

# Young Europeans as citizens online

Report of Working Group 2 of the  
Jean Monnet Network Project:  
Citizenship Education in the  
Context of European Values:  
CitEdEV

ERASMUS+ JEAN MONNET NETWORK



**Citizenship Education in the  
Context of European Values**

ISBN: 978-80-7603-413-6

DOI: 10.14712/9788076034136

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With the support of the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

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## Introduction

The development of new technologies has changed human functioning in many spheres. To the greatest extent, they affect socialisation patterns related to functioning in peer and social groups. They also shape relations with the state, civic activity, and the perception of oneself as a citizen. In this book we will present a comprehensive study, conducted by a team of academics from 4 European countries - UK, Hungary, Spain, and Poland - using a variety of methods and from different cultural perspectives, on young people's attitudes towards online citizenship. All members of the project group have contributed to the preparation of the research and the conduct of selected parts of it, and selected members have prepared chapters for this publication.

The brochure will present the results of the research on different aspects of young people's digital citizenship: how young people conceptualize virtual and digital citizenship, what types of online civic activity young people engage in, what are the justifications and motives for engaging in civic activity, and finally how to support teachers in educating digital citizenship.

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# Young people's conceptualization of digital citizenship

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## Introduction

As technological advances change our world, the circumstances of socialization for children and young people are also changing. Previously, this socialization took place in the real world. There, experiences of belonging to a social group, an institution, a wider community were collected, and concepts of law, power and authority were formed (Hess & Torney, 1967). The foundation of experiences and beliefs critical to civic activity was thus built. However, the transfer of social relations, including relations with the community and the state, to the virtual world has created new opportunities and challenges for civic activity.

Traditionally, citizenship was associated with place. It was associated with a sense of identity and belonging to a territory, which most often was the state with its borders (Harvey after: Melosik 1989). Being a citizen of a specific territorial space defined "who one was" and was the basis for inclusion and exclusion from the community. Classical concepts of citizenship thus referred to cultivating a relationship with that space. They were based on concern for the preservation of the traditions and culture of the past, and, in relation to the space, the defense of its territory. Thus, initially, citizenship meant a relationship with the state and the realization of obligations to the state, from respecting rules and laws to taking responsibility for governance through participation in voting, political activity such as membership in political parties or running for office (Heater, 1990; Theiss-Morse, 1993). The aforementioned activities are the most conventional and accepted forms of citizenship. Civic activity as a relationship with the state, was also understood as supporting the community and fellow citizens, for example, through charitable activities. When considering the issues of traditionally understood citizenship, it is impossible to ignore its less accepted forms, such as control of power, readiness to revolt and protest (Szacki, 1996)). More than once in European history, it was these types of citizen movements that determined significant social changes, altering the political systems of states and entire blocs (e.g., the actions of the Solidarity movement in Poland in the 1980s, which led to transformations throughout the Eastern bloc of USSR-dependent states). Among the many current conceptions of citizenship (Herbst, 2005; Kennedy, 1997, 2006; Lewicka, 2004, 2008), it is worth citing Zalewska and Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz's (2017) three-dimensional model of citizenship activity, which integrates both traditional dimensions and modern approaches. The model distinguishes between:

1. Passive citizenship - associated with a sense of belonging to a territory, also taking into account patriotic activities.
2. Semi-active citizenship - associated with occasional activity (such as voting in elections) but also respect for state institutions and adherence to rules.
3. Active citizenship - associated directly with various types of political, social activity, also taking into account protests against authority and activity for personal development (see Table 1) .

Table 1: A model of citizenship activity

Dimension	Subdimension	Description
<b>Passive</b>	National identity	A sense of belonging to the state/nation; knowing the values and history of the country, appreciation of national symbols
	Patriotism	Feeling ready to defend the country from external threats
<b>Semi-active</b>	Loyalty	Abiding the law; respecting the rules and regulations, respect for public institutions - the government and parliament
	Civic virtues	Voting, being interested in public affairs, working for the common good
<b>Active citizenship</b>	Political activity	Engagement and participation in conventional political activity (being a member of a political party, running for office)
	Acting for change	Engagement and participation in making political and/or social changes, protesting or aiming to control authorities. Legal (e.g. righting petitions, collecting votes) or illegal
	Social activity	One-time, irregular or incidental engagement and volunteering in actions and organizations that work for the community. Participating in actions aimed at maintaining local identity or community
	Personal activity	Working towards individual independence, taking responsibility for own life and health, aiming to be in charge of development and education, striving for financial independence

Source: own compilation based on Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz and Zalewska (2017)

With the technological development of the 1980s and the transition of societies into the post-modern phase, the meaning of territorial space has changed. The possibilities of travel and the development of new media has allowed people to function in different places simultaneously, being a member of a local and global community at the same time. Thus, they began to be affected not only by the problems of the immediate territory, but also by issues arising in distant parts of the world (including environmental issues, those affecting minorities, women's emancipation, poverty, unemployment, etc., see Kerr, 1999). Issues have become further complicated with the development of the Internet and widespread access to the web and social media. With this the concept of citizenship began to change. This is reflected in concepts relating to the impact of modern technologies on social participation, the most important of which is the *digital citizenship theory* described in the early 21st century (Mossberger et al.,

2008). The theory suggests that the Internet serves as more than just a tool for fostering progress and societal transformation; it actually establishes the environment where these transformations occur. Functioning online has made it even more possible to transcend physical boundaries and thus participate in the global community, fostering connectivity, collaboration, and a sense of belonging in the online world (Loader, 2007). This is especially true for young people, who are navigating the virtual world most skillfully and redefining what it means to be a citizen in the digital age.

In conclusion, the concept of citizenship is currently undergoing a transformation due to another change in the meaning of space and, in particular, the addition of online space. Therefore, it can be assumed that the meaning of citizenship is changing significantly especially in the youth generation. And their way of understanding this phenomenon will result from the activities undertaken. Therefore, understanding how young people understand citizenship will be the basis for a number of educational activities, including the formation of civic education programs in the future.

In this chapter, the results of international research will be presented, which attempted to answer the question: *how young people conceptualize the concept of digital citizenship in relation to the phenomenon of citizenship*. It was expected that understanding the potential differences and similarities would allow to understand how current educational activities focusing on traditionally understood citizenship should change and include new ways of understanding the phenomenon to meet the needs of the younger generation.

## Method

Understanding the conceptualization of a given phenomenon involves choosing the appropriate method of study. For the specifics of the problem we have posed, it is important that the method meet two conditions. First, it allows comparisons to be made. Second, it takes into account the meaningful context. Thus, it should combine elements of both quantitative and qualitative methods.

The most promising method that meets both conditions seems to be AGA (Associative Group Analysis). This method, by analyzing free associations, makes it possible to understand the potential dispositions associated with different categories of citizenship, without conceptual, theoretical interference with its shape. AGA was developed in the 1960s by American sociologist Lorand Szalay (Szalay & Bernt, 1967; Szalay & Bryson, 1974; Szalay & Deese, 1978). He assumed that the free associations that people generate around a phenomenon are a reflection of beliefs about it and are directly related to a certain kind of readiness to act in a given area. He made Charles Osgood's work on semantic differentiation, among others, the starting point for developing the method. Osgood (Osgood et al., 1957), Deese (1962, 1965) and Noble (1952), along with their colleagues, started from the premise that language reflects a person's dispositions related to intersubjective phenomena. The ability to access these dispositions would allow for an understanding of hidden subjective meanings that would enable a better understanding of behavior (Osgood et al., 1957). An important contribution to the creation of the method itself was made by James Deese (1965), who emphasized that it was not so much the associations themselves, but their sequence and therefore availability

that mattered. The associations generated first are the most persistent and constitute the semantic axis of the phenomena under study, the discovery of which is the goal of applying AGA. Thus, analysis is carried out at two levels: the qualitative level (meaning content) and the quantitative level (quantification of meaning). The qualitative level involves the independent work of expert judges who, on the basis of meanings, combine associations into bundles called categories. The categories can then be bundled into broader groups. This isolates the types of meanings that saturate a concept. Quantitative analysis makes it possible to compare this saturation between different groups of respondents (e.g., people of different ages) but also competing concepts (no citizenship and digital citizenship). For this purpose, a certain number of points - weights - are assigned to each association, depending on the order in which they were generated: the first association receives 6 points, the second 5 points, etc. The weights for each association were determined by Szalay in studies on the relevance and reliability of the method itself (Szalay & Brent, 1967; Szalay & Bryson 1974; Szalay & Lysne 1970; Szalay et al., 1972; Szalay et al., 1970). After estimating the point weight of each association, the average weight for the category is calculated, which makes it possible to compare its level of importance in relation to other categories. Szalay recommends that the number of people in each of the groups being compared should be identical - then comparison is possible at the level of the sum of weights. However, if the study groups have different numbers, the average of the weights for a given person is calculated. Such a solution was used in the research presented here.

The AGA method was initially used primarily in cross-cultural research. It was also used for comparative research on youth - understanding the phenomena of cooperation and competition and also citizenship (Ross et al., 2006). In recent years, the conceptual diversity of citizenship issues, virtual citizenship and online citizenship has been studied using this method (Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz & Kotyśko, 2023). The studies were local and limited to one country. However, they became an inspiration for cross-cultural research on the relationship between modern technologies and citizenship.

## Research procedure

The study was conducted in an online format, giving two tasks instructing to write down within one minute everything that comes to mind when they hear the word *Citizenship* (task 1) or *Digital citizenship* (task 2). The order of the instructions was random. In order to avoid one concept influencing the other, simple math tasks were presented in between, which participants solved in one minute.

## Research sample

The study included 377 subjects aged 14-22 in three age ranges that simultaneously represent three developmental periods: early adolescence, late adolescence, and early adulthood. The groups receive education at three different levels, which, depending on the educational system, referred to: late primary/lower secondary school, secondary school, university (see Table 2). The young people taking part in the study belong to a generation referred to in the

literature as Generation Z (Seemiller & Grace, 2017) or the generation of digital natives (Prensky, 2001). These are young people who were born at the turn of the century or later and are part of an online world with information available at any time and place "at their fingertips" (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). The research was conducted in four European countries - the United Kingdom, Spain, Hungary, and Poland. Although the countries belong to the Western European culture, are (or were until recently, like the UK) members of the EU, they are nonetheless diverse due to historical conditions related to democratic traditions and are currently experiencing different problems (details of the differences between the countries are described in the introduction to this casebook).

Due to the non-equivalence of age, gender and country groups, the analysis dropped comparisons on these variables and focused on analyzing the concept of citizenship and digital citizenship phenomenon itself.

Table 2: Research sample distribution by gender, age, and state.

	GENDER			AGE			TOTAL
	Non-binary	female	Male	14	18	22	
PL	0	72	92	20	65	80	164
UK	0	102	17	1	27	92	119
HU	1	19	12	0	13	19	32
ES	0	55	7	0	40	22	62
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>377</b>

## Results

The analysis of the results was carried out in two steps. In the first, a count was made of the number of associations generated by participants that were associated with each of the phenomena studied. In the second, a qualitative analysis of meanings was conducted by selecting categories covering the generated associations and then, according to the methodology proposed by Szalay, assigning weights to a given group of categories.

### Quantitative analysis - number of associations

For the *Citizenship* phenomenon, 2001 associations were generated with an average of  $M=5.27$  per person and for *Digital Citizenship* 1699 associations with an average of  $M=4.28$ . This means that *Digital Citizenship* has a less rich representation than *Citizenship*. This is not a surprising or revealing conclusion from the perspective of older generations, for whom the

phenomenon of *Digital Citizenship* is relatively new. However, young people who function online encounter social issues in the context of new technologies on a daily basis. Perhaps the identified disparity is due to civic education, which takes less account of digital issues.

### Qualitative analysis - the importance of associations

In the qualitative analysis, in the first step, the expert judges grouped the associations into categories and then the categories were combined into dimensions. This yielded 46 categories, which were combined into 14 dimensions based on similar associations (see Table 3). The frequency of each association was calculated for each concept, and weights were assigned based on the number of points according to Shalay's methodology. The weights of all associations in each category were summed, and the percentage of weight of each category was determined for the concept under analysis.

Table 3. Dimensions, categories, selected associations, percentage weight for *citizenship*, *digital citizenship* concepts

Association category/dimension	Selected associations	Weigh in %	
		citizenship	digital citizenship
<b>CIVIC ACTIVITY DIMENSION</b>		<b>6.7</b>	<b>2.4</b>
Active participation	Petitions, citizen initiative, political participation, projects, influence, mobilization	0.8	0.7
Support	Support, help, kindness, donation, empathy, caring, helping others	1.4	0.4
Elections	Votes cast, referendum, voting, elections, ballot box, remote elections	2.1	0.9
Duties	Obligations, duty, requirements	2.5	0.4
<b>VALUES DIMENSION</b>		<b>3.1</b>	<b>1.5</b>
Virtues	Solidarity, hardworking, seriousness, integrity	1.0	0.5
Values	Honor, equality, values, respect, truth, goodness	1.9	1.0
Responsibility	Keeps all deadlines, responsible, accountable	0.2	0.0
<b>PERSONAL DIMENSION</b>		<b>10.1</b>	<b>5.0</b>
Individual	Human, resident, neighbor, person, host	7.7	2.0
Citizen	Citizen, being a citizen, citizen, m-citizen, citizen on the Internet	2.5	3.0
<b>NON-SPECIFIC GROUP DIMENSION</b>		<b>10.5</b>	<b>4.5</b>
Non-specific group	People, group, population, group of people	8.1	2.5
Global relations	Immigrants, Europeans, foreign travel, living abroad Poland, world citizen	1.9	1.6
Diversity	Different opinion, differences, diversity, different types	0.5	0.2
<b>SOCIAL DIMENSION</b>		<b>26.7</b>	<b>9.8</b>
Society	Society, collectivity, building blocks of society, group work	7.9	4.9
Community	Community, unity, friendship, we, unification, friendship	2.3	0.7
Belonging	Membership, identification, loving	6.1	2.0
Roots	Place of origin, family, tradition	3.8	0.8
Place	Home, town, location, street	6.6	1.3
<b>CONTACT/ MEETING DIMENSION</b>		<b>0.1</b>	<b>7.2</b>





Meeting platform	Social media, Metaverse, Facebook, social media activity, Twitter, online chats	0.1	7.2
<b>STATE-NATIONAL IDENTITY DIMENSION</b>		<b>22.0</b>	<b>5,8</b>
State	country of origin, state, capital	14.7	3.1
Nation	Nation, Hungarians, language, nationality	4.1	1.3
Patriotism	Patriotism, patriotic defense of the state	1.0	0.5
Identity	National identity, identity, who I am, identity online,	1.7	0.8
Symbols	flag, emblem, anthem	0.5	0.2
<b>POLITICAL SYSTEMS DIMENSION</b>		<b>1.5</b>	<b>0.8</b>
Democracy	democracy, constitution, republic	0.5	0.1
Politics	Government, party, president, politics, virtual politicians	1.0	0.7
<b>STATE REGULATIONS DIMENSION</b>		<b>11.7</b>	<b>9.6</b>
Rules	Etiquette, observance of etiquette, privacy rules, social standards, rules	1.4	0.7
Rights	Rights, privileges, law of the land, giving opportunities	3.3	1.1
Order	Security, sense of security, system, protection	1.5	0.5
Office	Office, tax office, city hall, official matters, registration,	1.0	2.0
Documents	Document, e-passport, e-identity card	4.4	5.4
Government	Government	0.1	0.0
<b>INFORMATION SOCIETY DIMENSION</b>		<b>0.5</b>	<b>32.2</b>
Internet	Internet, electronics, online, network, World Wide Web	0.1	22.3
Anonymity	Anonymity, incognito, bez twarzy	0.0	0.4
Virtual reality	Virtual reality, virtual society	0.0	1.3
Devices	Phone, payment systems, computer, laptop, phone, wi-fi, app	0.4	8.2
<b>EDUCATION DIMENSION</b>		<b>1.3</b>	<b>2.9</b>
Information	Communication, collection of information, information, viewing news, knowledge	0.4	2.4
Education	civics test, learn, civics education, education	0.6	0.3
School	building, lesson, studying, curriculum, subject	0.3	0.2
<b>PROGRESS DIMENSION</b>		<b>1.1</b>	<b>8.4</b>
Facilitation	Connectivity, easy access, less bureaucracy, convenience, versatility,	0.7	2.5
Progress	lack of restrictions	0.4	5.9
<b>UNDESIRABLE PHENOMENA DIMENSION</b>		<b>1.2</b>	<b>5.2</b>
Negative phenomena	cyber violence, deviancy, hate, surveillance	1.0	3.8
Restrictions	Limited face-to-face contact, obstruction, pretense, warning	0.2	0.7
Isolation	Isolating, absence, outcast, isolation, relegation	0.0	0.4
COVID	Covid, pandemic	0.0	0.3
<b>OTHERS DIMENSION</b>		<b>3.4</b>	<b>4.9</b>
Other	Categorization, cables, collection, every day, trees	3.2	4.0
Abstraction	beyond reality, unknown, unreal, unreal, simulation	0.2	0.9



The saturation of the two studied phenomena with different associative categories is shown in Figures 1 and 2. For clarity, only 6 of the 4th categories for each phenomenon are graphically presented. It should be noted, however, that these 6 categories for citizenship, digital citizenship define them by about 50%. The analyzed dimensions, categories and selected associations with weight percentages are shown in Table 3.

The concept of citizenship is dominated by two dimensions: SOCIAL and STATE-NATIONAL IDENTITY. The four categories that make up these dimensions, *State*, *Society*, *Place* and *Belonging* saturate the concept of citizenship more than 35% giving it meaning related to a sense of community, belonging to a group of people, identification, country, place, capital. The remaining dimensions are NON-SPECIFIC GROUP and PERSONAL of which *Individual* and *Non-specific group* categories are an important conceptual range (about 8% each) of citizenship and reflect the meaning of a person, neighbor, host, or group of people. The citizenship category is not related to INFORMATION SOCIETY and CONTACT/ MEETING dimensions, but is also marginally understood as PROGRESS, including *Facilitation*. As depicted in Figure 1, six of the forty-six categories saturating the concept of citizenship in about 50% indicate its connection with space and nation-state identification. Thus, it can be concluded that the concept of Citizenship for young people is associated with the category of state, social group, place of residence.

The concept of Digital Citizenship is most closely related to issues of new media and the Internet and thus the INFORMATION SOCIETY dimension, which consists of *Internet Network* (Internet, electronics, online, network, World Wide Web) and high-tech *Devices* (phone, payment systems, computer, laptop, phone, wi-fi, app). Its significant component is also SOCIAL DIMENSION and especially *Society* (collectivity, building blocks of society, group work) and CONTACT/ MEETING DIMENSION involving social media activity: social media, Metaverse, Facebook, social media activity, Twitter, online chats. The State category makes up less of the concept, while STATE REGULATIONS DIMENSION and especially formal issues such as *Documents* (passport, ID) are important. Digital Citizenship is also associated with *Progress* - development of technology, newness, future, modernity, and innovation. It is marginally associated with VALUES and CIVIC ACTIVITY DIMENSION. As depicted in Figure 2, six of the forty-six categories saturating the concept of citizenship in about 50% indicate its association with new technologies, progress that facilitates relations with the state primarily in the area of regulation e.g., electronic documents.

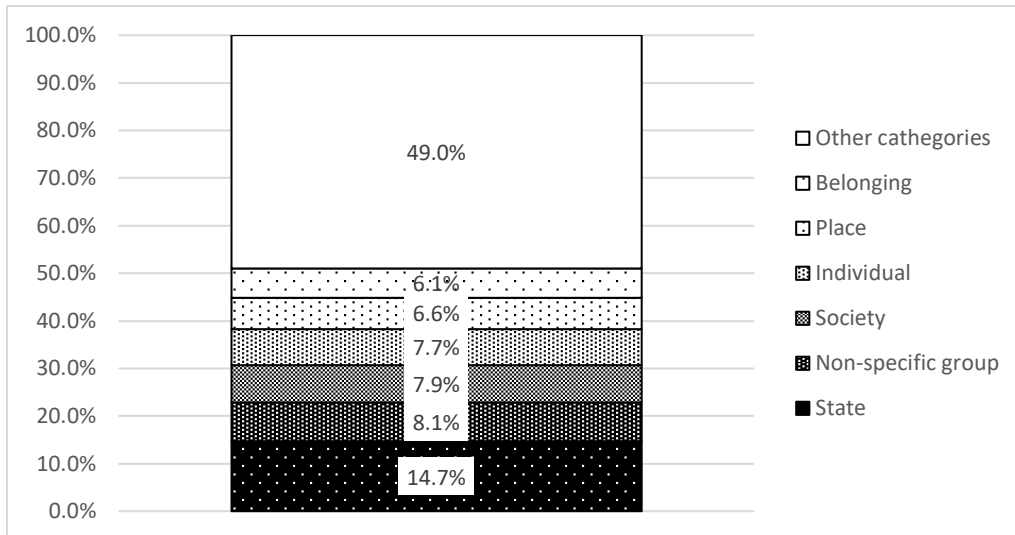


Figure 1. The saturation of the CITIZENSHIP phenomena by association categories

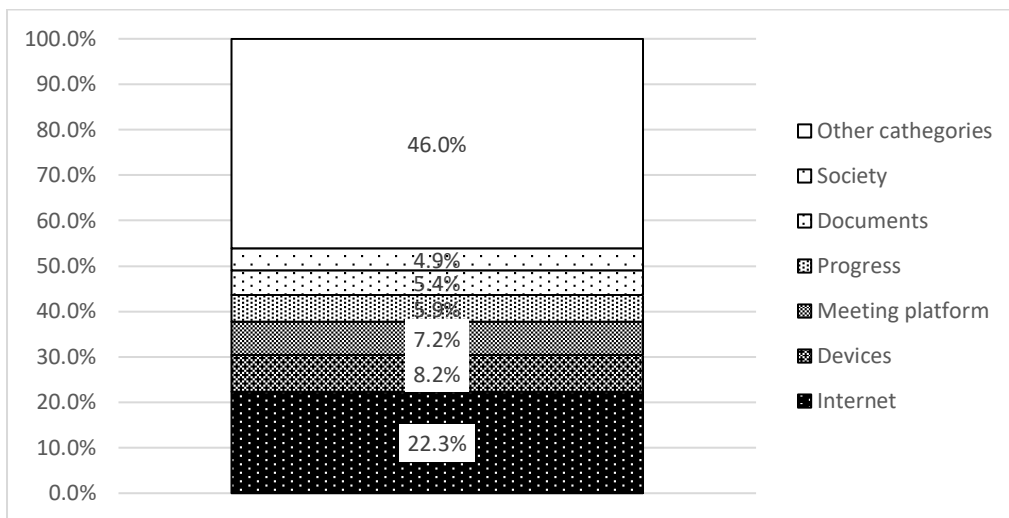


Figure 2. The saturation of the DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP phenomena by association categories

Interestingly, both phenomena for the digital age generation, make little reference to traditional civic attitudes and activities - civic virtues and responsibility, and political activism. Digital citizenship, on the other hand, is infused with more negative references, such as cyber violence, deviancy, hate, surveillance.

## Conclusions

For young people, the digital sphere is an important domain in which citizenship can be realized but also experienced. Online platforms provide opportunities for active participation, social engagement, and advocacy. Through social media, blogs and other digital platforms, people can express their opinions, support causes, and mobilize for social change. Virtual space thus provides a platform for democratic participation that young people can use to

express opinions and influence social discourse. While traditional notions associate citizenship with legal and political rights within a specific nation-state, young people growing up online can experience citizenship as a global and interconnected concept. By crossing geographical boundaries, they may be more inclined to advocate for a global collective.

According to our research, the concept of citizenship is understood in a more traditional way - limited to belonging to a territory. Digital citizenship, on the other hand, is associated with progress, using modern technology to meet on social media platforms. Online citizenship enables young people to make a difference, transcend physical limitations and strengthen their influence around the world. It should be emphasized that young people recognize the dangers of the digital world. They point to the importance of critically evaluating online information, media literacy and digital safety. Although online citizenship offers great opportunities, young people also face challenges and threats in the digital space. Online harassment, cyberbullying and privacy concerns pose serious threats to their well-being and online citizenship. In addition, the proliferation of fake news and echo chambers can make it difficult to objectively evaluate information and impede meaningful dialogue. Young people must deal with these challenges while actively promoting responsible digital citizenship.

Digital citizenship can enable transnational encounters and facilitate cooperation and understanding of global perspectives, intercultural communication, and international contacts. The social media sphere allows them to connect with people from different backgrounds, fostering cultural exchange and cultivating a sense of global citizenship. These interconnections provide young people with a broader worldview and a greater appreciation of diversity.

Young people's conceptualization of citizenship and online citizenship indicates that they see online platforms as a way to exercise citizenship, to support public affairs. With digital skills, young people are embracing global perspectives while crossing physical boundaries. As we move forward, it is essential to support young people in navigating the digital frontier, addressing the challenges they face and amplifying their voices. This is a challenge for civic education.

## **Recommendations for education**

As previously mentioned, digital citizenship goes beyond the traditional notion of citizenship tied to physical boundaries, enabling individuals to participate in the global community through online platforms. However, the virtual realm introduces unique challenges and complexities that require individuals to develop new competencies to support value-compliant action in online spaces. Citizenship education must adapt to these challenges, preparing individuals to be active and responsible online citizens. This issue is an area under-recognized by young people, for whom, according to our research, the issue of responsibility has little connection with the issue of citizenship. Therefore, in the digital age, responsible media literacy should become an important part of education. Young people should learn to navigate media sources, understand media biases, and critically engage with the content they consume and share. Digital citizenship education should emphasize media literacy, enabling individuals

to become active participants, creators, and curators of digital media, fostering responsible and ethical digital behavior.

Citizenship education requires a focus on digital skills and critical thinking. Individuals must be able to critically evaluate online information, distinguish fact from fiction and responsibly navigate the vast digital landscape. It should equip students to identify biases, assess credibility and engage in constructive dialogue online, enabling them to be informed and insightful online citizens.

Digital citizenship raises ethical questions and dilemmas that require thoughtful consideration. Issues such as online privacy, cyberbullying, digital rights, and the proliferation of misinformation require ethical awareness and responsible decision-making are noticed by young people and are more likely to be associated with digital citizenship. Education must foster ethical values, promoting respect, empathy, honesty, and digital responsibility to guide individuals in their online interactions and engagements.

Digital citizenship provides opportunities for global connectivity and cross-cultural interactions. However, the category of diversity is underplayed in the conceptualization of citizenship. Citizenship education should address this and foster cultural understanding, empathy, and cross-cultural communication skills. By appreciating different perspectives and engaging in dialogue with people from diverse backgrounds, virtual citizens can contribute to a more inclusive and interconnected global community.

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# Young people's online and offline citizenship activity and relations to the state - a brief research report

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## Introduction

Generation Z are people who do not know a world without technology and the Internet. They naturally use technological facilitations in their daily lives, from the way they communicate with others to how they order food online. As Seemiller and Grace (2017) point out, this generation, compared to its predecessors, has a different approach towards learning, community engagement and also career development. As Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz et al. describe (2018, in: Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz & Kotyśko, 2023, p. 53) "... youths are characterized by high levels of passive and semi-active citizenship. They declare respect for symbols and sense of attachment to their countries. They have intention to vote and respect the law. Although they assert some eagerness to work for community, but they are reluctant to become actively involved in politics."

Despite considerable evidence to indicate that young people's political and civic activity is declining, it should also be noted that the nature of civic participation is undergoing change. According to Barrett and Pachi (2019, p. 6), "individuals can be cognitively or affectively engaged without being behaviorally engaged. [...] lack of overt political or civic action cannot necessarily be interpreted as a sign of political and civic disengagement". Wike and Castillo (2018) observed that young people (ages 18-29) were less likely to vote than older adults, but they were more eager to express their political and social views online and become actively involved in the protection of freedom of speech. These observations could suggest that young people are not necessarily less active, but that their civic participation takes on less traditional form.

Considering the presented characteristics of Generation Z and the changes perceived in the civic activity of young people and the level of trust in institutions, a survey was conducted in four European countries (Spain, Hungary, Poland, and the UK). It aimed to compare the four countries in terms of: political involvement, the level of trust in national and international



institutions, mutual responsibility for the situation of different social groups, motives related to the reasons for helping, and citizenship activities done offline and online.

## Method

### Participants

Young people between the ages of 14 and 25, a total of 969 people, took part in the survey. The proportions of participants from each country were as follows: Hungary, n = 305; Poland, n = 326; Spain, n = 257 and UK, n = 81. The sample consisted of 69% women, 29.5% men, a gender other than those listed was indicated by 1.1% of participants, and 0.3% of respondents did not answer.

### Measurement

Research data was collected through a proprietary tool prepared by the Working Group 2 team, which includes: Paszkal Kiss (Hungary), Martyna Kotyśko, Beata Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz, Marcin Kowalczyk (Poland), Tatiana García Vélez (Spain) and Verity Jones (UK).

The survey consisted of 27 questions (UK version included 25 items) and an extended metric. Of the questions used, six were selected for this analysis, which related to:

- Interest in politics (scale range: 0-10 where the higher score the more interested in politics the person is)
- Ability to take active role in a group involved with political issues. (scale range: 0-10 where the higher score the more convinced the person is that can play an active role in political matters)
- Trust in national and international institutions (scale range: 1-5 where 1 - not at all and 5 - completely)
- Responsibility for social groups (scale range: 1-5 where 1 - not important at all and 5 - very important)
- Motivation for help (scale range 1-5 where 1 - does not motivate and 5 - highly motivates)
- Online and offline citizenship activities (scale range: 1-5 where 1 - almost never and 5 - almost always)

### Procedure

The survey was conducted in offline and online conditions. Regardless of the conditions, the survey was anonymous and voluntary. Among minors, parental consent was obtained for the child's participation in the survey. Among adults, the survey link was distributed by promoting the survey in student groups and through social media. Data were collected between April 2022 till February 2023.

### Data analysis

The Exploratory Factor Analysis and Principal Component Analysis were used for indicator selection, which then formed the basis for within (Student t-test for dependent samples) and cross-country comparisons (one-way ANOVA with Bonferroni post hoc test). Political involvement was categorized into three intensity levels: low, medium, and high. With the chi



square test use the proportions of each level of political involvement in every country were compared.

## Results

The average level of interest in politics in the sample was  $4.75 \pm 2.66$  while belief in one's ability to play an active role in a group involved with political issues had a mean of  $3.45 \pm 2.48$ . In both cases, the maximum score possible was 10. Using the Student's t-test for dependent samples for comparison, it can be concluded that the interest in politics in the sample is higher than the belief that one has the ability to play an active role in it ( $t = 17.21$ ,  $df = 939$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

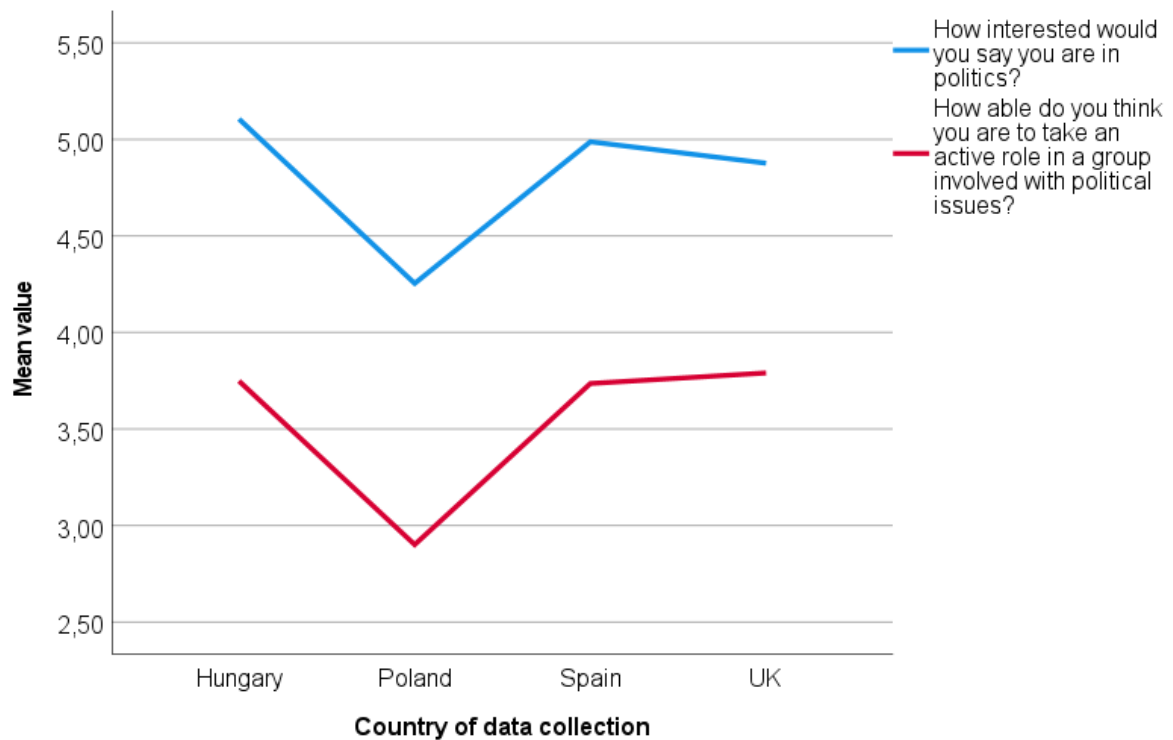
Using ANOVA analysis of variance, it was tested whether the four countries studied differed in both their average level of interest in politics and their belief in their ability to take an active part in a group involved with political issues. Within both the first ( $F(3,959) = 5.60$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and the second variable ( $F(3,940) = 8.67$ ;  $p < .001$ ), significant differences were noted between countries.

A post hoc analysis showed that, in terms of interest in politics, participants from Poland scored significantly lower than Hungarians ( $p = .004$ ) and Spaniards ( $p = .013$ ) but did not differ from the British ( $p = .320$ ). In contrast, Hungarians, Spaniards, and Britons did not differ from each other ( $p > .05$  in each case).

Post hoc comparisons involving the belief in the ability to play a significant role in a group involved with political issues indicated that, in this case, Polish respondents differed significantly from all representatives from the other countries surveyed ( $p < .05$ ), between which there were no significant differences in mean values ( $p > .05$ ). Detailed data are provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1

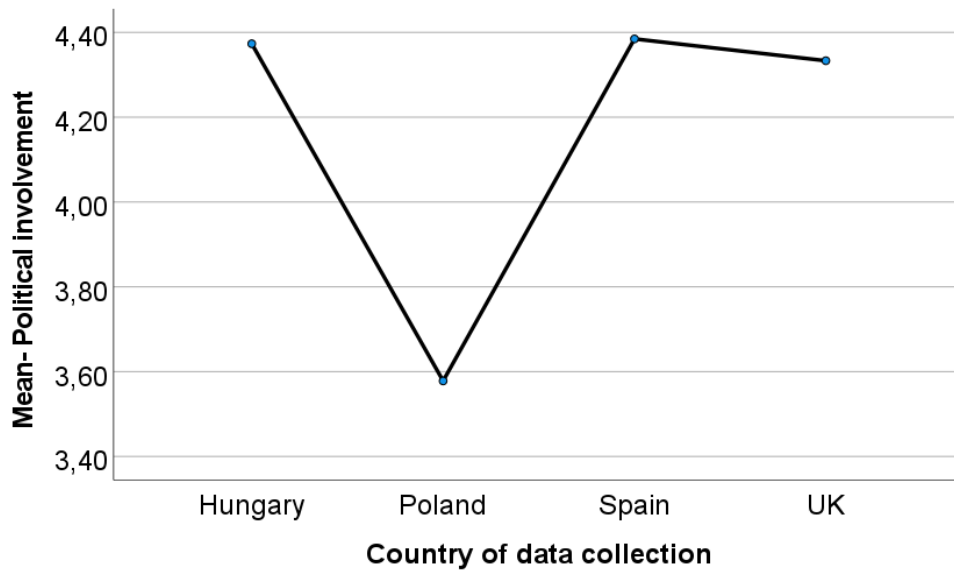
*Mean values for the questions: How interested would you say you are in politics? (range 0-10) and how able do you think you are to take an active role in a group involved with political issues? (range 0-10)*



Using the two variables discussed above, an indicator on political involvement was created, which was the mean of the scores for interest in politics and ability to play an active role in a group involved with political issues. The reliability coefficient for the indicator thus constructed was  $\alpha = .74$ .

An ANOVA analysis of variance again showed significant differences in levels of political involvement ( $F(3,963) = 8.82, p < .001$ ). Also, this time, participants from Poland scored significantly lower than Hungarians and Spaniards ( $p < .001$ ) but did not differ from the British ( $p = .067$ ). In contrast, Hungarians, Spaniards, and Britons did not differ from each other ( $p > .05$  in each case). Figure 2 illustrates the results.

Figure 2 Indicator of political involvement (range 0-10)



The indicator on political involvement was divided into three parts based on percentiles, expressing low, medium, and high levels of this variable. The proportions in each level were compared taking into account the country of the survey. The global chi-square test result was statistically significant (Table 1), indicating the presence of differences in the proportions recorded. Post hoc comparisons involving column proportions using the Z-test with Bonferroni correction showed that there were no differences between the survey countries in the proportions of people classified as moderately politically involved.

Differences occurred in the groups with low and high levels of political involvement. The proportion of people with a low level of political involvement was significantly higher among survey participants from Poland, compared to participants from Hungary or Spain. In the case of the category with the highest level of political involvement, the proportions were the opposite, i.e., compared to participants from Hungary and Spain, the proportion among Poles in this group was lower. The proportions among representatives from the UK were not significantly different from those recorded in the other countries.

Table 1 Chi-square results regarding the level of political involvement

Political involvement	Hungary		Poland		Spain		UK		$X^2$
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Low	110	36.2 <sub>a</sub>	152	46.6 <sub>b</sub>	86	33.6 <sub>a</sub>	26	32.1 <sub>a,b</sub>	22.31*
Medium	84	27.6 <sub>a</sub>	102	31.3 <sub>a</sub>	80	31.3 <sub>a</sub>	27	33.3 <sub>a</sub>	
High	110	36.2 <sub>a</sub>	72	22.1 <sub>b</sub>	90	35.2 <sub>a</sub>	28	34.6 <sub>a,b</sub>	

Note. Percentages in a row with different subscript differ at the  $p < .05$ ; \* $p < .05$

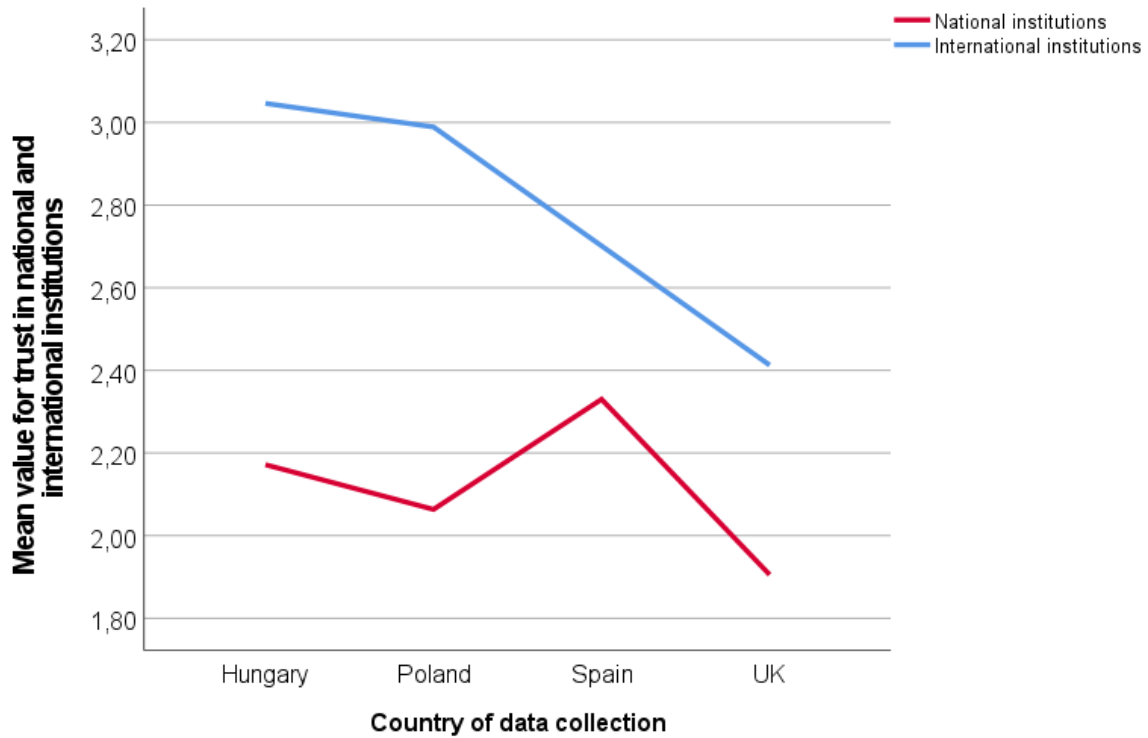
Another issue analysed was trust in institutions, about which respondents were asked. Survey participants were asked to indicate on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (completely) to what extent they trust specific institutions. A preliminary Principal Component Analysis (PCA) of 7 institutions identified two categories: national (government, parliament, national media) and international institutions (international media, EU in general, European Parliament, NATO). For each category, an indicator was created in the form of an average level of trust.

Across the entire sample, the mean level of trust for national institutions was  $2.15 \pm .84$  and for international institutions was  $2.88 \pm .89$ . The result of the Student's t-test for the dependent samples showed that respondents placed more trust in international institutions ( $t = -23.46$ ,  $df = 952$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -.76$ ). The mean values of trust in the two categories of institutions within the four countries surveyed were compared. Significant differences were found for both national ( $F(3,952) = 7.29$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and international ( $F(3,950) = 16.66$ ;  $p < .001$ ) institutions. The exact averages for each country are included in Figure 3.

Post hoc analyses conducted in terms of trust for national institutions showed that significant differences occur between the level of trust of Poles ( $p = .003$ ) and Brits ( $p = .001$ ) - lower scores, compared to Spaniards - higher scores. However, the averages in the two countries (Poland and UK) did not differ from each other ( $p = .503$ ). The level of trust in national institutions among Hungarians was not significantly different from that in the other countries included in the survey (HU vs PL,  $p = .447$ ; HU vs ESP,  $p = .196$ ; HU vs UK,  $p = .088$ ).

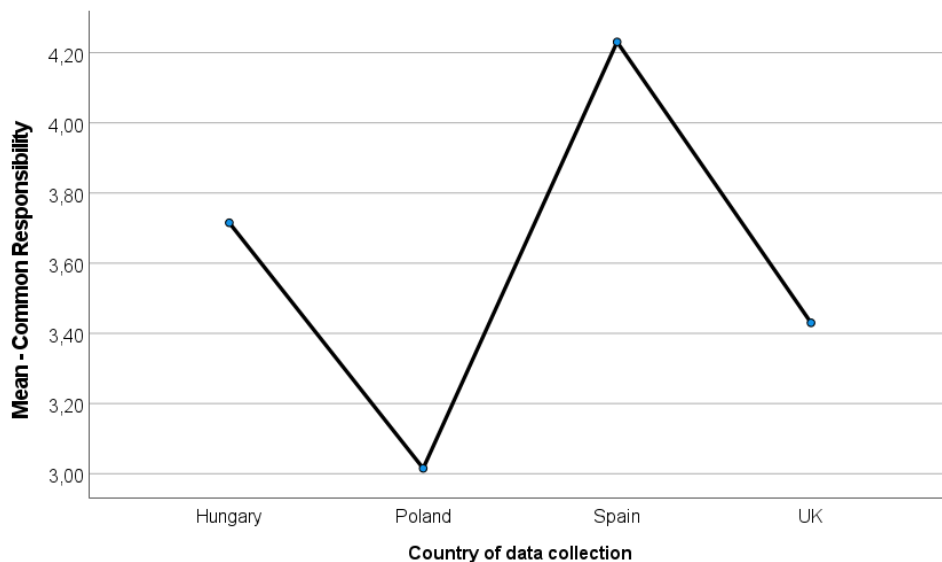
A detailed post hoc analysis for the variable: trust in international institutions revealed that Hungarians and Poles (highest scores - no difference between averages in both countries,  $p = .879$ ) score significantly different from Spaniards and Britons (lowest scores - no difference between averages in both countries,  $p = .084$ ): HU vs ESP,  $p < .001$ ; HU vs UK,  $p < .001$ ; PL vs ESP,  $p = .002$ ; PL vs UK,  $p < .001$ .

Figure 3 *Trust in national and international institutions (range 1-5)*



A further area of analysis was the common responsibility for the fate of groups in need of support. Participants were asked the question: “How important common responsibility it is for us to help the fate of these groups?” Participants were asked to respond in relation to six social groups: elderly, unemployed, immigrants, drug users, homeless, COVID infected. Based on these six groups, an overall indicator related to common responsibility was created. The result of the one-way ANOVA showed that there were significant differences between countries in the mean value of the aforementioned indicator ( $F(3,958) = 90.97$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Indeed, participants from Spain had the highest scores, and those from Poland the lowest. Respondents from Hungary and the UK had similar scores, but still significantly lower than the Spaniards and higher than the Poles. Detailed post hoc comparisons yielded the following result: ESP vs HU,  $p < .001$ ; ESP vs PL,  $p < .001$ ; ESP vs UK,  $p < .001$ ; HU vs PL,  $p < .001$ ; HU vs UK,  $p = .093$ ; PL vs UK,  $p = .003$ . Detailed data are presented in Figure 4.

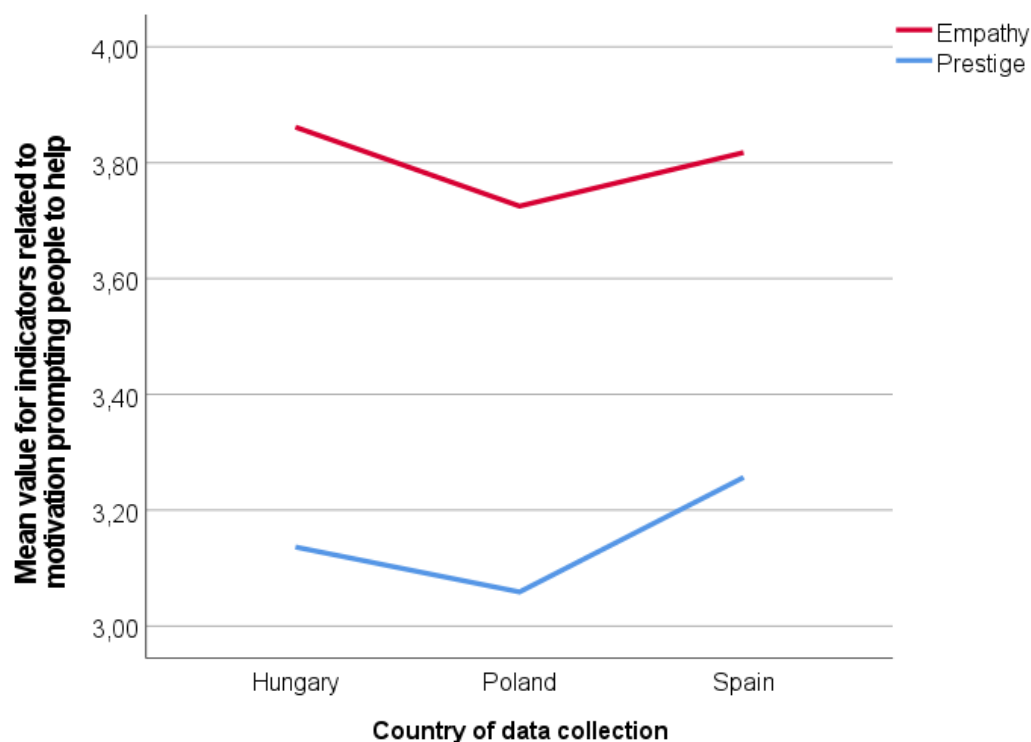
Figure 4 *Common responsibility (range 1-5)*



Linked to the issue of responsibility is the question of the motivation prompting people to help. Participants in the study were asked to determine the extent to which particular factors influence people to help and engage with the public issues. Six factors were considered in the study: empathy-compassion, protection of the weak, sense of belonging, influencers, elimination of guilt, social pressure. Two overarching factors were identified within the PCA: empathy and prestige. The empathy factor included three motives related to: empathy-compassion, protection of the weak and sense of belonging. While the prestige factor included also three components: influencers, elimination of guilt, social pressure. On this basis, two indicators were created, which were then compared with each other within each country, as well as between countries (the comparison was made for three countries – except UK due to the lack of this question in the survey).

Comparing the empathy and prestige factors among the entire sample as a dependent variables we can assume that young people perceive that people are motivated to help more by the empathetic motives than prestige ( $M_{Empathy} = 3.80$ ;  $M_{Prestige} = 3.14$ ;  $t = 17.13$ ,  $df = 874$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $d = .58$ ). Both motives were compared between Hungarians, Poles, and Spaniards in simple one-way ANOVA. Empathy motive had similar mean value among the countries ( $F(2,873) = 2.48$ ;  $p = .084$ ). Differences were noted in prestige motive ( $F(2,872) = 3.18$ ;  $p = .042$ ). In the post hoc comparison it was identified that Polish participants scored significantly lower than Spaniards ( $p = .042$ ). Figure 5 shows the average values for both analysed variables.

Figure 5 *Empathy and prestige as a factors which are perceived as motivators for people to help others (range 1-5)*



The final analysis covered the issue of participation in civic activities, taking into account their offline and online form. Participants were asked how often they: sign petitions about social issues; work with others to solve local, national, or global issues; participate in discussions on civic issues. Among all participants, petition signing was more often undertaken online than offline. In contrast, in terms of working to solve, among other things, local problems and also in terms of participating in discussions on civic issues, these activities were more often taken offline (Table 2).

Comparisons within countries indicate that, when it came to signing petitions in each country, this activity was undertaken more frequently online. However, in the case of working with others to solve local, national, or global issues, there were no significant differences by form of activity undertaken among Polish and UK participants. Discussions on civic issues among young people from Hungary and the UK were undertaken equally often offline and online.

Table 2 Comparison of frequency of civic activities undertaken offline and online (*t*-test for dependent samples, range 1-5)

Activity	Country	Offline	Online	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Sign petitions about social issues	Hungary	1.81	1.93	-2.18	298	.03
	Poland	2.07	2.53	-7.28	315	< .001

	Spain	1.85	2.22	-4.59	244	< .001
	UK	1.58	2.52	-5.88	80	< .001
	Total	1.89	2.26	-9.78	940	< .001
	Hungary	1.73	1.42	5.58	293	< .001
	Poland	1.82	1.89	-1.31	320	.191
Work with others to solve local, national, or global issues	Spain	1.77	1.6	3.08	244	.002
	UK	1.48	1.63	-1.42	79	.159
	Total	1.75	1.64	3.35	939	< .001
	Hungary	1.80	1.83	-0.54	296	.588
	Poland	2.18	2.04	2.32	319	.021
Participate in discussions on civic issues	Spain	1.96	1.76	2.12	244	.035
	UK	1.86	1.65	1.95	80	.055
	Total	1.97	1.87	2.68	942	.007

## Conclusions

The aim of the survey was to compare representatives of Generation Z from four European countries on several aspects related to citizenship activity.

Interest in politics and belief in the ability to take active role in a group involved with political issues in the study was the lowest among Polish participants. Created on the basis of these two variables, the political involvement indicator, was also the lowest among Poles. The level of political involvement estimated for the participants of the survey on average in each country oscillated around the value of 4.4 - the exception being the Poles, whose indicator was at the level of 3.6. It should be emphasised that the aforementioned indicator theoretically ranged from 0 to 10 did not even reach half of the possible scale (mean value) among studied young people.

It is worth highlighting that the presented data do not fully reflect the current situation in Poland. During the parliamentary elections that took place on October 15, 2023, young people took an active part in them to a greater extent than before. Comparing the turnout from 2019



in the 18-29 age group, there was an increase from 46.4% to 68.8% in 2023 – exit poll data (<https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/kraj/artykuly/9323015,wybory-2023-jak-glosowali-mlodzi-exit-poll.html>).

In terms of trust in national and international institutions, there was a trend that in each of the countries surveyed, international institutions were trusted more than national institutions. Mutual comparisons between participants from individual countries indicate that in terms of trust in national institutions, Poles, and British trust them less compared to Spaniards, but not significantly less than Hungarians, whose results did not differ from the other three countries. However, Poles and Hungarians show the greatest trust in international institutions, compared to participants from the UK and Spain. It seems important to establish in detail the reasons for the low level of trust in national institutions, which, compared to international institutions, are trusted less in each of the countries surveyed.

The issue of common responsibility for the fate of various social groups turned out to be a variable that varied in intensity among the representatives of the surveyed countries. The highest results were recorded among participants from Spain, and the lowest among Poles. An issue related to the theme of responsibility for others is motivation prompting people to help. The two indicators identified included the motive related to empathy and prestige. Higher importance was assigned to empathetic motives.

The final aspect addressed in the study concerned the comparison of offline and online civic activities. Young people reported signing petitions online to a greater extent than offline in each country. Working with others to solve local, national, or global issues in Hungary and Spain was more often undertaken offline than online, while in Poland and the UK the form - offline or online - was not a significant differentiating factor. Participation in discussions on civic issues was more often undertaken in Poland and Spain as a face-to-face activity than via the Internet. No differences were noted in Hungary and the UK.

Referring to the frequencies obtained, it can be cautiously concluded that in the country samples, the online and offline civic activities presented are undertaken infrequently, especially those that require a certain amount of commitment.

## **Recommendations for education**

The results presented encourage consideration of how young people can be supported and educated so that the frequency of their civic action is increased. Interest in politics and the belief in the possibility of playing an important role in a group dealing with political issues can be strengthened by showing how politics affects the lives of each of us. Simulation games may be helpful in this process, facilitating understanding of the principles of influence of politics on the functioning of society and its citizens, as well as showing the risks associated with lack of interest in politics and passivity.

Strengthening the sense of agency in the general functioning of young people may be a factor encouraging them to actively engage in civically important matters. These types of activities

should show that change can take place in their immediate environment, where they will be able to observe a specific result of their actions. This requires, on the one hand, the motivation of the students themselves, and on the other hand, the readiness of teachers to support students in implementing their ideas, understand their needs, and allow them to exercise agency and make decisions.

Young people recognize that shared responsibility for different social groups is important. This represents a huge potential to be exploited. Social action involving young people, the results of which are later recalled, can reinforce the belief of others that it is worthwhile to get involved because it has a visible effect on groups that need help. Many young people undertake such activities on their own. However, taking into account the educational aspect, giving this a certain organizational framework within the institution of the school/university could result in the formation of teams whose activities are long-lasting.

Participants in the study indicated that empathy was an important motive for helping others. Developing this competence from an early age, as well as strengthening it also among young adults through workshops and development activities, can contribute not only to individual change, but also translate into an increase in active citizenship, manifested as a willingness to help those in need.

Citizenship activities that require involvement and some form of effort (e.g., working to solve local or national problems) are undertaken by the surveyed representatives of generation Z relatively rarely (based on the average results). Conducting discussions on important social issues (including citizenship activities) in the classroom should be an integral part of the educational space. It is important to work on beliefs so that change at the behavioral level is possible, although the other way round, i.e., starting with action that translates into a change in thinking about socially relevant issues, is not excluded.

It is important for educators to point out the potential in using new technologies and various forms to work with youth and young adults on the development and strengthening of citizenship activity. Although it may seem that young people have their noses stuck exclusively in smartphones, they are increasingly showing the world what is important to them, and the role of guardians in the education process is to support them in creating the world in which they would like to live.

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## **‘You educate yourself on what you should be’: digital citizenship and young people in England and Poland**

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### **Introduction**

Within this casebook insights into young people’s digital citizenship have so far been presented in terms of data collected from Poland, Hungary, Spain, and England. This data reflected on how young people between 16 – 24 years old might conceptualize citizenship (Beata Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz) drawing on AGA methodology and large-scale survey data across the four countries (Paskal Kiss and Martyna Kotysko). In this paper, I present insights relating to young people’s experiences and understanding of digital citizenship through focus group data. I draw on data from two focus groups in Poland and two focus groups in England. This method provides opportunity for greater depth of discussion and exploration of the themes addressed.

This study draws on Zalewska and Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz’s (2011) model of citizenship, developed in relation to young people and defined in three dimensions:

1. Passive citizenship refers to behaviors expressing national identity. These are often shaped through formal schooling and relate to knowledge about the nation’s history. This citizenship is often seen as positive attitudes and respect for national symbolism and can also be expressed as patriotism (a more extreme form of national identity).
2. Semi active citizenship involves the acceptance of State rules and principles within the existing political order. This includes civic virtues in the form of voting and an interest in public affairs/ Loyalty to the state through, for example, respect of public

institutions and observance of laws and rules reflects an acceptance of the existing order.

3. Active citizenship sees individuals involved in four types of activity: political activity such as involvement with a political party; change orientated activities such as protest; social activity such as volunteer work that manifest a preservation of local identity and community; and personal activity where a conscious effort is made to towards personal development with regard education, independence, entrepreneurship etc. (see also Krzywosz-Runkiewicz and Zalewska 2017).

These three dimensions of citizenship have been used to frame the analysis of data and discussion.

## Method

It was not the intention of this study to formulate objective explanations or generalizable rules, but more to use a method that would provide an opportunity to help understand the specific context of digital citizenship in the group through agreed participation. The aim of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the various motivations that may lead to young people to engage in digital citizenship. The research questions that guided this were:

1. What are the motivational factors that affect young people in engaging in acts of digital citizenship?
2. What are the barriers to these acts?

Following ethical approval from our institutions in line with British Education Research Association (2018) guidance, volunteer young people who were 15-18 years old from England and Poland (n=24) were recruited. Participants and their parents (if under 18 years old) received information and consent forms relating to the project. Individuals were recruited through the institutions who had been involved with the administration of an earlier survey for the same project. The schools asked for volunteers willing to undertake a follow up focus group which was run at a time convenient to young people (some in school time, some after school). These semi-structured focus groups were undertaken face to face with one facilitator from the research team whose first language was either English or Polish. Discussion was divided into four questions that made for the basis of a semi-structured conversation. The questions were:

1. What is an ideal citizen and digital citizen?
2. What do the competencies (skills and activities) relating to citizenship look like in the digital context?
3. How might social media be used for digital citizenship?
4. How might citizenship education in the context of new media be improved?

Participants were encouraged to reflect on Question 1 independently for 2-3 minutes, jotting down ideas on paper that was provided before sharing with the wider group. For Question 2,

participants were given a list of 6 competencies and asked to rank them from most important. Again, this was initially done independently, before sharing and working towards group agreement of the overall ranking. The 6 competencies and related dimensions were:

Competency	Dimension
Expresses national identity, sense of belonging to a state or nation, respect for national symbols and patriotism	Passive
Participates in elections (voting) and shows loyalty to the local / national institutions,	Semi active
Donates money and/or has volunteer work for the local or larger community (e.g., protection of environment)	Active (social)
Willing to participate in governance by joining a political party or running for office	Active (political)
Monitors the performance of local or national authorities, participates in protests against bad decisions and practices	Active (change)
Strives toward personal development, independence, financial sustainability, and enterprise.	Active (personal)

Conversations were audio recorded and lasted c.90 minutes. Recordings were transcribed and the Polish translated into English for analysis. Two focus groups ran in each country. Each group had 6 participants of either 15-16 years old (n=6) or 17--18 years old (n=18). Six participants in Poland identified as female and six as male. In England, nine participants identified as female and three as male. All young people engaged in the conversation.

Data was analyzed relating to the three dimensions of citizenship outlined above as indicated by Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz's (2011). To achieve this the focus group transcripts were read for accuracy. Each transcription was then re-read in order to become familiar with the data. Transcripts were coded manually to reveal emergent categories (such as initiating collaboration and motivational factors). The categories from England and Poland were compared and bundled into themes such as 'political will' and 'student awareness.' After identifying potential themes these were reviewed to see if coded data extracts formed coherent patterns against the three dimensions. This process allowed themes to be combined and broken down or discarded if deemed irrelevant or beyond the scope of the research questions. Results are presented below in relation to the three dimensions addressed; passive semi-active and active participation.

## Results

### Passive Citizenship

There was agreement between how participants in England and Poland discussed the importance of national identity and patriotism. In all focus groups across the two countries this passive citizenship was considered to be of low importance.

As one participant from Poland commented:

*'Well I, personally, I'm not very keen on symbolism and such a very solemn style, e.g., patriotic, nation-building, that there's still going to be an army shooting and all that... There's not much room in my feelings for that.'*

In England, the response to considering national identity through symbols such as flags was unanimously negative with one participant commenting *'we're [the English] a bit rubbish.'* England's colonial history was seen to be the root cause of the being 'rubbish':

*'I think we're negative about this because it's coming from a lot of colonialism and like an era where Britain just wasn't that fun with the rest of the world. Yeah, mass destruction and slaughter, yeah?'*

In addition, it was noted that the participants from England associated symbols such as flags with far-right political parties; parties that participants did not agree with. Young people made comments such as: flags are *'mostly abused by people.'*

Participants from Poland reflected on how digital media is reshaping a sense of passive citizenship. They talked about how, due to the global scale of communication that social media, *'we will be able to forget about national borders.'*

Participants in England regarded far right organizations as *'intolerant,' 'disrespectful'* and *'unkind.'* By contrast, similarly to participants from Poland, they considered a digital citizen to be someone who was *'open minded,' 'kind'* and *'respectful.'* Participants from Poland talked about digital citizens being *'tolerant'* and how digital platforms allowed for an exploration of other cultures and ways of life that support the development of more inclusive world views:

*'Social media allows you to experience the differences, the otherness of people. And if you are open-minded enough, it opens your mind a bit, allows you to be more tolerant. And above all, if we are open to others, we are more able to identify with Europe, with the world. Simply put, these [digital] communities are changing citizenship in a way that broadens it.'*

Some participants in Poland talked about how the notion of a single national identity was being disrupted by engagement with digital content:

*'In previous years we thought nationally: Oh I am German, Oh, I am Polish, Oh I am Czech and so on. And now we have the opportunity to get to know different cultures, be different citizens.'*

The scale of citizen identity (usually associated with a local community or nation state) and where young people consider they are 'from' and have responsibility towards will be explored in the following sections.

### **Semi-active Citizenship**

Semi active citizenship, in the form of voting was seen to have mixed importance for participants in Poland. Young people agreed that it was difficult to engage in acts of voting because of individuals having to juggle their own views when attempting to align with a party-political view that has been identified both on and offline:

*'And not all the views of the party agree with the views of the people ... sometimes there is a man when he agrees with three parties.'*

In addition to this, the power of political rule was questioned with many wealthy individuals being identified as having more power than political parties:

*'The current world is structured in such a way that we could complain about our government, and still there are much more important people sitting and actually ruling who are billionaires and running this world. We don't even realize it.'*

Participants from Poland acknowledged that while they see voting as important, they are not able to vote until 18 years old (as it is in England). However, it was agreed that social media provides a platform through which an individual can become more engaged with political issues at an earlier age. For example:

*'Social media gives you such freedom that you can feel more like a citizen. Because you can also, you can discuss things, you can, you can support people, for example, from Ukraine .... Voting is important, but by the time you're 18 and voting, instead you can already do something thanks to the social media.'*

By contrast, while voting was seen as relatively low priority for young people in Poland with regard what made for the competencies of a citizen, conforming to state rule was seen as high priority (and a secondary priority to some in the groups from England). Being a law-abiding citizen, both in relation to law enforcers (such as the police) and civic contributions (as in paying tax) were noted as central competencies to offline citizenship.

*'For example... I'm driving and there's an inspection. A policeman collects me, then I culturally identify myself and I do what he asks me and I don't argue, I show respect and I don't make problems. If we are loyal then we pay our taxes as we are told.'*

Conversation relating to semi active citizenship in both focus groups in England focused on the importance of voting:

*'I think it's [voting] an important way to make sure your voice is heard. The idea is that the government are not only accountable but are also guided by us. By not voting, this is denying them a consultation from us, to which we owe the government and voting monitors government performance. The general will of the people should be sort of listened to.'*

This being 'listened to' by the state was echoed by one participant from Poland when they said:



*'I don't require every citizen to be a politician .... But it is enough to observe it and point out the mistakes.'*

All participants from England talked about the importance of voting from a historical perspective: that citizens (and in particular women and other under-represented groups within politics) should vote. As one female participant noted:

*'The vote yeah, take advantage of what you're given and what people don't have. Yeah, like yeah, we're lucky to have it.'*

When reflecting on why this was so important to the groups, participants talked about what they had learned in their history lessons relating to the Suffrage and Suffragette movements of the early 1900s and women's 'fight for the vote'. For those participants identifying as female, this impacted on how they acted as digital citizens; some taking more active roles in digital engagement to support women's perspectives or those who are less represented within a dominant white patriarchal system. This will be considered in section three.

There was consensus between participants in both England and Poland that 'older' generations did not have what they consider to be the benefits of social media with regard political knowledge to use when considering how to vote. Participants in Poland talked about how young people have '*more freedom to choose which direction we want to vote, and we can deepen our knowledge [through social media].*' This was seen to be because older generations relied on '*TV, or what our grandmother told us, or what our dad told us.*' Participants felt that young people today could draw on a wider group of people to inform their political choices:

*'I have Instagram or Twitter and I can read what politicians write and what other people in general write, even though I know it's also kind of, it's not quite true. But I can also discuss with other people and that kind of discussion gives me a lot in terms of understanding.'*

The above quote not only highlights the multiplicity of inputs young people are able to draw on with regard their political education, but also the awareness of needing to filter and question the information they are receiving. As one participant from England noted, '*you educate yourself on what you should be.*' This agency will be referred to in more detail in relation to active personal citizenship in section 3.4.

### **Active Citizenship**

In this section we present data in relation to the four subdivisions of active citizenship: social action, political action, change-orientated action, and personal action.

#### ***Social action***

In England, participants spoke about how digital citizenship is about what or who you love. It allows people to support those organizations or communities that are important to them. This was echoed by respondents in Poland.



Protection of the environment was considered to be one of the most important civic competencies for participants in both England and Poland. As one individual from Poland commented:

*'Working as a volunteer for the environment. It is important to act in such a way that we try to change something, so that the benefit is not only material for us, but for the common good in general.'*

The general 'common good' is echoed by participants in England when they discussed how people need to be *'future focused like caring about, you know, like the climate crisis ... 'we need to think about people that aren't doing that well, like knowing that it's like cyclical and you have to support each other because it could be you tomorrow.'*

In 2022 Russia invaded the Ukraine. Participants from both England and Poland reflected on how social media had allowed them to develop greater social agency relating to the ongoing war. Young people in England spoke of how coverage on social media allowed them to have as much information about where to donate and know sort of what exactly is going on. In Poland, where participants in focus groups had volunteered to help pack aid packages.

*'There was a moment recently when I helped pack aid packages for Ukrainians practically every week. And everything is documented. It's not a photo shoot, of course, but it is just to let people know who the gifts are from and who is preparing them.'*

Participants recognized how their offline actions had been amplified through online posts, enabled the development of socially active citizens in diverse ways.

### **Political action**

No participants from either Poland or England commented on participating in governance by joining a political party or running for office.

### **Change-orientated action**

In 2020 George Floyd was murdered by police during his arrest in Minneapolis, US when an officer knelt on Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes. Protests broke out across the world in response to police brutality and racism and people united around the phrase Black Lives Matter (BLM) which is now an international human rights movement. The following month, BLM protests were being reported across the world, and notably in England, a statue of Edward Colston (a slave trader from Bristol in the 1600s) was toppled. While none of the participants in the focus groups from England had taken part in a BLM protest, they were involved on commenting on posts online:

*'I wouldn't have made any posts or really talked about it [BLM] as much as I did if it wasn't for social media – I sort of felt like I had to say something and I think if there was no social media and I was just out and about I don't think I would. I wouldn't be as educated as I've got and I wouldn't think about news biases.'*

The above quote again shows that digital platforms allow for engagement with political issues in new ways for young audiences who would previously have little / no voice in activities that were happening outside of their local community.

### **Personal action**

In section two I referred to how young people are aware of having to fact check the information they receive online. Participants from both England and Poland were cognizant of how multiple voices and viewpoints are available online. One participant from England commented:

*'The algorithm of social media means you only see like certain things. It's very much what you like, yeah?'*

A participant from Poland extended this by reflecting that algorithms not only show you what you like, but create closed communities where being able to receive broad perspectives on issues may be more difficult:

*'We have parts of the internet that distribute content based on an algorithm, we have parts of the internet on which we ourselves choose which part we enter. Even though the Internet gives us freedom, we actually use it to create closed communities that actually reject everything else. I would say, at this point, that the internet is used more to alienate ourselves than to enjoy freedom and learn about other people's things.'*

Both groups from England spent time discussing how *'strong voices can prey on the weak'* and how people need to be on guard for this. Both groups gave the example of Andrew Tate, a controversial American – British media personality who was known for misogynistic commentary online. Participants agreed that *'a lot of young boys will have learnt from him.'* With others commenting:

*'He's [Tate] influencing young men's decisions on life in a really bad way because they're not they're not looking into what he actually is thinking and so they're agreeing with it [social media posts] because a flash looking man is saying it very convincingly'*  
(Note: Since the focus groups Andrew Tate has been arrested and faces charges of rape, human trafficking, and the exploitation of women.)

While participants noted that some individuals gain knowledge and develop themselves in what was seen as negative ways, it was generally accepted that social media and digital spaces provided opportunity for self-development; a portal to find out more about the world and have access to multiple perspectives that would not be accessible through other mediums as quickly. While it was acknowledged that it is sometimes *'difficult to tell what you should listen to'* participants from England also noted that *'a lot of people find support and comfort within online communities'* and in order to feel safe they take measures to reduce exposure to unwanted engagement online. As one participant who identified as female commented:

*'My DM's [direct messaging] are closed permanently. I think that's a really good boundary, because if you just let anyone in your DMs like you could get catfish'*

*scammed. It could be like an old man. So you gotta have these boundaries to make sure that things like that don't happen, like private accounts and stuff.'*

Personal development encapsulates education, knowledge, and skills as well as wellbeing. A number of those identifying as female in England referred to online exercise classes and being part of an online fitness community. There were reflections of times when men had made derogatory comments about some females leading fitness classes online and how they had made a number of responses in the comments in support of other women. When asked how it felt to be able to comment like this the response was:

*'Oh, I was unleashing my full alpha female anger. I was just supporting another woman. By telling another man that he should know. I was really polite actually because if you take a certain tone with these people then they will take every opportunity to like bring everything about you as a person down.'*

Participants reflected on how *'it's good speaking out when people say you know untruthful things, rude things.'* All participants from both Poland and England, agreed that key characteristics of a digital citizen should include being respectful, kind, and responsible. As one participant commented: we need to speak out when people say, you know, untruthful things, rude things.

## **Discussion**

This paper has presented insights into how twenty-four young people from Poland and England (aged between 15-18 years old) make sense of and use digital platforms to construct and inform their sense of citizenship. This study did not set out to be representative of young people or discover generalizable experiences. Instead, I aimed to provide insights for reflection and consideration of how digital citizenship is conceptualized and what this might mean for citizenship education. I recognize that further research is required in order to develop a broader understanding of young people's lived experiences of digital citizenship across Europe and beyond. In addition, I would welcome longitudinal studies that would allow for exploration of how new media are developing young citizens over time.

From the four discussions with young people this paper draws on, it has been noted that no one referred to how this age group are enabled to perform acts of active political citizenship – either voting or constructing political portfolios in order to run for a political party. At the time of the focus groups none of the participants had had the opportunity to take part in voting in their country. Whilst the current group were unable to comment, longitudinal studies with individuals might explore whether digital platforms engaged with during pre-voting ages might influence these activities in the future.

With regard the initial research questions I have explored the barriers and motivational factors that affect young people in engaging in acts of digital citizenship. Using Zalewska and Krzywosz-

Rynkiewicz's (2011) model of citizenship I identified examples of how young people are developing and acting as passive, semi-active and active citizens.

The data from focus groups did highlight that participants from England were being influenced by their formal education and that this would influence their voting practices and engagement both on and offline i.e., that they would vote. Young people reflected on how learning about votes for women and colonial histories in school supported semi-active citizenship and informed feelings towards passive citizenship with regard feeling about national symbols such as flags. Further research to interrogate how formal curriculum content across different nations impacts digital citizenship is required. While the history of colonialism has traditionally been taught from a Eurocentric position in English schools, there have been recent calls to decolonize the curriculum and some young people are now engaged with different narratives and explore experiences of Black, Asian and other ethnic minorities in new ways in the classroom. In England, passive citizenship, traditionally formed through formal education, is being reshaped and symbols associated with national identities are being questioned and, in some cases,- as shown in these conversations - devalued. This retelling of national histories, combined with contemporary politics around identity (in this case in relation to the Black Lives Matters campaigns) identifies how high-profile digital media, and young people's engagement with this, influences thought and action.

## Recommendations for education

Participants from both countries agreed that digital platforms allowed the development for more global perspectives and, as one participant stated, *'we will be able to forget about national borders.'* There was a strong agreement between all groups that to act as a digital citizen was to act for a large community (in number and geographical scale); to be kind, respectful and responsible. Access to immediate world news and multiple perspectives from different individuals and organizations provide informal education that informs how these young people act as a citizen both on and offline. The two spaces merge to create complex identities where young people recognize that they are able to present themselves as committed members of a group and comment, support and donate to issues they perceive as important to themselves and the world (for example environmental charities and those affected by war). It was acknowledged that the construction of these views was not simple. While previous generations may have trusted a sole source of knowledge (a school, parent, or respected family member), young people are now having to question and be critical of knowledge acquisition through digital platforms and take responsibility for ensuring it is reliable.

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## **The content of workshops – Anonymous hacktivist group as an example of civil disobedience**

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### **Anonymous group – hacktivism explained**

The group Anonymous initiated its activity in 2003 on the online discussion forum 4chan. Participants in Anonymous describe their social movement as an 'anarchist' movement, a digital 'global brain' ('global brain') or collective consciousness ('hivemind') [Hivemind, Macmillan dictionary]. Members and supporters of Anonymous in physical space (e.g. during street protests) may appear in distinctive Guy Fawkes masks (a historical figure - one of the conspirators who attempted to blow up the British House of Lords in November 1605) with a distinctive beard and moustache (Konzack, 2015).

Anonymous carried out its first significant actions in 2007, launching cyber-attacks on the website of the Church of Scientology organisation [Olson, 2013]. These were allegedly motivated by the Church of Scientology's use of online censorship . Other notable actions by Anonymous include cyber-attacks against payment operators PayPal and Visa in connection

with preventing online donations to the controversial Wikileaks website (Uitermark, 2017). Other notable Anonymous activities include the opposition to the introduction of ACTA in 2012, when a series of attacks were carried out against commercial and governmental organisation websites in the USA, Poland, Ireland, Slovenia, and France, among others. Anonymous activists led to the leak of email addresses, logins, and passwords and even details of the private lives of public figures, including politicians who voted in favour of the controversial law. In addition, Anonymous attacked the website of the US intelligence agency CIA and made public a coded teleconference involving the US FBI and the UK's Scotland Yard (Svydrenko, Możgin, 2022). As a result of the mass protests, both in physical and virtual space, the European Parliament decided to reject the ACTA bill, citing the argument of violation of the right of free access to information (Svydrenko, Możgin, 2022).

In recent years, the Anonymous group has carried out a number of campaigns referred to as 'Ops', such as Op Syria , OpLiberation , OpLastResort , #OpKillingBay , #OpIsrael , OpGreenRights , #OpFreePalestine or Op\_Russia . Equally important was the activity of the Anonymous group during the Black Lives Matter (BLM) racial protests taking place both in the US and in European countries, among others. The protests were prompted by public outrage following the death of George Floyd as a result of Minneapolis police action in May 2020 Jones et al., 2022]. In recent years, the activities of the group Anonymous have become particularly prominent as a response to the creeping conflict between Russia and Ukraine since 2014, initiated by the annexation of Crimea and the establishment, under the protectorate and with military support of Russia, of so-called separatist republics in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions (Svydrenko, Możgin, 2022).

Shortly after Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the group Anonymous issued a communiqué declaring cyber war on the Russian authorities. This was in response to Russia's aggression against a sovereign state [@YourAnonOne, 202] .As a result of Anonymous' actions, Roscosmos, the institution responsible for the surveillance of Russian satellites in space around the earth, was paralysed. In addition, in the very first days of the Russian attack on Ukraine, hactivists from Anonymous carried out successful DDoS attacks on the Russian websites of the Kremlin-commissioned English-language news service Russia Today (RT), the websites of Russian ministries and government agencies, including the Ministry of Defence, or the Gazprom website. The websites sovam.com, com2com.ru, ptt.ru, mail.ru, goverement.ru, kremlin.ru, and rt.com were effectively temporarily blocked. In addition, on 26 February 2022, the hactivists gained access to Russian state television channels, broadcasting from Ukrainian television channels - thereby informing the Russian public of the actual course of Russian aggression against the neighbouring country (Svydrenko, Możgin, 2022). In the following months, the Anonymous group carried out several more hacks of ICT systems within Russia. These included attacking the Russian taxi service 'Yandex Taxi' and redirecting all Moscow taxis to make a course from the same address, leading to a complete destabilisation of traffic in the Russian capital , or hacking into the cameras monitoring the Russian government's headquarters in the Kremlin.

The philosophy of hactivists is to fight against all forms of social injustice and to mobilise communities of internet users to protest against institutions perceived as abusive and unjust. As described earlier, hactivism can be considered in conceptual terms: electronic/digital civil

disobedience, new civil disobedience, or civil disobedience 2.0 [Delmas, 2018]. The term civil disobedience itself was popularised in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s with the peaceful protest movement for equal civil rights and the fight against racial segregation in the states of the American South. A symbol of the civil disobedience movement like Pastor Martin Luther King organising the famous protest march from Selma to Montgomery, the state capital of Alabama, in March 1965 [Harris Combs, 2013]. Another equally symbolic figure of the civil disobedience movement is the African-American activist Rosa Parks. Her first form of protest in December 1955 consisted of not giving up her seat to a white passenger on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama (a racially segregated state). Her arrest and sentencing by the court to a fine and suspended prison sentence led to a boycott of bus travel by the coloured population of Montgomery, and contributed to the US Supreme Court challenging the validity of racial segregation on buses as inconsistent with the US Constitution in a ruling on 13 November 1956. The boycotts subsided only after the Supreme Court decision [Rosa Parks, History].

Hactivism cannot be equated with conventional actions, either in physical space (activism) or in cyberspace (cyberactivism). On the other hand, hactivism also cannot be clearly identified with violent actions, such as terrorism and cyberterrorism. Hactivism falls into the category of transgressive actions, involving transgression of accepted conventional forms of protest against institutions perceived as no. unjust and discriminatory. Hactivism can take the form of website hacking, redirection to other websites, DDoS attacks, data theft, parodying websites, virtual sabotage, or the creation of one's own unlicensed software. wildcat strikes, which consist of workers initiating industrial action without prior agreements or announcements to their employer, distribution of underground press, theatre of an oppositional nature, sabotage.

Among the most popular hacktivist organisations are the group Anonymous or the Wikileaks website founded by Julian Assange. Other organisations appearing in the list below include LulzSec, Impact Team, Redhack, Cyber Berkut, The Red Hacker Alliance, The Chaos Computer Club (CCC), Worms Against Nuclear Killers, Di5s3nSi0N.

## **Workshop ideas for Generation Z students**

The following methods should be used to involve students in the workshops:

### **Brainstorming**

A method that activates all participants, forcing them to think creatively, so that many different, interesting solutions to problems are usually produced in a short period of time. Used, for example, during activities related to formulating one's own non-standard ideas relating to the sphere of opportunities and threats related to the development of the potential of strong artificial intelligence (AGI);

### **Project forms**



Allowing independent decision-making as part of problem solving, supporting students' creative thinking;

### **Problem tasks in groups**

In this case, students are given a task to solve, based on their previously acquired partial knowledge or other premises, from which they create the answer themselves.

### **Socratic method**

The method of independent investigation of the truth. The teacher gives directions, is the moderator of the discussion, in which the students' answers are supposed to lead them to the correct answer or solution to a problem or task. In this case, I try not to indicate ready-made solutions, each student has the right to search for the truth on his or her own (which, by the way, is also the aim of scientific activity and the work of scientists);

### **Use of multimedia and IT tools during lessons**

Interactive whiteboard, multimedia projector, iPads etc. should be used in class regularly;

### **Developing collaborative and creative thinking skills in the classroom**

Design Thinking workshop formula should be implemented during the teaching activities. Design Thinking is an approach to creating new products and services based on a deep understanding of user problems and needs.

Design Thinking works on the following assumptions: (1) user focus - a deep understanding of the user's conscious and unconscious needs, (2) creative collaboration - looking at a problem from multiple perspectives, finding new solutions, going beyond the usual patterns; (3) experimentation and hypothesis testing - building prototypes and frequently collecting feedback from users.

Its main premise was to seek "[...]innovation, but not by copying and replicating what was there, but by implementing original solutions based on deeply identified user needs". During the learning process, a teacher should realise that each of my students had individual areas of their own talents, abilities, and interests. Their joint juxtaposition within the project team could contribute to the search for original, non-standard ways of formulating new ideas (without obvious solutions).

### **Use of gamification mechanisms enhancing competition and learning through play**

Use of gamification mechanisms in the classroom (e.g. competition for points as a derivative of standardised assessments, working in groups competing against each other for points, etc.); Developing the workforce competencies of the future.

Gamification refers to "is the application of game mechanics to aspects of life that hitherto had little to do with games". In line with the cited description, I tried to intensify student competition by focusing on opportunities for students and student teams to earn points. Quizzes done in this way, for example, generated a lot of (hopefully) positive excitement and made the lessons more interesting.



## Results achieved

The following results were achieved within the workshop:

- getting to know the participants - pupils - better, in terms of their individual potential and interests;
- building a good relationship with students, based on mutual trust and respect;
- developing attractive, modern forms of acquiring and consolidating knowledge;
- increasing the attractiveness of classes and the quality of the organisation;
- making the educational process more attractive by developing modern forms of acquiring knowledge and skills;
- increasing pupils' self-esteem, self-confidence, creativity; and awareness of their own potential;
- faster and more sustainable acquisition of competences through action;
- building good relationships with the teacher and other students;
- acceleration of student learning and teaching;
- increasing pupils' involvement in class
- sharing lesson plans with ready-to-use exercises and tests to check the acquired knowledge and skills;
- meeting students' expectations and increasing their interest in the learning material;
- improving communication, cooperation, and collaboration in the group;
- improving educational outcomes;
- creating opportunities for pupils to learn from each other;
- creating new and attractive teaching aids and forms of work with students;
- increasing work effectiveness;
- increasing the attractiveness of classes and the quality of the organisation's functioning;
- making the educational process more attractive by developing modern forms of acquiring knowledge and skills.
- improving communication, cooperation and teamwork;
- improving educational outcomes;
- making the teaching process more attractive
- finding interesting ideas for teaching
- following young people's expectations regarding the use of modern technology;
- adapting educational methods to changing realities;
- using more effective methods of influencing the student (pictorial, graphic, audio, action);
- creating new, attractive teaching aids and forms of working with students;
- promoting active forms of learning through play;
- sharing knowledge on innovative forms of teaching with other teachers;
- strengthening cooperation with other teachers;

- sharing experience and knowledge as an effective implementation of school responsibilities;

## Scenario for the workshop

A workshop incorporating the elements indicated earlier could follow the following scenario: Firstly, reference should be made to the identification of potential forms of civic activism of a protestive nature against, for example, unfair treatment, discrimination, violence, blocking of freedom of expression, etc. It would also be necessary to address issues related to hactivism - online civic activity of a protest nature.

Later in the workshop, on the basis of a method such as brainstorming, acceptable and unacceptable forms of civic activity online could be identified. It would be useful to distinguish what the workshop participants believe to be overstepping the boundaries of acceptable activities.

Another element of the workshop could be to identify examples of activities by, for example, the group Anonymous, and to determine whether, in a given situation, this could be regarded as an activity in the public interest (e.g. participation in cyber-warfare against an aggressor) or cyber-criminal acts. Students could be encouraged to discuss additional examples of hacktivist actions. This point could also be expanded to include issues related to determining the extent to which hacktivism can be seen as a form of expression of civic engagement by young people.

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@Op\_Israel  
@OpKillingBay  
@OpLastResort  
@OpLiberation  
@Op\_Russia  
@OpSyria  
@TheAnonMovement  
@YourAnonCentral  
@YourAnonOne  
4chan

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