on DigComp (European Commission, 2022), the Digital European competence framework for citizens[10], which identifies five competence areas:

(1) **Information and data literacy:** how to find, filter, assess, and manage data and information.

(2) **Communication and collaboration:** how to use digital technologies for teamwork, discussions, and decisions.

(3) **Digital content creation:** how to mix and remix, and make your own things digitally.

(4) **Safety:** how to protect yourself, your data, your devices, and the environment.

(5) **Problem solving:** how to deal with technical trouble, and how to learn this skill.

Communication and collaboration is the highest ranking competence among participants, with 76% of the respondents indicating that they learned something in this regard. Around 60% indicated that they learned to *solve a problem digitally*, while only 29% indicated that they learned something about *digital content creation*. Looking at the RAY MON data, *information and data literacy* (25.5%) and *safety* (24%) are the competences that participants least commonly strengthen.

Reviewing the qualitative data of the study at hand, we can identify both similarities and discrepancies:

While all competences are addressed by the projects studied, digital *communication and collaboration* and *digital content creation* are the ones most prominently mentioned throughout the focus groups. While the first can be interpreted as a general feature of Erasmus+ projects, the latter seems to be a specific characteristic of the best practice projects studied as part of RAY DIGI. *Information and data literacy* and *safety*, however, are competences that – both from the perspective of RAY MON and RAY DIGI – require more attention. This conclusion also resonates with young people's digital needs as identified in chapter 4.1.

4.4 PROPOSING A DIGITAL COMPETENCE REFLECTION TOOL FOR DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

The youth field aims at describing digital competences holistically. Both youth workers and young people repeatedly describe going beyond digital hard skills as a key success factor of digital youth work:

> *Participants emphasized that compared to other digital youth work experiences, this*

9 The full research reports of the most recent monitoring surveys are available at researchyouth.net/reports/.

10 The DigComp framework can be accessed here: op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/50c53c01-abeb-11ec-83e1-01aa75ed71a1/.

> *project stood out due to its comprehensive approach, focusing on digital skills, critical thinking about digital content and digital safety. It went beyond simply using digital tools for communication.*
>
> **– GREEK REPORT–**

The notion of *going beyond* is often associated with attitudes that are strengthened or incentivised by taking part in a project. These include aspects such as *having a critical mindset, being aware of something* or *being reflective about something*. Another feature that characterises the intention of going beyond is distinguishing between *using* and *understanding*:

> *I used to use Instagram just to post pictures or to watch others pictures, I did not know what was behind it. [In the project] I learnt how videos become viral, I learned trends and things that most people do.*
>
> **– ITALIAN REPORT –**

We also learned from the focus groups that both youth workers and young people do at times discern the goal or objective for which the digital competence is acquired. Often, the aim is to enable young people to better navigate aspects of their digital lives. Other projects aim to, for example, strengthen young people's work-life-related competences or young people's active digital citizenship.

Last but not least, a key differentiation youth workers and young people make when describing competences gained during a project is the way in which they were acquired. Sometimes a project addresses a digital competence explicitly, while other competences are only addressed implicitly. Other modes of acquisition described could be captured by terms including hands-on, experiential, or discursive.

The idea that digital education is more than technical skills and the ability to use digital tools is a widespread one, and it is not unique to digital youth work. Often, the term digital literacy[11] is applied to capture this concept. The idea, however, of going beyond is also captured by the notion of competences as defined by DigComp.

A digital competence is described as the

> *confident, critical and responsible use of, and engagement with, digital technologies for learning, at work, and for participation in society. It is defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes.*
>
> **– EUROPEAN COMMISSION. DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR EDUCATION, YOUTH, SPORT AND CULTURE, 2019 –**

Building on this definition and on the analysis above, we propose a reflection tool for young people's digital competences in digital youth work that can be used as a tool to plan, evaluate, and reflect on digital youth work activities (annexed).

11 The concepts of digital literacy and digital competences intersect and are at times interchangeable. Within the context of European policies and in non-English speaking countries the term competences is more common (Zhao et al., 2021) . The term literacies derives from the ability to read and write and thus has the connotation of basic abilities and is putting more emphasis on understanding and making sense of things. The concept of competences, on the other hand, often operates with different proficiency levels and focuses on how competences are applied in different spheres (e.g. in work contexts or in education) (Godhe, 2019). Since the DigComp framework is the most influential point of reference within the European youth context, we propose to make use of its terminology for pragmatic reasons.

5 — STRUCTURAL SUCCESS FACTORS OF DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

As illustrated in this report, integrating digital technologies into youth work has a fundamental impact on pedagogical approaches and values as well as on young people's needs and expectations towards youth work. However, there is also a structural dimension to take into account.

The following are the three structural pillars we identified as key enablers for successful digital youth work: 1) Digital youth work requires rethinking the **funding** and **infrastructure** of youth work organisations. Therefore, there is also a need for better **recognition** of digital youth work. 2) **Building strong and diverse networks** is described as an important structural aspect, also for bridging gaps in the resources of youth work organisations. 3) **Skilled and confident digital youth workers** are a scarce but crucial resource for successful digital youth work. Offering training and support to build both digital soft and hard skills is a need recurrently identified within our interviews.

5.1 FUNDING, INFRASTRUCTURE AND RECOGNITION

Adequate and sustainable funding is the cornerstone of successful youth work in general. This need for robust financial support was also a recurring topic in our focus groups on digital youth work. Interviews revealed that digital youth work, in particular, has unique financial support requirements that must be addressed to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability.

First and foremost, many youth work organisations were described as having insufficient digital infrastructure and equipment to engage young people in digital youth work in the first place. While having access to up-to-date and innovative digital technologies was pointed out to be a key success factor from the perspective of young people, many youth work organisations lack financial resources to provide these tools:

> *In many areas, youth work is perhaps not so easy to implement digitally. In some cases, the associations lack the technical requirements and equipment.*
>
> **– GERMAN REPORT –**

> *Additional financial resources are needed if the organizations want to bring in new technology and equipment into their youth centres or youth organisations. Financing for the equipment has to come with extensive training on how to integrate it into youth work activities.*
>
> **– LITHUANIAN REPORT–**

> *One obstacle was the limited budget, which was not sufficient to develop the solutions to their full potential.*
>
> **– ESTONIAN REPORT –**

In addition, digital technology is not a one-time investment, rather, there is a constant need for maintenance and staying current with technological developments. This issue at times contradicts the innovation logic of funding programmes. At times, from the perspective of youth work organisations, it makes more sense to remix and optimise existing digital solutions instead of building new ones from scratch:

> *The respondent [...] indicated that creating and running online platforms is not simple, requiring constant follow-up by the developer and by the youth council/service using the platform.*
>
> **– FLEMISH REPORT –**

> *It was pointed out that instead of constantly creating new opportunities, it would be better to focus on improving the quality of existing digital solutions.*
>
> **– ESTONIAN REPORT –**

> *It was also realized that the solutions developed needed resources to keep them running, which the youth center did not have after the project funding had ended.*
>
> **– ESTONIAN REPORT –**

And, particularly with regard to pandemic experiences, there is a lack of awareness that online events require the same amount of resources as those happening face-to-face. In fact, adapting to online environments often requires additional resources. This goes hand-in-hand with a lack of awareness and overall recognition of the value of digital youth work. Some youth workers reported that digital technologies in youth work are only seen as a temporary phenomenon the pandemic required and not as something that needs constant attention:

> *[...] digital youth work is not yet formally recognized at national level. As expressed by the interviewee: "The feeling remains that digital youth work is still not taken seriously.*
>
> **– SLOVENIAN REPORT –**

5.2 STRONG AND DIVERSE NETWORKS

Having project partners with diverse profiles and expertise is an essential factor for successful digital youth work. Involving different actors in the field of digital education – such as NGOs and libraries, but also formal education – was pointed out to be important for the future of digital youth work:

> *To successfully tackle digitalisation, youth work would need to always stay updated on new technologies and to develop partnerships and sharing of knowledge between NGOs.*
>
> **– PORTUGUESE REPORT –**

> *Collaborations with local institutions like libraries and schools allow for diverse activities and expertise sharing.*
>
> **– TRANSNATIONAL REPORT –**

> *Another key factor of success mentioned in case studies [...] was having active and effective partnerships and networks. Sharing of all types of resources (be it human resources, expertise, digital tools, or equipment) between partner organizations, and each partner giving a meaningful contribution to the final project, is seen as an essential part of success, and also important to overcome eventual budget limitations.*
>
> **– PORTUGUESE REPORT –**

The importance of establishing platforms for exchange, organising networking events, and fostering a robust community of practice was also strongly emphasised.

5.3 SKILLED, CONFIDENT AND CURIOUS YOUTH WORKERS

Skilled youth workers are one of the main pillars of successful youth work. Recent research gives some orientation as to the digital competences of youth workers in Europe: Pawluczuk's survey (2022) suggests that around 35% of youth workers describe themselves as having upper-intermediate and advanced digital skills, while 65% of the respondents indicated they have intermediate or low digital skills. Our research also indicates that skilled and confident digital youth workers are a scarce resource, and this shortage is identified as one of the main hampering factors:

> *First thing that came into mind was the lack of professionals. Can I say it out loud? But it's a fact. I don't know how it is in other European countries, but in Finland the workers are [...] not gamers or not used to using different digital ways to work.*
>
> **– TRANSNATIONAL REPORT –**

> *The project teams interviewed set up training and created materials for youth workers, as they see a big gap between the needs of young people and the abilities of youth workers, who are often insecure about their own digital competences.*
>
> **– FLEMISH REPORT –**

> *It was also difficult for youth workers to participate in meetings with developers as they lacked the technical expertise to engage in technical issues.*
>
> **– ESTONIAN REPORT –**

> *[Digital youth work needs] human resources so that you don't just have to throw something together.*
>
> **– GERMAN REPORT –**

Combining technical and pedagogical skills in a team (e.g., by involving volunteers with technical backgrounds) was pointed out as a success factor by some of the projects researched.

However, in addition to the technical hard-skills, the attitudes and emotions of youth workers were pointed out to be equally important:

> *A key for success was that] the organisers of the project had the willingness to experiment and jump head-first into the unknown.*
>
> **– ESTONIAN REPORT –**

> *Successful approaches to digital youth work require: Continuous improvement of competences of youth workers. Sparking their interest in the new technologies.*
>
> **– LITHUANIAN REPORT –**

> *We often get people coming to our training and they don't have a clue about digital youth work. We ask people about how they feel now. Feeling more confident is key. [...] The fear of standing in front of young people and not knowing what you are doing is daunting. The greatest thing you can say is "I don't know". I am going to show you the basics. They will hopefully start to run off and start engaging themselves. It's about breaking down the barriers and the fear around technology.*
>
> **– IRISH REPORT –**

Curiosity, open-mindedness, and a positive attitude (towards digital technologies) were pointed out to be crucial. Being aware and open about gaps in knowledge were also pinpointed as vital factors for success. More training offers for youth workers to develop both digital hard and soft skills were emphasised as a need, as well as (external) technical support throughout the project implementation.

6 — ENVISIONING DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

Digital youth work is an emerging practice that is constantly evolving. As a result, it is not surprising that there is no single vision for the future of digital youth work among the young people and youth workers interviewed. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is not to present a definitive vision. Instead, the chapter strives to cultivate awareness among readers regarding the unique challenges and opportunities faced by digital youth work in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, it identifies five key elements that young people and youth workers consider when envisioning the future of digital youth work.

6.1 OVERCOMING COVID-19

The Covid-19 pandemic was a transformative moment for youth work, particularly in terms of digitalisation. Many youth workers experienced online youth work for the first time during the crisis due to restrictions and lockdowns. According to RAY research, only a small fraction of youth workers (9%) did not translate any of their youth work to online settings during the pandemic (RAY network, 2021). At the beginning, the pandemic was seen as the long-awaited digital boost for the youth sector. However, upon reflection, it is evident that the pandemic experiences are not necessarily a blueprint for future digital youth work. The interviews conducted reveal a growing awareness that post-pandemic realities demand a different approach to digital youth work: As the Romanian case study report states, "We are moving into a post-Covid stage with digital youth work." And some reports even argue that youth workers might even stop engaging in digital/ online youth work after the pandemic:

> *Digital youth work [...] has been a necessity during the pandemic, however, all interviewees stopped doing it when the pandemic was over.*
>
> **– POLISH REPORT –**

Therefore, this chapter proposes a critical assessment of digital youth work experiences during the pandemic. It is argued that the pandemic and its ripple effects may hinder current and future digital youth work. These are key issues to overcome Covid-19 in digital youth work:

FROM AD HOC ACTION TO STRATEGIC PLANNING

Amid the pandemic, a substantial portion of youth work moved online. Most often this shift took place out of necessity and not by choice:

> *When the pandemic arrived and we lost the connection with young people we started to ask ourselves how we can reach those who are most vulnerable. The pandemic was the key factor for including the digital.*
>
> **– ROMANIAN REPORT –**

The youth work sector was largely ill-prepared for the impact of the pandemic. Covid-19 forced many organisations to engage in digital youth work for the first time (Vermiere et al., 2022). A significant amount of resources were allocated to adapting to the pandemic's specific needs. While the pandemic required a reactive approach to situational demands, there is now a need for strategic planning of digital youth work in the post-pandemic era.

FROM ACCESS TO YOUTH WORK TO ACCESS TO DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND COMPETENCES

During the pandemic, youth work focused on ensuring young people's access to youth work by moving online. However, as described in chapter 4, young people have higher expectations and want to get access to digital technology and competences by participating in digital youth work activities.

FROM ONLINE YOUTH WORK TO DIVERSE DIGITAL YOUTH WORK PRACTICES

The pandemic resulted in a significant increase in online youth work. However, as described in chapter 3, digital youth work encompasses much more than simply moving youth work activities online. Engaging young people with digital technologies in a hands-on and creative manner often requires on-site settings, which were limited due to pandemic restrictions. Therefore, post-pandemic digital youth work should shift its focus from online youth work to the various settings in which digital youth work can take place.

FROM ONLINE FATIGUE TO MEANINGFUL DIGITAL YOUTH WORK EXPERIENCES

Post-pandemic youth work should acknowledge the experiences of young people and youth workers during the pandemic, particularly with regards to online learning.

> *Young people on the other hand do not have good experience with online learning and tools. One could say they are traumatised by quarantine experiences when they were deprived of human connection. This is highlighted very often.*
>
> **– LITHUANIAN REPORT –**

> *Some of the digitally excluded youth workers talked about "being left out", "having no organisational support", and "not being able to get up to speed [with digital skills]" during the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020.*
>
> **(PAWLUCZUK, 2022)**

The term 'digital youth work' may evoke negative emotions for young people due to its association with their pandemic experiences. Therefore, a post-pandemic approach to digital youth work should acknowledge these emotions and recognise the desire for face-to-face interaction among both young people and youth workers:

> *After the lockdowns, it was felt pretty strongly by us that there was digital fatigue setting in and we were all recognising the value of being together physically.*
>
> **– IRISH REPORT –**

> *After the Corona pandemic young people are more interested in face-to-face contacts than in digital work. Projects must take this into account. Digital youth work is not about digitizing everything, it is to combine analog and digital approaches in an efficient way to achieve the aims of the project.*
>
> **– GERMAN REPORT –**

Our explorations of successful digital youth work have shown that it can create meaningful experiences and foster positive social relations. Overcoming negative emotions and attitudes towards digital technologies, brought about by pandemic experiences, will be crucial in the future of digital youth work.

6.2 FIVE DIMENSIONS OF DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

For the study at hand, we engaged young people and youth workers across Europe in a conversation about the future of digital youth work. The ideas for digital youth work are diverse, and there is no coherent vision for its future. However, based on our research material, we could identify five dimensions that are important to youth workers and young people when talking about the future of digital youth work. Based on these, we developed a digital youth work planning tool (annexed).

PEDAGOGICAL DIMENSION

When talking about visions of digital youth work, youth workers in particular were touching on pedagogical approaches, values, and attitudes. Digital youth work was mainly envisioned as (remaining) a non-formal youth work practice. These are keywords that would best describe the pedagogical visions of digital youth work as described in our focus groups[12]:

- Activating
- At eye-level
- Bottom-up
- Co-designed
- Empowering
- Experimental
- Experience-based
- Gamified
- Hands-on
- Inclusive
- Needs-based
- Non-formal
- Self-directed
- Tailored
- Youth-centred

EXPERIENTIAL DIMENSION

While the pedagogical dimension is primarily based on youth workers' visions of digital youth work, the experiential dimension mainly describes young people's perspective. It describes how young people would like to experience digital youth work in the future. Young people in our focus groups articulated their vision for digital youth work by describing the ideal experience they hoped to have while taking part in a digital youth work activity. The following key words best describe these visions:

- Activating
- Collaborative
- Diverse
- Empowering
- Entertaining
- Fun
- nspirational
- Interactive
- Meaningful
- On eye-level
- Playful
- Respectful of privacy
- Safe
- Self-efficacy
- Sense of achievement
- Social

While the previous two dimensions strongly overlap with values and attitudes already present in non-formal youth work in general, the content dimension is more specific to digital youth work. Youth workers stress that they aim for digital youth work as a critical practice, and that they strive to go beyond digital hard-skills. This vision is often described with the notion of digital citizenship. Other topics both youth workers and young people would like to address more in youth work relate to digital risks, safety, and digital well-being. But topics surrounding digital youth cultures and digital youth rights are also mentioned. Furthermore, there is the hope that up-to-date digital topics and technologies, such as virtual reality or artificial intelligence, are addressed more in youth work.

12 Please note that these keywords summarise the content of our focus groups, and they are not intended to comprise an exhaustive list of aspects relevant for digital pedagogy.

These are keywords that describe the desired content and digital technologies for future digital youth work:

- Artificial intelligence
- Data and information literacy
- Digital citizenship
- Digital inclusion
- Digital risks and safety
- Digital well-being
- Digital youth culture
- Digital youth rights
- Going beyond technical skills
- Maker education
- Up-to-date
- Virtual reality

SPATIAL DIMENSION

Visions of where digital youth work should happen in the future are diverse and range from fully digital youth centres to stressing the importance of offline youth work settings. After the pandemic, there is a strong desire for face-to-face encounters. However, both young people and youth workers interviewed agree that youth work should harness the potential of both online and offline settings. A balanced combination of both settings was often seen as desirable. The following key words most closely describe the visions described:

- Accessible
- Balanced
- Blended
- Going where young people are
- Open-source
- Not going where young people are
- Offline
- On-site
- Online

STRUCTURAL DIMENSION

Another important aspect when talking about the future of digital youth work was the structural dimension of digital youth work. As already described in chapter 5, digital youth work requires additional and more tailored funding, recognition and platforms for exchange, as well as training offers for youth workers. Other visions described in the focus groups were related to life-long learning and the concept of open-source[13]. Further, the importance of making digitalisation sustainable was highlighted – both in terms of environment and the sustainability of digitalisation efforts in organisations.

These keywords best describe structural visions of digital youth work:

- Diverse
- Inclusion of different stakeholders
- Innovative
- Lifelong learning
- Multi-professional
- Networked
- Open source
- Safe
- Skilled
- Sustainable
- Well-equipped
- Well-funded

6.3 PROPOSING A DIGITAL YOUTH WORK PLANNING FRAMEWORK

We propose to build on the five dimensions identified when planning digital youth work. These five dimensions can help in structuring and fostering a dialogue within youth work organisations or project teams to strategically plan their digital youth work activities. You'll find the planning tool annexed.

13 Open source refers to software for which the original source code is made freely available and may be redistributed and modified. It promotes collaborative development, transparency, and community-driven innovation.

7 — RECOMMENDATIONS

If you are a youth work practitioner, we hope this report inspires you to...

- add more meaningful digital dimensions to your work with young people by using non-formal education to explore digital technologies and phenomena with them and by using digital technologies to better achieve your youth work goals.
- keep up and translate the spirit of non-formal education into digital environments and think of (creative) ways to alleviate the limitations online spaces bring about for non-formal youth work.
- diversify your youth work spaces by using both online and offline spaces and by purposefully combining both.
- let young people participate at all stages of your digital youth work project.
- build and contribute to diverse teams and networks for digital youth work.
- reflect and relate to young people's digital experiences and needs and also focus on the added value a digital youth work offer could bring to young people.
- aim for a holistic understanding of digital competences that goes beyond just using digital tools.
- give young people more opportunities to learn and discuss information and data literacy, digital safety, and digital well-being.

If you are a youth work strategist, we hope this report inspires you to...

- understand and promote digital youth work as an opportunity to attract new and more diverse people to youth work.
- work towards a shared understanding and recognition of digital youth work; e.g., on the organisational, local, national, or European level.
- promote additional and increasingly tailored training offers for youth workers on digital youth work.
- contribute to and advocate for adequate structural conditions necessary for digital youth work to thrive.
- support more projects that engage young people with topics in the areas of information and data literacy, digital safety, and digital well-being.
- champion a strategic approach to digital youth work within your organisational, local, or national context as well as on the European level, taking into account the additional challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

If you are a young person, we hope this report inspires you to...

- take part in digital youth work activities.
- be aware and spread the word about European youth work as an opportunity to foster digital competences.
- participate in critical discussions about the future of digital youth work and how to better align it with young people's digital experiences and needs.

And **if you are a youth work thinker** (perhaps you became one for the first time while reading this report), please continue to explore ways to help young people thrive and develop in a digital world!

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9 — ANNEXES

DIGITAL YOUTH WORK PLANNING TOOL

This digital youth work planning tool invites you to strategically and holistically plan your digital youth work offer – either as an organisation or when working on an upcoming project. If you think about the 5 dimensions of digital youth work, you will have a solid basis for strategically planning digital offers of your organisation or the project ahead of you!

STRUCTURAL DIMENSION

What are desirable circumstances, resources, and frameworks for our digital youth work activities? How can we improve and influence these structural circumstances?

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_ _

CONTENT DIMENSION

Which digital topics or issues do we want to address in our digital youth work activities? Which (innovative) digital technologies do we want to include in our youth work activities?

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_ _

PEDAGOGICAL DIMENSION

What are the pedagogical approaches, values, and features we want to apply when engaging young people in digital youth work?

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_ _

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SPATIAL DIMENSION

Where should our youth work activity happen? Which digital spaces will we use? How will we combine offline and online spaces?

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EXPERIENTIAL DIMENSION

How should our digital youth work offers feel like for a young person? How should digital youth work feel like as a youth worker?

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This digital youth work planning tool is based on research conducted by the RAY network. If you want to learn more about RAY, please visit researchyouth.net.

If you want additional information on our research on digital youth work, please refer to the research report this tool is based on: Exploring successful approaches to digital youth work (2024), available at researchyouth.net/reports/.

DIGITAL COMPETENCE REFLECTION TOOL

The competence reflection tool on the next page is intended to assist you in planning or evaluating digital youth work projects. It can be used by both youth workers and young people. It invites you to reflect on the following aspects:

1. **Activity**: Describe the activity you are about to implement/ you want to evaluate / you took part in.
2. **Competence area:** Which digital competence areas of DigComp is/ was the activity addressing? The DigComp[1] competences are: Information & data literacy[2], Communication & Collaboration[3], Digital content creation[4], Safety, Problem solving[5].
3. **Skills:** What are the skills young people improved/ will improve/ you improved by taking part in this activity?
4. **Knowledge:** What knowledge or experiential knowledge did young people gain/ will young people gain/ did you gain by participating in the activity?
5. **Attitudes:** Which attitudes would you like to impart by the activity you are designing/ you implemented? Which attitudes did you acquire by taking part in the digital youth work activity?
6. **Modes of acquisition:** How are skills, knowledge, and attitudes acquired? How did you acquire the digital competence? For instance, explicit, implicit, experiential, hands-on, theoretical, discursive, on my own, in a group.
7. **Objectives:** Which desirable effect on young people did or do you want to achieve? What are the positive effects this activity has had on you? Where should the competences acquired be applied?

[1] You can access DigComp here: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/50c53c01-abeb-11ec-83e1-01aa75ed71a1/.

[2] Covers how to find, filter, assess and manage data and information.

[3] Covers how to use digital technologies for teamwork, discussions, and decisions.

[3] Covers how to mix and remix, and make your own things digitally.

[4] Covers how to protect yourself, your data, your devices, and the environment.

[5] Covers how to deal with technical trouble, and how to learn this skill

DIGITAL COMPETENCE REFLECTION TOOL

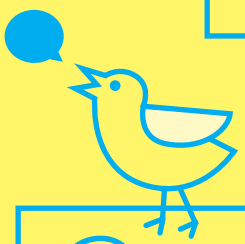
ACTIVITY	DIGCOMP COMPETENCE AREA	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGE	ATTITUDES	MODES OF ACQUISITION	OBJECTIVES

Questions to reflect upon

- Competence areas: Does the project cover a diverse range of digital competences? Or does it deliberately focus on a specific competence area?
- Skills, knowledge, attitudes: Does the project (equally) address the dimensions of skills, knowledge, and attitudes? Does it privilege one dimension and if so, why?
- Modes of acquisition: Does the project offer diverse approaches to acquire digital competences?
- Objectives: Does the activity contribute to the objectives of the project? Which other competences would be needed to meet the objectives of your project?

This digital competence reflection tool is based on research conducted by the RAY network. If you want to learn more about RAY, please visit researchyouth.net. If you want additional information on our research on digital youth work, please refer to the research report this tool is based on: Exploring successful approaches to digital youth work (2024), available at researchyouth.net/reports/.

Join the network!



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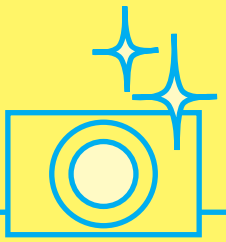

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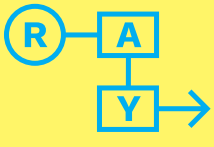

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