Activism &

Participation

Digital Transformation in Learning
for Active Citizenship

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Democracy and
Human Rights Education
in Europe

BLUE LINES

Preface:

Into Digital Transformation

The social, economic, cultural and political impact of digital change in education and learning

Digitalisation is an essential part of our lives across all dimensions. Many people think that it is a technological process, i.e. it is mainly about computer servers, algorithms, Internet and the like. But that is only half of the truth. For example, it is difficult to separate digitalisation from almost all activities in our lives. When we shop online – are we online or are we shopping? When we play computer games – are we playing or are we at the computer? And when we are active in social media, we are both social and active in an electronic medium. Moreover, our health system is already digitised, the pollution of the planet is, to a growing extent, caused by digital technology, and activities such as navigating a car or collaboration in civil society are increasingly facilitated by digital technology.

This example seeks to point out that what we ultimately understand by "digitalisation" depends very much on how we look at the topic. It is after all possible to engage in all the aforementioned activities without information and communication technology (ICT). In this sense, we prefer the term *digital transformation*, because it explains a social, cultural or economic process in which things are done seemingly differently – made possible by information and communication technology. In this sense, education for digital transformation is learning about social, economic and cultural processes and about understanding the differences caused by technology. As such, in further exploring the topic, it is important to:

1. Look at both the technology and the nature of economic, social and cultural activities, for example, what we do in different social roles as digital customers, digital activists, digital workers and digital citizens.

2. Take an interest in the difference that digitalisation brings to such activities. What is changing thanks to new technology? What impact does it have on society?

There is No Overly Complex Issue for Education

A lot of curiosity and increasing concerns regarding digitalisation today have to do with its 'engine room' - the fascinating global infrastructure of the Internet, its enormous costs and hunger for energy, Big Data, AI, and the increasing economic value of digital platforms.

In particular, the growth of new kinds of platforms, fuelled by digital business models successfully capitalizing on users, is a widely visible phenomenon of this new technological and economic configuration. Consequently, their users are at the same time subjects and objects of digital change. They experience the opportunities made available through new, platform-mediated forms of interaction, but also feel uncomfortable since they are also symmetrically affected in their role as autonomous subjects. The right to independent information, privacy and security are, from this perspective, not yet sufficiently respected in the digital sphere.

The migration of substantial parts of working and communication processes to the digital sphere during the last decades is also simultaneously a benefit and a challenge. One aspect is technical mastery – access to current technology and the ability to use it in a competent way. A more fundamental aspect is that the "digital self" is completing people's analogue identity. Their digital traces are accompanying people's lives with related consequences for their various social roles as private subjects, employees and citizens.

Feeling overtaxed by all the associated challenges and concerns is a bad prerequisite for learning and a bad basis for considering future personal and social decisions. It is high time for adult education and youth work to do something about this double-edged sword.

In particular, adult citizenship education has a lot of experience teaching complex social issues and could transfer its methodology and approach to the topic of digital transformation. We know, for example, that nobody needs to be an economist to be able to co-decide on political decisions affecting the economy. We also are capable of understanding the social impact of cars, despite very limited knowledge of automotive

engineering. Considering that it is possible to acquire knowledge about digital transformation, could we not even enjoy learning about Big Data, robotics, algorithms or the Internet of tomorrow similar to the way we passionately discuss political issues such as transport, ecology, or democracy? We should not, however, be blinded by the technical complexity of the digital transformation. It is important that we pay more attention to the social dimension, the intentions behind a technology, exploring its effects and regulations.

Although not familiar with all technical or legal details, most people intuit that it is ill-advised to give out personal information without consent. We suppose what the right to privacy should entail and what distinguishes conscious decisions from uninformed ones, and in our analogue world, we discourage the "used car salesmen" of our society from taking unsuspecting customers for a ride. After all, most of us have experienced the discomfort of having been deceived as a result of not understanding the fine print.

If we transfer this insight to a pedagogy of digital transformation, we must admit that we should also be willing to explore new aspects of the technical dimension such as data processing or the nudging mechanisms in online platforms. But that is not the only priority! The most important thing is that we know what our *rights* and *ethical foundations* are and how they relate to the new digital contexts and are able to act accordingly. These questions are not solely related to privacy and safety, as seemingly no aspect of social life is unaffected by digital transformation.

Using this foundation, we might further explore the potentials and risks of digitalisation in context, assessing its impact. Personal rights, for instance, entail privacy issues, but digital transformation has also led to new opportunities for co-creating, better information, or involvement of citizens in decision-making processes. On this basis, we are then able to define the conditions and rules under which certain digital practices should be rolled-out or restricted.

E*lectronic* communication has changed the character of *human communication* as a whole. There are fewer impermanent ideas or assertions that go undocumented, to later be searched and rehashed. This change is both positive and negative, for example from the perspective of an employee who may be judged based on past decisions which live forever online. Pedagogy might help people to better understand the risks and benefits associated with electronic communication.

In addition, it will be a creative challenge to imagine the technology we want to develop as a society and what will help us to initiate social, economic and cultural changes in the future. In this regard, it is also important to develop a view towards the so-called 'skill gaps' and 'digital gaps' people may face when mastering digitalisation. What is the purpose of defining a gap; for whom is the gap relevant; in whose interest is it to argue the risk of gaps as opposed to their benefits?

Why Democracy and Rights-based Learning Makes the Difference

The essence of a definition of democracy and rights-based education can be found in the Council of Europe's Declaration regarding Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC), which is "education, training, awareness-raising, information, practices, and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, to empower them to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life, with a view to the promotion and protection of democracy and the rule of law" (CoE CM/Rec(2010)7).

Transferred to the context of learning about digital transformation, we extract three core questions from this:

1. *What digital transformation competence* – knowledge, skills, values and attitudes – do citizens need to understand the digital transformation in their society and how it affects them in their different social roles?

2. How are *fundamental rights and ethical foundations* related to the transformation? Where do they shift their nature, what weakens them and what kind of development strengthens their enforcement?

3. What *active civic competences* do citizens need to contribute to the transformation, including participation in relevant public discourses and decisions, self-organisation and social engagement, and the development of social innovations?

Stakeholders from many different sectors have high expectations in education. In particular, they demand from earning for active citizenship a better preparation of Europeans for big societal changes. Only if we implement ideals of democracy "by design" into digital progress will we create a *democratic* digital society.

Enjoy and Explore

This reader series aims to introduce selected key aspects of digital transformation to educators and teachers in formal, non-formal or informal education. Our perspective is *Education for Democratic Citizenship* and our main goal is to motivate you as educators in adult education and in youthwork or other education fields to dive into the topics connected to digital transformation with curiosity and critical thinking as well as ideas for educational action. In other words: Nobody has to adore technology, but it is definitely worthwhile to become more comfortable with it. Digital transformation is a reality and as such, in principle, relevant for any specific field of

education, any subject, or pedagogy.

Together we might work on a broader understanding of what digital literacy is and explore as educators and learners in lifelong learning processes how it affects our lives. With a strong aspect of democracy and human rights in lifelong learning, we should lay the foundations for a democratic digital transformation and empower learners to find a constructive and active position in this transformation.

We aim to provide basic insights into some of the various aspects of digital transformation as a basis for further exploration. They tackle the digital-self, participation, the e-state, digital culture, media and journalism and the future of work and education. In each of the publications we also present our ideas as to how education might take up this specific topic.

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Activism & Participation

In a global digital world, new communities are emerging. Many of them are ephemeral. Others, born in the information age through digital transformation still persist (even in the offline world). Today, there is enough room to create real digital networks that share the same interests or, on the contrary, differ in opinion. To the common citizen, digitalisation has also brought a panoply of tools and platforms that enhance participation in the most varied aspects. But there is always the other side of the coin; hate and sensationalism have also gained a new world stage. Today thousands of extremist groups have also joined this global network in the so-called disinformation age (Pomerantsev, 2019). With the evolution of social networks and echo chambers, the influence in political elections has increased and is more complex. We also see the emergence of new movements.

We live in an era of constant and rapid change at many levels. What was a reality yesterday, is no longer a certainty today. As all of us have experienced, COVID-19 has accelerated the process of digital transformation already underway and suddenly changed the paradigm of relationships. The way communities interact with
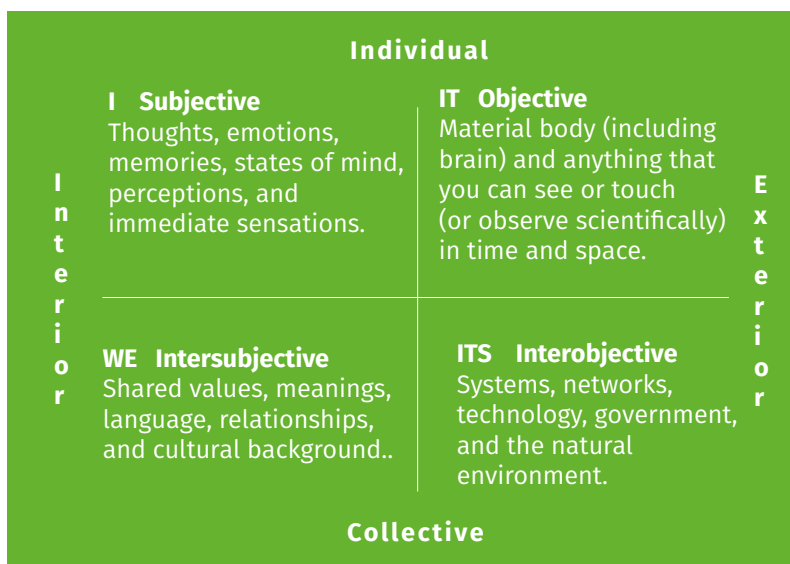
each other has been put to the test and new groups have emerged. But it is not only the pandemic that is changing individual and community behaviours. *"There is a difference between the millennial generation and generations to come through...with technology, we are much more empowered and educated than ever before. (...) You just need to look around and you can see many ways this new story (or subjective and inter-subjective reality) is showing up. Looking at things like the collaborative economy with Uber, Airbnb, GoGet and many more."* (Jeffery, 2016)

This chapter deals with transformation of social movements as well as active participation and dialogue among citizens and public institutions. We underline the relevance of both online and offline forms of participation in a world where activists (and hacktivists) and movements play an increasingly major role in local communities and in global processes. From the tech universe to social feminist organisations, we highlight some local and global movements that have mapped and continue to map out an important path in empowering citizens and making private and public institutions feel responsible for fully respecting the democratic process. We conclude with reflection on how forms of participation will change in the future and the competences demanded for guaranteeing full participation of citizens in the democratic process in the (digital) transformation age.

1. New On/Offline Behaviours & Hacktivism

As Ken Wilber showed us in his *Four Quadrant map*, there is a clear connection between our behaviour as individuals – and also in the community - and the technologies we develop (2014). In our daily life, we battle with our inner self in a constant struggle of emotions and sensations, transmitted to society through diverse cultural values. But beyond what we don't see, there is a whole complex scientific universe of material things that connect the individual to society. Digitalisation is a part of this process.
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Four Quadrants

Individual		
I Subjective Thoughts, emotions, memories, states of mind, perceptions, and immediate sensations.	**IT Objective** Material body (including brain) and anything that you can see or touch (or observe scientifically) in time and space.	
WE Intersubjective Shared values, meanings, language, relationships, and cultural background..	**ITS Interobjective** Systems, networks, technology, government, and the natural environment.	
Collective		

Interior ... Exterior

But while we discuss the digitisation and digitalisation differences among us, the world is subjected to a digital transformation at different scales. The access to mobile phones and the Internet has expanded over the past decade, but people around the globe are still trying to figure out new ways to deal with social constraints so that they can participate social and cultural life.

The gap in access and usage of these devices between the northern and southern hemispheres is still huge. In the south, "although young people in low-income settings indeed access mobile phones, theirs is not an experience of 'always-on, always connected" (Raftree, 2019). For most, the online experience is "mobile, rather than computer-based' (Raftree, 2019).

The youngest people are the ones who have triggered the main behavioural changes in society in recent years. Since the appearance of social networks, especially Millennials and Gen Z have mobilised thousands of people around common causes. Fridays for Future is probably one of the most recent and well-known global movements, created by the 15-year-old Greta Thunberg and other young activists in 2018. A completely analogue poster to protest against the lack of action on the climate crisis was the trigger. The young activist skipped several school classes and stayed a few days in front of the Swedish parliament. After a few posts on Instagram and Twitter, the issue went viral. The movement was born at that moment and now has more than 13 million supporters in 7,500 cities around the world.

This well-known example is evidence of the potential of the digital world. A group of a few people with a global cause created outside of the digital ecosystem managed to turn themselves into a global movement through social networks. A strong and common cause could easily create a movement and perhaps evolve into a community. Nowadays, the chance to transform into an online community has grown – and, of course, is increasing the speed of movements.

A local example during the COVID-19 crisis gathered 5,000 Portuguese volunteers online to support vulnerable people in coping with the pandemic and lockdown. Tech4Covid was born online as a small group, and two months later had created more than 45 projects and raised 210 thousand euros to fight the problem in different areas such as economics, tech and health.

Athina Karatzogianni, senior lecturer on media and communication from the University of Leicester, said that "smartphones and the internet have changed the way political events, protests, and movements are organised, helping to mobilise thousands of new supporters to a diverse range of causes. These often bypass the existing world of politics, social movements and campaigning. Instead, they take advantage of new technologies to provide an alternative way of organising society and the economy" (2016).

But it doesn't always work in this way. Trump's use of Twitter is an example of how politics and politicians can take advantage of these technologies and new media.

On the other hand, hacktivist organisations such as Anonymous serve as a balance sheet for political exploitation, as they usually share information that has been concealed from citizens, in this case to uncover Trump's "fascist dictatorial tendencies….where anyone can be arrested for just posting old information online" (Ashok, 2016).

Examples of leaktivism, such as the Panama Papers – 11.5 million documents leaked that detailed financial and attorney–client information for more than 214,488 offshore entities and has resulted in the arrest of at least five people in Uruguay – have multiplied in recent years. Online groups and individual activists used the internet to leak and spread confidential documents with political ramifications.

The power to access digital information from anywhere set new limits on freedom of expression but also led people into a new kind of modern tribalism, where some authors believe that "human beings have evolved to live in tribal society, as opposed to mass society, and thus will naturally form social networks constituting new tribes" (McPherson, 2006).

Beyond the good examples of self-organisation, the Internet was also an accelerator for antidemocratic movements. Especially with the rise of social media, right-wing extremist groups emerged – and still emerge everyday – as a consequence of their quick understanding of digital perks and "how digital communication relates to social mobilization" (Ekman, 2014). The "dark side of online activism" is described by Ekman as undemocratic actors using the rapid advancement in digital technology. The author analysed more than 200 clips on YouTube, produced by five right-wing extremist Swedish organisations and identified "the extreme right video activism as a strategy of visibility to mobilize and strengthen activists."

With attempts to change the historical perception of far-right events, these activists could be "understood as an aestheticization of politics", as the platform YouTube becomes a political arena "in which action repertoires and street politics are adapted to the specific

Hacktivism:
Hacktivism is the combination of the words "hacking" and "activism" and describes the phenomenon started in the 1980s which promotes political and social change through computer-based techniques on the Web. In the 1990s, the collective Anonymous made known this practice of dissidence and social disobedience which is a continue evolution with the new form of using the technology (Romagna, 2020).

Leaktivism:
Leaktivism is the phenomenon of distributing confidential documents and information in order to denounce illicit acts affecting the socio-economic and political dimensions of social organisation. The term has been used to the distribution of Panama Papers documents and made known by Micah White, the co-founder of the Occupy movement.

characteristics of online video activism" (Ekman, 2014). Since the beginning of the Information Age, people have tended to organise into "bubbles" and often, without realizing it, become included in echo-chambers enabled by media outlets, social networks and accepted by the majority of the society.

Social media networks are probably the perfect and most recent example of this. Users are exposed to their algorithms on a daily basis and the content is filtered in real-time.

Echo Chamber:
Environment where a person only encounters information or opinions that reflect and reinforce their own.
Oxford English Dictionary

"Our perception of reality is distorted; worse still, the built-in algorithmic mechanism only serves to exponentially filter and simplify the complex web of human understanding to understand where to place us socially and how to present us to others. For example, the more niche your interest, the less likely you are to see a wider variety of people and interests — meaning, the wider the gap, the less likely you will ever experience world views different from yours. You must actively seek it." (Lubin, 2018).

As Lubin said, "ostensibly, algorithms thrust us into tribes", where usually like-minded people group together the social media echo chambers are often "the most powerful reinforcements of rumors" and also the places where a sentence can simply become truth just because it is accepted by everyone in the group, with no counter-arguments (DiFonzo, 2018).

The Power of Social Media around the World

The "Why We Post" research project of University College London (UCL) has collected evidence that validates the existence and power of social networks in some countries: "social media is being used to reinforce traditional groups, such as family, caste and tribe and to repair the ruptures created by migration and mobility". However, despite the clear advantage these channels have in some areas, there is "overall impact on exclusion, social differences, or oppression offline". In Brazil, for instance, "social media is a sign of upward mobility that may impress people of similar social standing, but it does not change the way people from higher classes regard a person".
https://www.ucl.ac.uk/why-we-post/

Interview with Diego Ceccobelli

Diego Ceccobelli is a researcher at Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa (Florence, Italy) in the field of political communication and comparative politics. He has a research background studying the role of social media in contemporary political communication and personalization of politics in comparative perspective, and he is part of a multidisciplinary team in the PiCME project, that investigates political participation in complex media environments. This project examined how mechanisms and processes of political participation evolve in complex media environments and the consequences within the political sphere at large and particularly concerning political actors. The comparative perspective of PiCME was one of its particularities, with a focus on the Italian, Greek, and Spanish contexts, which is how we started our interview.

In a very quick summary, what are the main differences in the relationship you identify in the three countries?
I would say quite a lot and also nothing. (laughing) Perhaps the main finding is that we trace, and now we are discussing a book that should be out soon on the level of attention regarding surveillance issues. What we trace is that a country like Spain, in the level of attention toward security in sending a message on WhatsApp or having a phone call with a source or writing something on a Facebook group, is pretty high. So, there's always an idea that someone could be looking at us. Spain is the main country in which activists started using new ways, new tools, new apps that do not give potential third parties the possibility to spy on their conversations. Which is something we did not trace at all for example in Italy. Greece is kind of a hybrid case in this regard.

Why do you think these differences occur that way?
For us, the main one I would say is historical reasons. The fact that Spain experienced an autocratic government up to around 45 years ago and perhaps this idea of not having a democracy and someone could have interest in and having the ability to spy on you could influence the way that activists circulate information in this country. The same for Greece. Italy appears as a country that kind of forgot what it means to live in a fascist regime. The second reason is that Spain was able to develop thousands of publications on it. In the last 10 years, Spain has developed a huge hacker culture, while, for example, Italy has not developed one at all. In Spain, there's a culture that is more socialised toward the deep meaning of what hacking means, how the digital works in depth. Italy is naiver in general, of course. This is something that you see when you talk, in Italy, about apps like Signal, Telegram or WhatsApp. In Italy, if you think of communicating, you think about using WhatsApp, for example, that you see as a more common tool. The security issues, who cares? There are different behaviours, culture and knowledge about this issue. Another difference we identified is about the

connection with mainstream media, in terms of the visibility practices. Italy is the country where we noticed the activists are more able to join televised programmes. It's not so hard for them - Italian activists – to enter within the mass media television, radio or newspapers, while if we look to Greece and Spain, activists share a hate-love connection – but more hate – with mainstream media, assuming that they can't enter this kind of environment at all.

Digitalisation has brought huge changes in the media sphere and the way of communicating in public debate. How do these changes affect political participation?
First of all, I would say it that affects in terms of organizing. Thank to different digital platforms, now even different interests can be organised easily. Of course, the ability to shorten the time of action by a lot is something that is not so easy to do without digitalisation. And since timing is a crucial factor in politics, this ability to organize in a faster way is hugely helping allow social movements to better achieve political goals. There's also a strong ability to get a specific fight or group more visibility in the political scenario or a specific country, but I would say that communicating in different platforms is not enough to get noticed. Based on our research, I think what matters is a high level of professionalisation in these movements as well, to make something visible, in social media, to the general public. We are talking, for example, of professional video makers, professional graphic designers, professional webmasters… If not, you risk wasting this generic flame you can activate, for example, with a protest event in the ground or a televised interview you were able to trigger attention on a different level. And about this, you also should never forget the legacy media. It is not enough to be popular in digital media, you will always need TV, radio, and newspaper colouring what you are doing.

Is that your perspective for southern European countries, or can it be applied to any country?
I think that is very close to reality. You need the legacy media in order to achieve your political course. This is what I say is going on pretty much in Spain, Greece, Italy, Portugal, France… But this is actually the same in North America, Eastern and Western Europe in general.

According to your experience, do you think people tend to get involved more in digital political participation when compared with other types of participation?
Definitely yes. There's also a kind of participation which might be considered a bit weak, but it is, I would say, the main novelty of our times, which is encountering politics in non-political environments. For example, "I don't care about politics and I'm part of a group that organizes little matches in futsal". But then I can encounter political ideas, political events, political issues, and there I'm stuck in a way, socializing with politics, and that might trigger my participation. So, this is the main novelty we have observed

nowadays. It's like an indirect way of getting in touch with politics that might have the ability then to trigger different kinds of participation, both online and offline. Of course, if you have a high interest in politics, you do politics naturally in offline events – like protests, political groups and so on – but if you don't have this high level of interest, then, there are many more spaces where you can unexpectedly encounter politics and this can trigger your participation.

There is some criticism about the impact of digital forms of participation. Clicktivism, social media campaigns and the use of memes are seen by some stakeholders as easily avoidable forms of participation, with less potential and impact. How do you see this criticism? Should we consider digital participation a way to amplify traditional forms of participation or can it have an impact by itself?

Both, in my opinion. Of course, digital can amplify because through different platforms or apps, you can organize and participate in a much easier way. And I don't see so strongly the idea of clicktivism occurring. Of course, some participate in politics in a very intermittent way – with a post, for example – but that was something that was not available without digital. So much more than determining clicktivism, I would say digital is providing new ways of engaging with politics. I'm more on the positive side. This doesn't mean the thesis of clicktivism has to be rejected in total. It's clear that this weak way of participating can't by itself determine severe changes within the political sphere, but I would say a little is better than nothing. So, if through the digital, the number of citizens that, for different reasons, have not developed a huge interest in politics during the teenage years, still have this indirect way of getting in touch into politics is something to welcome positively.

In which way does digital transformation – social media and different use of traditional media - affect the communication and the leadership style of political parties?

Severely, in different ways. First, there's now the need to rely more on images, the visual side of politics. And this is due to different factors. The level of attention decreasing significantly is one of them. Even new apps like TikTok have a textual component, but the visual is the main component shaping those platforms. And there's now this first ability of some politician to exploit this new platform.

What's the role of the digital sphere to improve the participation of civil society in governance processes?

Not so much, I would say. If you look to visibility, organising and communicating practices with people with a low level of interest in politics, you'll see change. If you look into the policymaking process, not so much. Politics still works as usual. Policymakers look at the digital, of course. They are there, and they get a lot of influence from different platforms. So, indirectly, you can influence them, but not in a direct way. Of course, there are different platforms in which we can interact. Twitter, for example, is, for sure,

the most influenceable platform for policymakers. But the influence is not from the bottom-up level of politics but more from colleagues, lobbyists, journalists...so, a different influence, more classic perhaps.

Do you think it is possible to identify some digital changes that affect political participation and the democratic process in Western/European countries?
If I look at it in the long term, what perhaps is still missing is the power of the digital to develop a kind of data democracy. There was this huge idea that internet would have to change democracy from its pillars, by bringing into the more deliberative and representative side of politics, in the direct way of voting, affecting the governance procedure with direct voting through the internet, which is something not occurring at all and I don't see this arising in the near future either.

Can Offline Communities Significantly Change as a Result of Digital Transformation?

Communities and networks are a "living thing." [...] "They emerge, sometimes rather spontaneously, from the apparent vacuum when triggered by the environment to do so. They self-organize into hierarchies that are well adapted to the environment they live in" (Portela, 2018). It has always been this way, long before the internet came along. As said before, the digital components have brought some changes in people's behaviour and led to the appearance of new online communities, spaces and networks . However, we cannot say there is a causal link between offline and online communities. Portela said, "we all keep many stakes in numerous networks but only when we need to organize a surprise party for a friend, do these connections become 'real' and materialize as an event in the real world" (2018). We have flash online communities, that appear and disappear in the blink of an eye; we have online communities that are truly dependent on offline content, such as the Humans of New York project that started photographing 10,000 New Yorkers on the street and now has thousands of catalogued lives replicated in more than 20 countries; and we have online communities that result in "real-life" changes.

   Echo chambers, for instance, also affect offline communities. Many online users used online arguments to spread their "truth" offline at home or work. In fact, a 2016 study even claims that "Twitter users who felt their audience on Twitter agreed with their opinion were more willing to speak out on that issue in the workplace" (Hampton, 2016).

   We are not able to fully prove a direct cause of the main changes in offline communities' relationship with the online world. However, we do know that the digital era has have behavioural consequences.

Civil Engagement: Decrease or Increase?

"The explosion of technological developments coupled with a drastic economic transformation has led to a decline in civic engagement" (Kronen, 2018). Several studies have found changes in Americans' behaviours, related to our modern way of connecting with people. A paper from the Pew Research Center said only 57% of Americans know one or some of their neighbours by name (Smith, 2010). A poll from AP-GfK, also concluded that one in three Americans believe that most people can't be trusted (Press, 2013). In his article, Kronen suggests our "feeling of social cohesion is rapidly dissipating" (2018). Nowadays, "we attend less community meetings, join less clubs, and have less dinner parties with friends and family....It's a vicious cycle with dangerous implications, leading to a relapse in toxic tribalism", he concluded (Kronen, 2018).

However, Germany is an example where the proportion of volunteer activities and civic engagement increased by about 10% within fifteen years to 43,6% of the population in 2014 (Simonson et al., 2016). Not surprisingly, those between 14 and 49 years of age are the most engaged, but the most dynamic increase in Germany is taking place among those 65 years and older. In regard to digitalisation, this transformation has a strong structural impact on civil society organisations, forcing them to extend to the digital sphere. Also, new forms and topics for civil engagement are emerging. In particular, platformisation is becoming an issue in its different facets (social media, organisation, campaigning, fundraising, etc.) (BMFSFJ, 2020).

According to Eurobarometer, 47% of Europeans "engage with CSOs in some way". The main engagement is donating money (27%). In regard to participation in public consultations, 45% of respondents said that they participated during the last 12 months in such a consultation (EU DG COM, 2020).

Is digitalisation having a positive or a negative impact on civic engagement and the development of interpersonal trust? The two examples show seemingly contradictory results. While the first position argues that digitalisation is disconnecting people from the analogue world, the German results suggest that digitally mediated social ties are evolving and mirroring social relations in new or different ways, although still in relation with individuals.

Digital Feminism and #Hashtag Activism

Especially in western countries in the first decade of the 21st century, the progressive spread of internet access and skill development for the consumption and creation of online resources resulted in a flowering of many feminist sites, blogs and online projects; digital spaces nurtured collectives, associations and movements identified under the umbrella expression of the "fourth wave of feminism" (McCann et all, 2019). In her article, "The fourth wave of feminism: meet the rebel women", Kira Cochrane states that: "What's happening now feels like something new again. It's defined by technology: tools that are allowing women to build a strong, popular, reactive movement online" (2013). Beyond the fact that, actually, the current feminist wave can be identified as the fourth of the feminist movement, it is possible to affirm that the use of digital tools continue to play an important role in coordinating the internal communication of the feminist, queer and LGBT movements and attracting a larger audience to spread their claims (Jouët, 2018; Fotopoulou, 2016).

Examples of Feminist Sites, Blogs and Projects

Feministing
An online community run by and for young feminists. For over a decade, we've been offering sharp, uncompromising feminist analysis of everything from pop culture to politics and inspiring young people to make real-world feminist change, online and off. (http://feministing.com/)

The Everyday Sexism Project
Exists to catalogue instances of sexism experienced on a day-to-day basis. They might be serious or minor, outrageously offensive or so niggling and normalised that you don't even feel able to protest. Say as much or as little as you like, use your real name or a pseudonym – it's up to you. By sharing your story you're showing the world that sexism does exist, it is faced by women everyday and it is a valid problem to discuss. (https://everydaysexism.com/)

UK Feminista
Dedicated to supporting people to take action and create lasting change. (https://ukfeminista.org.uk/)

inGenere
A webzine on economic, social and political issues with a gender perspective. It was launched in December 2009 by a group of women economists who were aware that while many interesting studies on gender inequalities are carried out by academics, gender experts, NGOs and others, the results of these studies often do not circulate and remain unknown even to those who would benefit from them. (http://www.ingenere.it/en, https://missy-magazine.de)

As is well known, online and offline spheres of life and society are strictly interconnected and intertwined. That is also true for social movements, and, above all, for the feminist one, as stated by Aristea Fotopoulou: "Media technologies, social media and the internet do not exist as a space beyond and independently of the situated practices of feminist activists. They inform and shape each other. In fact....doing feminism and being feminist implies enacting ourselves primarily as embodied and social subjects through media practices and imaginaries of technologies and the internet, but also as citizens and users of these technologies" (2016, p2).

The digital feminist space, like the offline one, is plural and multi-faceted (Jouët, 2018; Fotopoulou, 2016). In fact, there are:

Several ways in which this space is *inhabited and used* by collectives, associations, movements and persons: internal communication, storytelling, campaigning, hashtags, petitions, etc. Digital media are communicative devices (community building) and tools for action (political mobilization) integrated in the political strategies of collectives and movements, which include several older instruments such as press releases, protests, lobby actions and performances (Jouët, 2018).

Different reflections and criticisms concerning the *development and functioning of digital spaces* – social media, platform, AI, etc. "The concept of *networked feminism* helps us rethink media technologies and their role in feminism by reflecting on how activist cultures negotiate five key aspects of digital media technologies: access, connectivity, immediacy, labour and visibility. Through these negotiations, activists critically rethink and problematise rather than accept digital media as intrinsically exploitative or empowering technologies" (Fotopoulou, 2016, p.4).

Diverse issues addressed with respect to how technology and digital transformation question the *relationship with our bodies* – biopower and governability influence the redefinition of gender and privilege issues; and develop intersectional thinking and claims. "The body, as a porous boundary between self and other, autonomy and sociality, emerges at the conjunction of digital spaces and street protests as a symbolic site of control and resistance" (Baer, 2016, p. 19).

Digital transformation (re)defines the continuity and discontinuity of feminist movements at local national and global levels, which are more and more inter-connected, as the example of the "Ni una menos" grassroots movement shows. Digital spaces (blogs, websites, social media) have been inhabited and used in different ways by collectives and associations active in the sixties and seventies and by collectives born in the new century: They often share the cultural and political challenges to patriarchal norms with humour, caricature and transgression tones, but the techno-cultural production and aesthetics differ among generations of activists (Jouët, 2018; Fotopoulou, 2014).

As well-expressed by Fotopoulou with the concept of biodigital vulnerability, digital transformation leads to opportunities and constraints that we have yet to deeply analyse and understand relating to sexism, gender and sexuality (2016).

The dark side of digital space for feminist activists and movements regards the features of the social media spaces and of the mechanisms ruling the World Wide Web: from one perspective, these are indeed linked to the neoliberal and marketing logic which affect even solidaristic and justice movements with competitive thinking (Jouet, 2018). On the other hand, the functioning mechanisms of the digital spheres and movements in this space risk exacerbating marginalisation mechanisms which primarily impact persons already excluded in the physical space, such as black, trans, homosexual and disabled people (McCann et al., 2019). Both these aspects are directly addressed by several feminist movements in the rhetoric of their discourses and struggles (anti-capitalistic frame, economic inequality focus and intersectional approach).

Moreover, the digital sphere becomes a battlefield in which feminist activists and professionals are the target of specific attacks because of their struggles and claims, which takes the form of trolling, threats of death and rape, defamation, revenge porn and doxxing.

The hashtag feminist practice exemplifies how "increased use of digital media has altered, influenced, and shaped feminism in the twenty-first century by giving rise to changed modes of communication, different kinds of conversations, and new configurations of activism across the globe, both online and offline" (Baer, 2016: Jouët, 2018, p. 145). As is well known, hashtag activism has, in most cases, been addressed at breaking the silence on gender violence, harassment and discrimination, building an awareness and common knowledge about the need to overcome victimisation, victim blaming and sexist culture in our societies.

Focusing the attention on the hashtag activist practice allows for highlighting different levels of participation and commitment in the digital sphere. As we have seen,

Hashtag activism: refers to creation and proliferation of online activism and discursive protest on social media- through a hash-tagged word, phrase or sentence with a social or political claim – which can lead to material effects in the digital and physical sphere (Jackson et al., 2020; Yang, 2016).

Biodigital vulnerability: Understanding the complex dynamics of content production and control that constitute online networks as contradictory spaces of both vulnerability and empowerment for feminist and queer politics. In particular.... when corporeal vulnerability and the new forms of governmentality that appear due to technoscientific acceleration are made public, they have great political potential and can be empowering for communities and individuals that have been marginalised or victimised due to sexuality or gender (Fotopoulou, 2016, p.4).

Examples of hashtag feminism:

#yesallwomen, #beenrapedneverreported,#notyourbaby, #bringbackourgirls, #sayhername, #blacktranslivesmatter, #womentax, #womenstrike, #Iamafeminist, #safetytipsforladies, #timesup, #meetoo, #weetoogether.

the internet is populated by numerous subjectivities that propose a plurality of positions and knowledge related to the interconnection among gender, sexuality and power issues and equality and rights claims for discriminated groups, e.g., women, trans and homosexual people. The digital space offers to these collectives, movements, associations and professionals the opportunity to reach a wider audience and disseminate knowledge about gender from a feminist perspective.

The digital space, then, has given the possibility to a greater number of people – adults and young people – to receive information on these issues. This is true, in particular, because of the success of some campaigns and hashtags, which become newsworthy in traditional media and enter the public debate with positive and negative effects.

The #MeToo movement is an example of this amplification process that crosses the digital sphere and traditional media and returns to offline activism practices in a virtuous circuit in terms of recognition of feminist movements and instances in the public debate (Pavan & Mainardi, 2018). There are also negative effects due to the functioning of the public debate in itself, which refer to the tendency to simplify feminist claims and requests that are often traced back to the themes of discrimination and the processes of (re)victimization of women or of others minorities, weakening their agency and capacity of questioning the status quo for structural and systemic change in gender-power relations.

Following the typology elaborated by Josiane Jouët that analyses the digital space of French feminist movements and collectives (similarly identified in Italian and English digital spaces), it is possible to identify three levels of online participation. The highest commitment level is made up of feminists who produce and read content

Revenge porn:
Non-consensual pornography (the most common form of which is known as 'revenge porn') involves the online distribution of sexually graphic photographs or videos without the consent of the individual in the images. The perpetrator is often an ex-partner who obtains images or videos in the course of a prior relationship, and aims to publicly shame and humiliate the victim, in retaliation for ending a relationship. However, perpetrators are not necessarily partners or ex-partners and the motive is not always revenge. Images can also be obtained by

daily and comment on and share the content produced by other feminist actors that compose the „virtual feminist community" (2018).

The next level is made up of non-regularly-posting feminists who are not actively part of any offline group. This group reads posts and articles on some feminist collectives or bloggers and occasionally contributes with comments and sharing and supporting petitions and campaigns. Finally, there are those who are interested in gender issues and women's rights but who live feminism on an individual basis regarding their own relational sphere and behaviours.

Sharing posts, articles, memes and other digital products is the most widespread practice among all the identified groups that allows these messages to circulate on the network (in some bubbles) and to gain consensus. It contributes to the construction of a shared identity and the sense of belonging to a community and makes planning advocacy strategies and lobbying activities for construction of policies possible. However, as explained before, these actions may also attract dissent which

hacking into the victim's computer, social media accounts or phone, and can aim to inflict real damage on the target's 'real-world' life - for example, intending to cause a person to be fired from their job, or in some cases causing suicide (EIGE, 2017, p.4).

Doxing:
Doxing refers to the online researching and publishing of private information on the internet to publicly expose and shame the person targeted. (European Women#s Lobby, 2017, p.8).

Scheme based on typology identify by Joet 2018
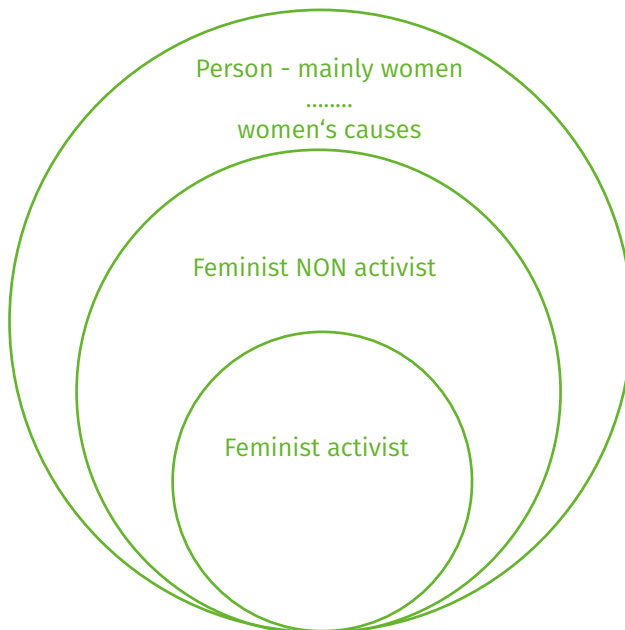
often manifests itself through trolling, hate speech or cyberbullying. The vast echo of campaigns and feminist protests in the public space is a source of violent counter-attacks. In the last decade, the high visibility of feminists on the Web has led to a huge rise in virulent cyber-sexism. This global phenomenon has been studied and denounced by several Anglophone feminist researchers who report national or international mobilisations to counter these aggressions (Gill, 2015; Shepherd et al., 2015 and Mendes, 2015; Keller et al., 2016 in Jouët, 2018: 153).

Although the sharing and circulation of knowledge produced with political intent and support for petitions and campaigns are significant acts in the digital sphere and could have interesting political effects, some experts underline the risk of emptying meaning from activism. Evgeny Morozov (2011), for instance, refers to it as slacktivism. "Romaric, a young male feminist of 23 points out: Activism is a daily commitment and a strenuous work. Internet is not bad for activism but there is a danger. Today by the number of voices which are heard on the internet, one may think that there is no longer any frontier between being a militant or just giving your opinion" (Jouët, 2018: 151). In this perspective "sharing" can be considered as a means of building of collective identity, community belonging and awarness raising about women's issue instead of activism in its strict understanding (Jouët, 2018).

When we refer to the use of hashtags in feminist movements, it is also important to underline that it can have very different outcomes for those who contribute with a personal narrative in order to support the reporting of violence and the claim of rights. The construction of a subjective narrative connected with others who shared similar experiences gives the opportunity to build and strengthen one's ability to express oneself and identify as a feminist, thus contributing to str engthening agency at an individual level in a collective context. It allows actors to "break the silence" (Jouët, 2018).

 On the other hand, however, those who choose to narrate discriminant experiences even if they do it consciously must bear a significant psychological cost by

deciding to expose themselves to change the sexist culture that makes this narration so difficult.

Slacktivism:

Slacktivism is a term that combines the words "slacker" and "activism" to refer to simple measures used to support an issue or social cause involving virtually no effort on the part of participants. Slacktivism is most commonly associated with actions like signing online petitions, copying social network statuses or joining cause-related social networking groups. Slacktivism critics contend these actions are merely for participant gratification because they lack engagement and commitment and fail to produce any tangible effect, in terms of promoting a cause.

Slacktivism is common online, particularly in social media, where statuses, information, images and avatars are posted and shared, allegedly to promote awareness within the slacktivist's network. Although slacktivism has a derogatory connotation, a U.S. survey conducted by Georgetown University's Center for Social Impact Communication (CSIC) and Ogilvy Worldwide found that individuals that engage in slacktivism are more likely to contribute to a cause than non-slacktivists. This might include donating money and time, and even recruiting others to join a cause. As a result, nonprofits have started to cast slacktivists in a more favorable light. Rather than being viewed as non-contributors, slacktivists are now seen as potential (and more likely) recruits to the cause of an organization.

(Slacktivism definition https://www.techopedia.com)

#BlackLivesMatter

The Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) is an ecosystem of individuals, groups and organisations creating a common vision and policy agenda to claim rights, recognition and resources for Black people.

"Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks' humanity, our contributions to this society, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression" (Black Lives Matter website: https://blacklivesmatter.com/).

The hashtag and call to action #BlackLivesMatter was founded in 2013 in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer. He was a 17-year-old African American from Florida, who was fatally shot in Sanford by George Zimmerman, a volunteer Neighborhood Watch person. The purpose of Black Lives Matter is to end police brutality, change public policies, amplify Black people's stories, support all Black people and run for office: "Black Healing and Wellness are essential to our liberation – state violence and systems of oppression traumatize us and our communities, and make it simultaneously impossible for us to fully heal. We have the inherent right to access healing and be free of institutions and systems that explicitly harm and undermine our capacity to live with our full humanity, connection and purpose" (Healing Action Toolkit, p. 10).

The five organisational pillars reflect the mission of the Black Power Rising 2024 goals:
1. Mass engagement
2. Local power: self-determined Black communities
3. Building across movements/multiracial strategy
4. Leadership development
5. Electoral strategy: preventing the rise of white-nationalist and authoritarian rule.

Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi are considered the founders of the Black Lives Matter Network, an online platform that existed to provide activists with a shared set of principles and goals. Local Black Lives Matter chapters are asked to commit to the organisation's list of guiding principles but operate without a central structure or hierarchy.

A Non-hierarchical Network
Digital and analogue spheres are strongly intertwined at the local and global levels. M4BL is a coalition of more than 50 groups representing the interests of black communities across the United States.

"Black Lives Matter Foundation, Inc. is a global organisation in the US, UK, and Canada, whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes. By combating and countering acts of violence, creating space for Black imagination and innovation, and centering Black joy, we are winning immediate improvements in our lives".

Source: BLM website

Use of the #BlackLivesMatter Hashtag on Twitter

The hashtag, #BLM, was slow to gain prominence. There have been periodic increases in its daily usage in response to real-world events – most notably news and discussion about fatal encounters between law enforcement and black Americans.
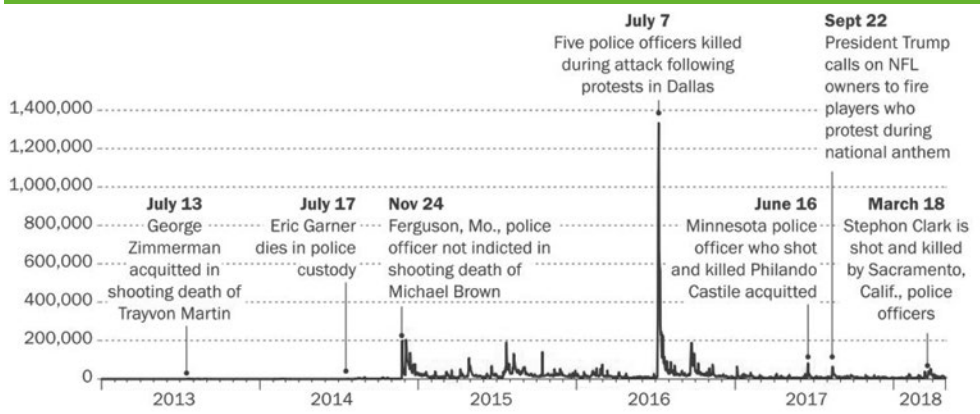
From July 2013 through 1 May 2018, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was used nearly 30 million times on Twitter, an average of 17,002 times per day.

On 28 May 2020, there were nearly 8.8 million tweets with the hashtag, and the average had increased to 3.7 million a day. By 10 June 2020, #BLM had been tweeted roughly 47.8 million times, with the period of 7–17 July 2016 seeing the highest usage at nearly 500,000 tweets a day.

The majority of Americans, across all racial and ethnic groups, have expressed support for the Black Lives Matter movement: a poll found that 60% of white, 77% of Hispanic, 75% of Asian and 86% of African-Americans either "strongly support" or "somewhat support" BLM.

On Wikipedia, a WikiProject dedicated to coverage of the Black Lives Matter movement was created in June 2020.

Twitter Posts Using the #BlackLivesMatters Hashtag

Pew Research Center (2020)

BLM Protests in the U.S.

Between 26 May, the day after George Floyd's death, and 22 August, ACLED recorded over 7,750 demonstrations linked to the BLM movement in more than 2,440 locations in all 50 states and Washington, D.C.. On 20 July 2020, the M4BL organised a strike in 60 cities, including several dozen trade unions. The strike consisted of a nation-wide walkout involving thousands of workers. #StrikeForBlackLives

An intersectional movement:
#BlackTransLivesMatter, #SayHerName, #BlackGirlsMatter

"As organizers who work with everyday people, BLM members see and understand significant gaps in movement spaces and leadership. Black liberation movements in this country have created room, space, and leadership mostly for Black heterosexual, cisgender men — leaving women, queer and transgender people, and others either out of the movement or in the background to move the work forward with little or no recognition. As a network, we have always recognised the need to center the leadership of women and queer and trans people. To maximize our movement muscle, and to be intentional about not replicating harmful practices that excluded so many in past movements for liberation, we made a commitment to placing those at the margins closer to the center".

Keywords related to the discrimination and oppression of Black people (in the U.S.)
Legal murders - Mass imprisonment - Socioeconomic inequality - Political under representation - White supremacy - Dehumanization - Black life devaluation
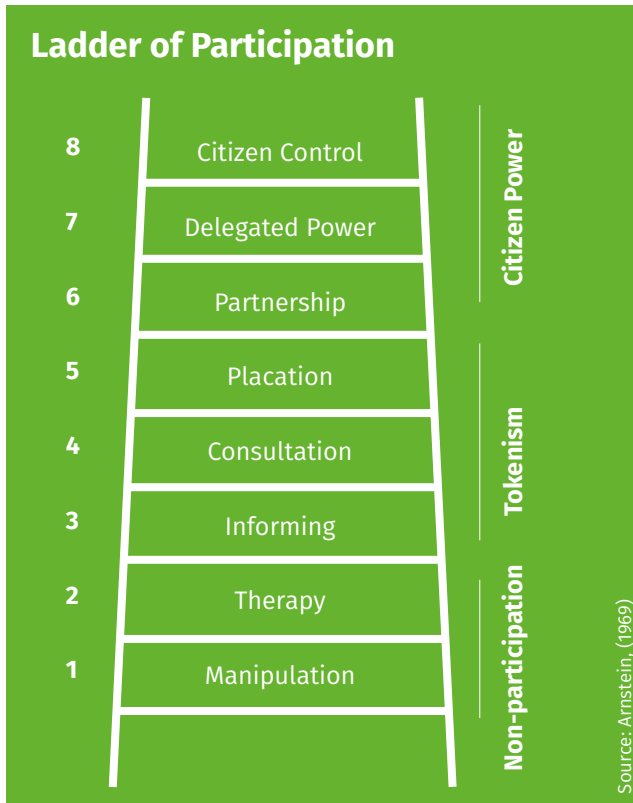
Slogans
"Black Lives Matter"; "I can't breath"; „White silence is violence"; "No justice, no peace"; "Is my son next?"

2. Plural Forms of Participation

Terms such as *clicktivism* or *slacktivism* are just examples of new concepts created in an era where the word *participation* has reached new limits, sometimes difficult to measure. A simple click on any publication can now be considered by some as activism, which is criticised by some. At first sight, slacktivism could be conceived of as pejorative, but some argue that "if anything, the internet has a positive impact on offline mobilization" (Christensen, 2011). This new form of participation "is at worst harmless fun and can at best help invigorate citizens".

  Traditionally, citizens' participation in decision making can be divided into several levels. Arnstein defined three : the level of "non-participation", „tokenism" [see box], and "citizen power" (1969). At the lowest level, the objective is "not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programmes, but to enable power holders to educate or cure the participants" (Arnstein, 1969). At the information and consultation level, tokenism allows participants to hear and be heard but "there is no follow-through, no 'muscle', hence no assurance of changing the status quo" (Arnstein, 1969). Level five, however, "allows have-nots to advise, but retain for the power holders the continued right to decide" (Arnstein, 1969). The high level of participation starts to appear in stage 6: the partnership. This can be noticed as citizens start to negotiate and engage. At the highest levels, the have-not citizens "obtain the majority of decision-making seats" (Arnstein, 1969).

Ladder of Participation

8	Citizen Control	**Citizen Power**
7	Delegated Power	
6	Partnership	
5	Placation	**Tokenism**
4	Consultation	
3	Informing	
2	Therapy	**Non-participation**
1	Manipulation	

Source: Arnstein, (1969)

But several other authors have analysed participation differently in the past years. Sarah White identified four distinct forms and functions. Unlike Arnstein, who distinguishes participation regarding to what extent it leads to (self-)empowerment of individuals, White categorizes participation according to the aims and purposes of a participatory process (1996). The first form does not result in a change, as "less powerful people become involved in it through a desire for inclusion". Instrumental participation sees "community participation being used as a means towards a stated end" and representative participation "involves giving community members a voice in the decision-making and implementation process of projects or policies that affect them" (White, 1996). Transformative participation, at last, empowers the involved people and changes structures and institutions. This model differentiates between the expectations that public bodies as providers of participatory processes have and how these processes

Tokenism:
The impression of social inclusiveness and diversity. The European Institute for Gender Equality defines tokenism as "policy or practice that is mainly symbolic, and involves attempting to fulfil one's obligations with regard to established targets, such as voluntary or mandated gender quotas, with limited efforts or gestures".
In general, tokenism can be seen as a token effort or gesture, as in offering opportunities to minorities equal to those of the majority.

appear to citizens. Although it was developed for the analysis of public participation processes, it is to some extent also suitable for the analysis of other participatory processes.

Forms and Functions of Participation

Nominal:
Often used by more powerful actors to give legitimacy to development plans. Less powerful people become involved in it and does not result in change.

Instrumental:
Community participation being used as a means towards a stated end (the efficient use of the skills and knowledge of community members in project implementation).

Representative:
Community members have a voice in the decision-making and implementation process of projects or policies that affect them.

Transformative:
Results in the empowerment of those involved, and as a result, alters the structures and institutions that lead to marginalisation and exclusion.

Source: White (1969)

Similarly, the International Association for Public Participation, an international organisation that promotes public participation through advocacy and key initiatives around the world, developed "The Spectrum of Public Participation".

It is evident that all aspects of the model are relevant. In particular, access to information is a condition for qualitative and collaborative forms of participation. For instance, participatory processes can be planned well according to the inclusion of groups and taking care of fair deliberation, but participants might experience a lack of informational basis and suffer from lack of transparency. In this regard, we would need not only to advocate for more involvement and collaboration but also to ensure that a solid basis of information is available such as the easy access to relevant (public) data for citizens and participants.

The model acts like an international standard to help groups define the public's role in any public engagement process.

Engagement is precisely the most sensitive topic in this equation since people's apathy grows day by day. in his talk at TEDxToronto 2010, Dave Meslin, a community organizer and activist from Toronto, compared the way information was organised in a town hall notice with a Nike advertisement. It quickly became clear that the two publications have very different goals. The first is limited to publishing the mandatory information, without a real interest in enhancing public participation. In the Nike advertisement, the company really wants to sell and makes the information as appealing as possible (Meslin, 2010).

Across the world, organisations have created e-participation tools with the same goal: to fight apathy. One of the best examples is in Estonia, where the citizen initiative portal, "rahvaalgatus.ee", allows citizens to participate by submitting concrete proposals to the Estonian Parliament. Citizens can submit proposals digitally, and when 1,000 signatures are obtained, it is submitted to Parliament. Like an e-petition, people have the chance to make real changes in the country's proposed laws.

The Portuguese platform "participa.pt" is another successful case of e-participation. After five years online, Participa has established itself as an instrument for the exercise of citizenship in the context of the Portuguese Ministry of Environment and Energy Transition. After almost one million accesses and about 1,200 public consultations, the platform is now in revision and will soon present an important innovation for the dynamics of stakeholder involvement in public consultation processes: the possibility for any entity to join the platform and gain an exclusive space to manage its own public consultations.

In fact, both countries have had major e-participation developments in recent years, but that doesn't mean an increase in citizen participation. "While e-participation platforms using new technologies have spread rapidly in developed countries in the first decade of the 2000s and in developing countries during the last 10 years, it is not clear that their multiplication has translated into broader or deeper citizen participation" (Le Blanc, 2020).

E-participation tools like Participa or Rahvaalgatus are not, in general, synonymous with inclusive participation. As we have said before, not all citizens have access to a computer or a smartphone. Moreover, despite the significant improvement at European level in recent years, the lack of digital skills is still a serious problem for a large section of the population, especially senior citizens.

On the other hand, the results of participation in these tools are often a disappointment for those who participate. Most decisions in which citizens participate are non-binding and there is a discredit in government and public tools.

But isn't it supposed to be easier to participate now? Yes. CitizenLab, a team of developers and citizen participation experts based in Brussels, point to four ways technology facilitates participation. First, technology makes collaboration easier, helping to manage feedback from multiple departments and teams for example. Secondly, there is an improvement in citizens' communication as digital participation tools can help give a platform to citizen voices. Technology can also make it easier to generate insights, as citizens' inputs can be automatically collected and processed. Finally, according to CitizenLab, technology can also help public bodies to act on those insights.

Despite these advantages, participation rates remain generally low. "Beyond reasons related to technology access and digital skills, factors such as lack of understanding of citizens' motivations to participate and the reluctance of public institutions to genuinely share agenda setting and decision-making power seem to play an important

The Spectrum of Public Participation

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public Participation Goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public
Promises to the Public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and re-commendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

Source: International Association for Public Participation

role in the observed limited progress.... Participation is fundamentally more difficult to manage than standard administrative transactions, because individual feedback is expected from those who participate, as well as signals that their contribution is taken into account. Because participation is voluntary rather than mandatory as in the case of digitised public services, trust in the government and public institutions play a more important role in citizen uptake" (Le Blanc, 2020).

## Availability of Services Online and Use of E-consultation and E-voting in European Countries
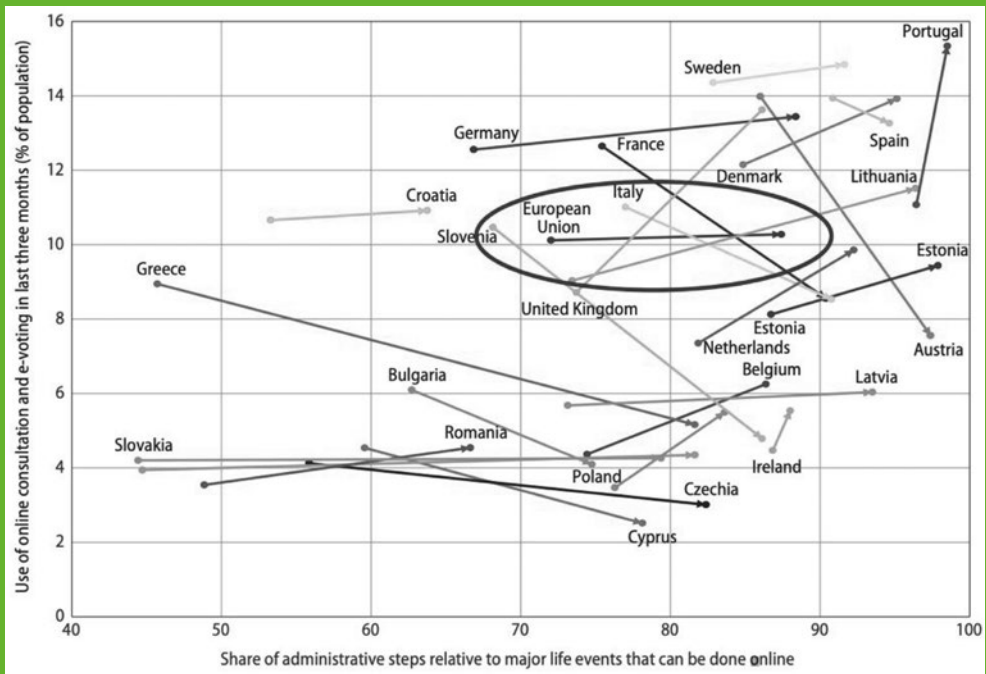
The Le Blanc United Nations paper presents e-participation in an infographic that represents the intersection of participation and e-government, where inclusion and transparency also have a role.

As we can see in the previous graphic, there is still much work to be done as far as the availability of services online and use of e-consultation and e-voting in European countries is concerned. In the most optimistic picture, some southern European countries such as Portugal and Spain and the Baltic countries are the ones that have showed some development in this area.

But as David Le Blanc says, "the boundary between old and new participation tools is not always clear-cut" (2020). There are limitations on both sides, but the new tools are often "easier to implement and provide alternative, cheaper ways of eliciting

Relations among e-participation and selected governance concepts

Source: Le Blanc (2020)
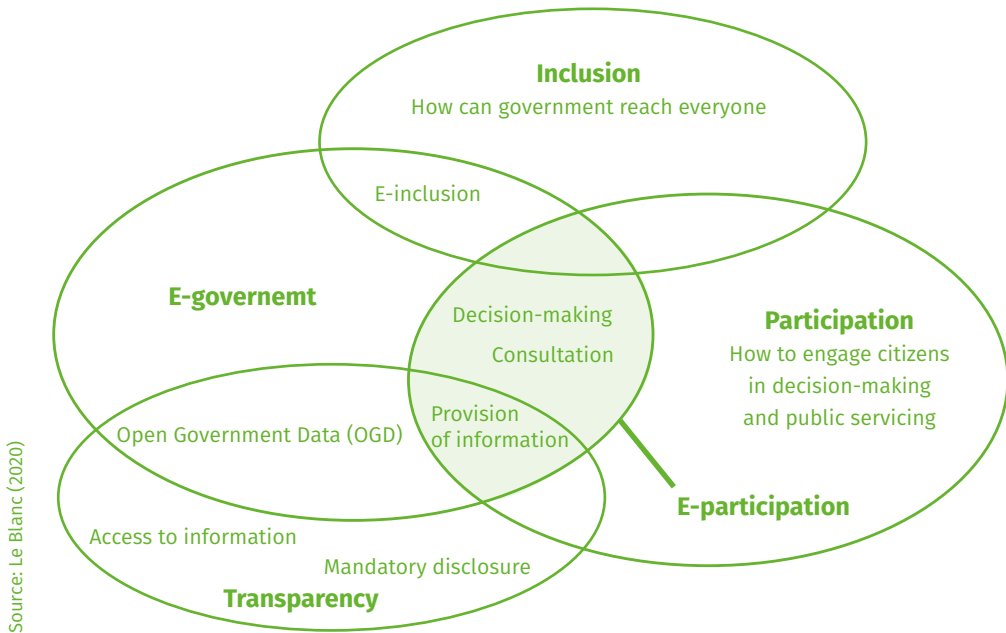
participation" (Le Blanc, 2020). The ideal e-participation scenario should above all bring more information to people and provide a decision-making consultation to the population, always based on inclusive and transparent practices. However, even with two decades of ICTs there are barriers that are difficult to overcome.

The #speakup barometer is a Deutsche Welle Akademie project that analyses the connection between digital participation, freedom of expression and access to information. This allows access to some data on the main barriers to digital participation in eight different countries (Uganda, Ghana, Kenya, Columbia, Lebanon, Ukraine, Myanmar, and Pakistan). In 2020, there will be 15 (Deutsche Welle). The data includes the level of digital participation in each country, measured on the basis of the scores of different clusters: access, digital rights, media and journalism, innovation and society. In the list of the eight countries, Ukraine was considered the country with the highest level of digital participation.

Two of the key findings are that digital rights are at risk and that the Internet has become a critical part of infrastructure.

A driver for more digital participation is innovation driven by user needs. Therefore, rights, infrastructure and needs-centered methods or tools must be seen a interlinked.

Examples of Platforms and Digital Tools for Participation

Throughout the Spectrum of Public Participation, we have been able to identify and point out several examples of useful European and global platforms and tools that can and should be used by all citizens.

Inform

Open data

Wikipedia (multilingual online encyclopedia)

wheelmap.org (a place to mark and find wheelchair accessible locations worldwide for free)

Access to politics and administration

FragDenStaat (a German platform that offers an overview of the German and European authorities and allows all users to consult effortlessly)

parliament.watch (a network of different national platforms providing a question-answer channel between citizens and parliamentarians)

Consult

Public consultations

participa.pt (a Portuguese platform where citizens can have access to 1200 public consultations and participate online)

Involve

City development

mysmartlife.eu (an integrated planning platform, where citizens from Nantes, Hamburg, and Helsinki are actively involved in decision making)

Collaborate

Citizen initiative portal

rahvaalgatus.ee (an Estonian platform where citizens can write proposals, hold discussions, compose and send digitally signed collective addresses to the Estonian Parliament)

Civic collaboration platform

wechange.de (a network, collaboration and communication platform for eco-activism built using open-source tools)

Empower

Complaints

Portal da Queixa (an online complaints channel in Portugal that allows dialogue, feedback and sharing of experiences in order to understand and resolve complaints)

How to Make Digital Participation Inclusive?

There is no simple answer to this question. There are many complex factors that may contribute to making digital participation less inclusive than we would like it to be, starting with the lack of skills or access to digital tools. But the good news is that there are projects that can help engage people to participate in a digital way.

> **Inclusive Digital Participation**
>
> **Set-up & communication:**
> Use inclusive language and visual material that shows as many groups of the population as possible.
> **Bring the digital to your citizens:**
> Place your own computers and create an online-offline mixed system.
> **Customize the software:**
> Make sure you use clarity over creativity. You can add videos, GIFs or colours on your platform but if no one finds your "Vote" button, you will never reach your objectives.
> **Measure your results:**
> Measure how inclusive your participation process actually is..

Source: CitizenLab

CitizenLab is a digital participation platform founded in Brussels in 2015 and provides a quick guide to making digital participation more inclusive. The first step, "the setup and communication", gives tips "such as using inclusive language and visual material that shows as many groups of the population as possible". The participation process should also be a mix of online and offline, and it's recommended to have equipment specifically made for that specific process. The software should also be user-friendly, follow standards and have some visual components. At the end, we should be able to "measure how inclusive your participation process actually is".

A discussion between social media platforms and digital democracy platforms has begun to emerge. Mainly developed as open source software, Digital Democracy Platforms are quite limited in terms of user base when compared with commercial platforms. However, despite the fact that social media platforms can "provide a common aesthetic framework for an inclusive, and potentially universal, networked public sphere", Marco Deseriis and Davide Vittori identify a key feature of digital democracy platforms: "the potential of implementing normative criteria whereby the democratic quality of online participation and deliberation can be assessed" (2019). Nevertheless, the authors do not underestimate the power of social networks in online participation. "Social media platforms can be used as alternatives to e-government platforms based on a top-down model of participation. From this angle, a platform model is yet to be developed that may strike a balance between spontaneous participation and structured deliberation and between social movement practices and the procedural

codification of such practices." (Deseriis and Vittori, 2019).

When we talk about inclusion, we cannot fail to refer to digital literacy. Today, 80 million Europeans never use the internet either because they don't have a computer or because it is too expensive, according to the 2019 Digital Scoreboard of the European Commission. Only 57% of Europeans have basic digital skills while 17% have no digital skills at all. And though the number of ICT specialists has increased in recent years – representing already 3,7% of total employment – women ICT experts are only 1,5% of total employed women.

Unfortunately, digital opportunities and digital skills are not for everyone. In general, those who are disconnected from the Web or ICTs may now face great disadvantages. Non-formal education and some informal learning – often provided by family and friends – are often the only option left. When we talk about gender equality, the differences become even more pronounced.

In the past two decades, along with digitalisation, gender and diversity topics have gained a new dimension. With the appearance of the Internet, millions of people can now connect with each other. Many communities have been created since Tim Berners-Lee's invention, some of them to fight for gender equality. Such is the case of "Open Box da Ciência" (Science Open Box), created by a data-oriented media organisation in Brazil to qualify the debate on this theme. The group mapped 250 influential women researchers in the country to alert the government to more inclusive policies and the absence of gender equality in the Brazilian science sector.

Europe is following the global scenario as women are less included in jobs, higher education and entrepreneurship in the digital sector. Indeed, according to the European Commission's study, "Women in the digital age", "only 24 out of every 1000 female tertiary graduates have an ICT related subject – of which only six go on to work in the digital sector" (2018).

The "Women in Digital Scoreboard 2019" went further and identified a gender gap of 11% in digital skills, higher for above basic skills and especially for those above 55-years-old.

To fight this problem, another successful community has been born in the last years, thanks to digitalisation. The Portuguese Women in Tech is a "portrait of the women that help make the difference in the Portuguese tech scene". The group of a few hundred women was created, among other reasons, as a free mentorship programme for women, and recently launched a salary transparency project.

PARTICIPATION

CHANGE

3. Trust and Participatory Governance

By Nils-Eyk Zimmermann

A crucial condition for the acceptance of digital infrastructure, platforms and services, and for believing in participatory processes, is citizens' trust in their usefulness and good intentions. Although the public seems to trust manufacturers, big services and the authority of politicians and scientific experts, there are also grounds that speak for stronger involvement of citizenry in their control. From an individual perspective, deeper trust might be shaped by a healthy balance of confidence and also reasons for falsifying distrust. Different leaks, privacy breaches or data scandals, behind lacking state regulation and soft self-governance in the private sector, show the challenges arising from a lack of governance. In consequence, it might happen that a principally trusting attitude turns into categorical distrust when trustworthy institutions appear not to fulfil expectations they set themselves. As a consequence, and considering the risks and technical implications caused by digitalisation, we need a sense of critically considered and trustworthy governance that is broadly supported in society. .

Who should be responsible for such governance? While people feared the computer state during the 1980s, now they fear big data platforms. "In the EU-27, more than one in five respondents (23 %) do not want to share any of these data with public administration, and 41 % do not want to share these data with private companies" (FRA, 2020). The tech lobby is, according to the portal lobbyfacts.eu, one of the most active in Brussels (the umbrella organisation Digitaleurope alone has 14 lobbyists and Google alone had 230 meetings with the European Commission in 2018). But still, the demands to their regulation or domestication according to democratic principles are not going away.
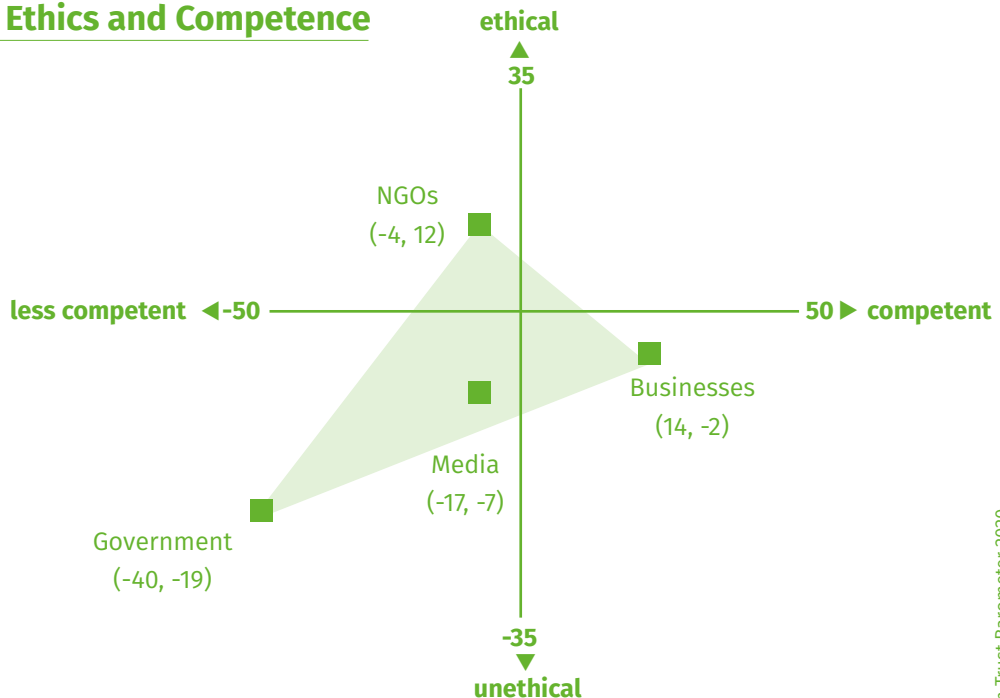
Paradoxically, trustworthy institutions enable people to develop trust in these organisations or in other people, but also offer a space for practicing critical thinking (or a healthy level of distrust). People in modern societies are able to trust strangers via such institutions, which is the basic condition for large democracies. Institutions serve as a matching space (or a man in the middle) between diverse people and interests. They offer citizens a space where they might experience their common interest mediated through their inscribed purpose and due to their gained credibility: "It is this implied

normative meaning of institutions and the moral plausibility I assume it will have for others which allows me to trust those that are involved in the same institutions – although they are strangers and not personally known to me" (Offe, 1999, p. 70).

A study of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency pointed out, that 55% in the EU fear that criminals get access to their personal information. Around one third has concerns against advertisers (31%) and foreign governments (30%). Around one quarter among the respondents is sceptical toward their countries intelligence services (26%) and governments (20%). 17% share concerns regarding law enforcement agencies and employers (FRA, 2020).

In regard to technology companies, the question might sound different today. How can I trust seemingly non-existant institutions? It is not possible to meet or speak with concrete persons, and companies and providers are not investing in more visibility, responsibility and accountability. As a result, today, more and more, the men in the middle is fading away and citizens need to draw trust from a generalised belief in the adequacy and reliability of technology systems. "If the recorded individual has come into full view, the recording individual has faded into the background, arguably to the point of extinction" (Fourcade/Healy, 2017, p. 11).

Ethics and Competence

ethical
▲
35

NGOs
(-4, 12)

less competent ◀-50 ———————————————— 50 ▶ competent

Businesses
(14, -2)

Media
(-17, -7)

Government
(-40, -19)

-35
▼
unethical

No institution is seen as both competent and ethical.

Public or semi-public new institutions might fill the gap the big data companies are consciously creating. This would also speak for more cross-sectoral governance and pluralism in governance authorities, acknowledging and moderating different perspectives in the society.

For example, a national or European privacy foundation might overlook the market and its practices, act as a consumer protection agency, provide legal assistance to citizens or act as a standardization body. Other opportunities could be the idea of ombudsmen as regulatory bodies.

Civil society might also create organisations for citizens protection in the digital sphere, which goes beyond the role of digital (tech) activists' networks and also beyond traditional consumer protection, since the digital sphere affects people in very different roles as producers of data and content, as consumers, employees or as (digitally) civically engaged citizens.

Consequently these actors would need to be included in such governance, in line with the conclusion of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency regarding the monitoring and governance of facial recognition technology: "An important way to promote compliance with fundamental rights is oversight by independent bodies" (FRA, 2019, p. 21). This would imply the inclusion of civil society in a structured way in such bodies, but also in arbitrage bodies and in decision-making or rule-setting processes. In the ethical domain, in particular, civil society is perceived as highly credible and trustworthy, while companies seem to be perceived as competent. Therefore, the challenge for state media and civil society would be to gain more digitalisation competence and in particular for civil society, to bring clear ethical positions inside the debates, regulations and governance. (Edelman Trust Barometer 2020: p. 20).

The European Ombudsman

Emily O'Reilly is the European Ombudsman, an "independent and impartial body that holds the EU's institutions and bodies to account, as well as promoting good administration".

The role of the Ombudsman is to help people, businesses and organisations facing problems with the EU's administration. If you have a complaint about maladministration by EU institutions and bodies or if you want to know more about the Ombudsman, check the QR code below.

https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/emily-oreilly

4. Is the Future in Between On and Offline Activism?

For at least a decade, the Internet has been considered an extension of our analogue life. We have increasingly realised that the digital sphere is strongly intertwined with the offline one, affecting people's behaviour at many levels, including participation and activism. The emphasis on hacktivism "led many to see the internet as offering an escape from the emptied out public space" and thousands of groups and movements have been created around the globe under this premise (McCaughey and Ayers, 2003). But many of these movements are often criticised for doing little in terms of major decisions and changes in society, and others do not appreciate being called people who just "comment and like" (Gerbaudo, 2012). In fact, in the digital sphere we can find a different model of leadership, a soft one, through which leaders have a relevant role in creating the context and a collective emotional space where movements' actions can unfold. These "soft leaders" have been compared to choreographers. Indeed they are "for the most part not visible on the stage or at least do not take centre-stage as it were. But by harnessing participants' emotionality and directing it their actions nevertheless do have a deep influence on the display of collective action" (Gerbaudo, 2012). This kind of leadership is particularly meaningful in short term claims for promoting protest events and actions, but it is problematic in the long term for the sustainability of movements themselves.

Hacktivism and digital grassroots participation – in particular through social media – have a functional role for:

- mobilizing new activists – e.g., disseminating information, boosting protest turnout and supporting fundraising campaigns;
- building coalition – e.g., mobilising internal and external resources;
- meaning making by sharing narratives, ideology and collective identity.

The symbolic process that frames relevant political issues takes place through new forms of communication and discussion by creating opportunities for recurring interactions among activists (Mundt, et. al 2018). Social media spaces create "big tents" that enable multiple personalised frames to be used simultaneously under a broad

umbrella. As such these opportunities help engender a sense of collective identity and cause, which has been shown to be crucial for effective social movement organizing (Mundt, et al. 2018, p. 2). The feeling of connectivity helps to build and consolidate the sense of belonging to a broader movement and motivate for engagement.

Nevertheless, as we mentioned before, the forms of participation taking place in the digital sphere, are not enough to guarantee the effectiveness of the social movements in contributing/influencing the mainstream public discourse, the political agenda or the policy-making process. The constraints on social media and the digital sphere that company and government (can) put in place shows the precariousness of the "freedom of speech" and of the tools for organising and communicating among activists and movement groups. Moreover, activists are personally exposed in the (digital) public sphere. It means they can become the target of personal regime/government repression and adversaries, e.g., physical or reputational attacks.

The future of social movements and CSOs is to find ways to merge online and analogue communities and coalitions able to affect the political agenda, identify innovative solutions from the bottom up and, in the meantime, question the interconnection and integration between the online and offline spheres. The global feminist movement seems to be the one most advanced in this path and for this reason, we chose to focus our attention on it. The different feminist movements, at global and local levels, indeed are able to connect each other to claim and struggle against the patriarchal system thanks to digital tools - #MeToo is only the most recognisable and recent phenomenon. At the national and local level, digital and analogue strategies are integrated in order to advocate their claims, raise awareness among citizens and engage and create an alliance among several groups and collectives. Finally, a meaningful part of feminist experts, academics and movements is questioning the digital sphere itself and the way it interconnects with the offline one, starting with examining the personal dimension and the symbolic and material consequences of this interconnection on our bodies.

5. Conclusions for Education

Contemporary societies face several challenges – digital transformations, migration flows, economic crises, climate change and pandemics such as COVID-19 – that affect the functioning of democratic processes. The tensions between opposite forces like the growing importance of global phenomena and the tendency to withdraw into nationalism teach us that we must consider the complexity and interconnection of the phenomena in the analysis, management and construction of solutions. This is crucial not only for institutional and scientific knowledge but also for the knowledge that comes from bottom-up ethical, value-based and political grounds. The digital sphere and tools are strategic elements. Indeed, the impact of a certain choice of digital tools and instruments on the grassroots level needs to be approached more consciously. Ethical and value considerations could, thanks to civic education, also be extended to the technical or instrumental aspects of civil self-organisation.

According to this view, it is necessary to cultivate and develop several competences, for present and future generations, in order to guarantee the opportunity for citizens to fully and consciously participate in the democratic process.

Competence

is understood as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Knowledge is composed of the concepts, facts and figures, ideas and theories which are already established, and support the understanding of a certain area or subject.

Skills are defined as the ability to carry out processes and use the existing knowledge to achieve results.

 Attitudes describe the disposition and mindset to act or react to ideas, persons or situations.

From a broad perspective and focusing on adult learners, among the crucial competences listed in the "Key competence for lifelong learning" publication, we concentrate on the citizenship and digital competences (EC, 2019). The document defines the *citizenship competence* as "the ability to act as responsible citizens and to fully participate in civic and social life, based on understanding of social, economic, legal and political concepts and structures, as well as global developments and sustainability" (2019, p.12).

For active participation of citizens in co-creating the rules under which participation is taking place under the conditions of digital platforms and also in the context of big data and algorithmic processing of data, citizens and their self-organisation need to be empowered (for instance for the co-governance of data and platforms, their regulation, or the provision of tools and platforms for citizens). In line with the Council of Europe's authors of the study "Algorithms and Human Rights" we make a claim for a broader "empowerment of the public to critically understand and deal with the logic and operation of algorithms" (CoE 2018, p. 43).

The digital competence includes:

involving the confident, critical and responsible use of and engagement with digital technologies for learning, work, and participation in society;
information and data literacy,
communication and collaboration,
media literacy, digital content creation (including programming),
safety (including digital well-being and competences related to cybersecurity),
intellectual property related questions, problem solving and critical thinking (p. 10).
Even if this list includes several skills and competences it cannot been considered exhaustive. It should indeed also include other aspects of digital transformation: AI/Data literacy, understanding of digital-economic models or the social impact of technology choices and access to the Internet.

The integration among listed competences allows the adoption of citizenship competences into the digital sphere. On the other hand, skills of analysis and critical understanding of how the digital sphere affects our way of *building our own identity*, our way of relating, working , spending free time are just a few aspects that must be taken into consideration by each individual when s/he decides to act collectively by joining social movements and protests, claiming rights and building a more equitable and just society. In particular, the competences included in what is defined as *media and information literary* should also be considered by those who join social movements or who propose to be activists in local collectives and groups that act "from below". Similarly, in training related to promoting active citizenship, it is important to include the skills to search, critically evaluate and use and contribute information and media content wisely. However, it is possible to identify some specific skills addressing the processes of activism and participation that are intertwined with all those already

mentioned. Moreover, some competences and skills take on *specific meaning related to activism and participation* processes. We focus, for example, on collective intelligence, multitasking, transmedia navigation, networking and negotiation. Definitions of these skills refer to the elaboration by Young (2018) of the new media literacy skills developed by Jenkins et al. (2009) tackling the role of media education as a condition for participatory culture.

Collective intelligence	The ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others toward a common goal.
Multitasking	The ability to scan one's environment and shift focus as needed to salient details.
Transmedia navigation	The ability to follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities.
Negotiation	The ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms.

Furthermore, activism and participation which connects offline and online strategies and tools seems to be an increasingly *professionalised space* in which members of collectives and social movements need to have high competence in organising, communicating internally and externally and networking (defined as the ability to create an alliance and common frame among different groups, at a local, national and global level). Civil Society – activists, associations, collectives and movements – also create interactive and participative platforms and develop innovative strategies in order to fund their efforts (e.g., crowdfunding platforms, online merchandising) and spread their claims and struggles in the digital sphere. Professional competences are needed to persuade, commit and engage the broader public – for advocacy and political claims: technically, such as creating videos, visual graphic design or website creation.

Finally – analytically – activists and citizens must *learn about digital rights* and also how to recognize, contrast and avoid cyberbullying attacks by trolls and haters. Security and defence of privacy are at the core of political expression and being able to navigate safely in the digital sphere is crucial, in particular in a fragile democratic context.

Last but not least, *efficient and successful participation of civil society* under the conditions of digital transformation means also that citizens and civil society organisations can be involved in legislation as well as monitoring and governance of digital processes, platforms and infrastructure. This is a question of learning among citizens and in civil society organisations but also a duty for the state to offer

appropriate opportunities and conditions for efficient participation.

The Council of Europe's Commissioner on Human Rights in the "Unboxing Artificial Intelligence: 10 steps to protect Human Rights" recommendation identifies ten steps which "national authorities can take to maximise the potential of artificial intelligence systems and prevent or mitigate the negative impact they may have on people's lives and rights" (CoE, 2019). Obviously, citizens, and in particular those groups among them that are exposed to the risk of marginalisation or discrimination through the impact of the digital transformation, should become involved and empowered for competent action in these fields:

Involvement of Civil Society in Monitoring Technology:

human rights impact assessment;
public consultations;
human rights standards in the private sector;
information and transparency;
independent oversight;
non-discrimination and equality;
data protection and privacy;
freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, and the right to work;
access to remedies;
the promotion of artificial intelligence literacy (CoE 2019)

Digitalisation offers new and unknown potentials – beneficial and harmful – of community building, mobilising and organising. To meaningfully apply it, however, sets pre-requirements of an extended digital literacy and of extended technical capacities, both of the learners as well as of those supporting the learners. This counts also for the definition of what learning and education is about – in its scope, structures, systems and approaches.

Civic education should aim to have a decisive role in these processes, since digitalisation enhances the potential of multipolar mobilisation. We are witnessing rising difficulties to identify the sources and purposes, that form occasions and fuel activities of existing and emerging communities. They may result in societal and democratic superchallenges.

To get aware, understand, classify the different drivers, purposes and consequences of (and for) civic involvement, engagement and organising, requires commitment to democratic and holistic learning - a core concern of civic education.

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