



19/12/2019

EX POST PAPER

RAN YF&C expert meeting – ‘Digital youth work’,
29 November 2019, Copenhagen, Denmark

Doing digital youth work in a P/CVE context

Youth workers are best placed to reach young people online and to do effective digital work with them and one-on-one interventions. However, most European countries are still at the beginning of doing effective digital youth work in P/CVE, while practitioners often need more tools to be able to engage with young people online. Although the work is sometimes experienced as being challenging, a helpful thought can be that there is a lot of overlap in offline and digital youth work efforts, and also in doing digital youth work in a P/CVE or a general context. However, digital youth work in a P/CVE context requires some specific practices.

This paper explores digital youth work and the practices related to it as well as the challenges that practitioners encounter in engaging in it. It provides four key elements to take into account when planning to do digital youth work: focusing on equipping youth workers with the right tools; knowing your target audience and understanding their online behavior; taking ethical considerations and safety measures into account; and considering an offline component. The paper is aimed at youth workers who are planning to do or enhance their skills in digital youth work in a P/CVE context.

The (non-)digital world of young people

The spread of internet technology has vastly expanded the number of ways to communicate and gain information. It has provided new ways to express opinions, cooperate with others, discuss problems or questions, reflect, and have a social life. While many older generations may still find this development difficult to adapt to, the young people of the current generation were born into the so-called 'digital age' and can therefore be regarded as 'digital natives' – a term coined by Prensky (2001)¹. Characteristics of this generation are that it multitasks (it communicates via several media channels at once), can take in information quickly, prefers images and sounds over text, excels in working in a network structure, prefers games over 'serious work', and regards technology as a friend (in contrast to viewing it as inconvenient or 'evil').

In addition, this generation uses media differently from other generations: The internet has primarily supplanted traditional media. However, despite the significant amount of time that young people spend on (social) media, older generations often do not regard this as 'being part of the real world'. A good example of this notion is given in the article of Heikhi Lauha², on the misconception of how youth appear to spend their time online.

In the article "Why do we need digital youth work?" author Laura Hein³ explains how in 2014 a Dutch photographer took a now-famous photograph of a small group of high school students sitting on benches in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. The photo of children sitting absorbed in their touchscreens in front of Rembrandt's masterpiece, 'The Night Watch', was posted on the same day on Facebook and was shared almost 9,500 times in just a few days. The image was also reposted by others and shared on Twitter, Tumblr and Reddit. It went viral, with people often adding rather dispirited captions: "Today's youth is more interested in WhatsApp than in Rembrandt". A couple of years later, a British newspaper, The Telegraph, published an article explaining the true story behind the viral photo. It turned out that the children were actually researching a school assignment when the photo was taken. For the assignment, the students had to use smartphones and a special app as part of the museum tour. Despite this, the image is still being shared online and has been described as a 'metaphor for our age' of social media (The Telegraph, 2016)⁴.

As Székely and Nagy (2011)⁵ point out, "it is a fundamental error to think that the events that take place in the virtual world are detached from real life and real relationships. The digital environment is merely a part of reality and not an entity separate from it (e.g. a blog and avatar belong to a teenager's personality just like his or her physical appearance and favourite type of music)." Similarly, they argue that virtual communities closely resemble traditional communities, in which young people may feel even more comfortable than they do in communities in the offline world. Young people may, for example, find it easier to discuss certain issues through their laptop than face to face. Therefore, it is reasonable to see the similarity in the goals of youth workers, whether their work is carried out in the 'real' or the 'virtual' worlds.

(How) does digital youth work differ from general youth work?

According to the expert group on 'Risks, opportunities and implications of digitalisation for youth, youth work and youth policy' set up under the European Union Work Plan for Youth 2016-2018⁶, digital youth work means:

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

¹ In: Székely, L., & Nagy, Á. (2011). Online youth work and eYouth—A guide to the world of the digital natives. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(11), 2186-2197.

² See: Laura Hein (2011) "Why do we need digital youth work?", p.15.

³ Laura Hein (2011) "Why do we need digital youth work?", p.15.

⁴ The Telegraph (2016) "The real story behind a viral Rembrandt 'kids on phones' photo"

⁵ Székely, L., & Nagy, Á. (2011). Online youth work and eYouth—A guide to the world of the digital natives. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(11), 2186-2197.

⁶ See "Developing digital youth work: policy recommendations, training needs and good practices needs", European Union Work Plan for Youth 2016-2018.

work. Digital youth work is underpinned by the same ethics, values and principles as youth work. Youth workers in this context refer to both paid and volunteer youth workers."

In line with that argumentation, Székely and Nagy (2011)⁷ argue that it is a fundamental error to exclusively define youth work by criteria that do not entail participation in a general sense, but to narrow it down to in-person participation. In their opinion, the performance of a youth worker does not depend only on how many young people the youth worker manages to persuade to participate in offline events, and they conclude that "*youth work can only be effective if based on online communication.*" Nonetheless, during an earlier [YF&C meeting on the role of youth work in P/CVE](#) practitioners did agree that online work can strengthen, but never replace, offline youth work. Practitioners of this 2019 meeting concluded that it may be risky to only do youth work online, due to the difficulty of debriefing online, but that it is not always possible to have an offline component, for example in areas where there is no local party to follow up on the online contact.

Elements of digital youth work

There are passive and interactive ways of doing digital youth work. The **passive level** is basically used for disseminating information from youth worker to young people, whereas the **interactive way** involves a two-way communication process between the two sides⁸. Similarly, tools digital youth workers use can be divided into '**passive tools**' that allow one-way communication (e.g. a traditional home page, offline and online newsletters) and '**(inter) active tools**'. These can be **indirect** (e.g. webpage that can be commented on, text message campaigns, email lists) and **direct** (e.g. chat, telephone). Other tools include video portals, virtual worlds and games. The latter can be used in multiple ways in youth work: to develop a certain skill, to encourage a better social and cultural understanding between people, to reduce isolation, to let a person develop personal reflection, or to promote positive group work. They can be included in an already existing youth work project, but also used as a stand-alone tool to engage young people.

Challenges and conditions for a digital youth worker

Although it can be said that in general youth workers acknowledge the necessity of incorporating digital youth work into their daily practice, many do not know what this work consists of, and how it might be best approached. According to Cohlmeier (2017)⁹, part of the uncertainty many youth workers feel lies in their own perception that because the work takes place on the internet, it is not actually 'real'. However, Cohlmeier states that youth work can take place on the internet just as it can at a youth centre or on a street corner. If practitioners learn to think of 'online' as a space or community where young people meet, than doing digital youth work is not too different from general youth work activities. In this case, youth workers may feel more familiar with and confident in delivering their work online as well.

In addition, a challenge that youth workers doing digital youth work may encounter is being present on the right (social) media. As the outcomes of the international research project "Screenagers" shows, youth workers use social and digital media to varying degrees. Among the countries researched, Facebook was mentioned as the most commonly used social media tool. There was a recognition in most countries that there has been an increase in the use of apps such as Snapchat and Instagram by young people – however, the number of youth workers using such apps does not actually match the popularity and usage of these by young people. Often, youth workers planning to do digital youth work may rely on the platforms that they already know, overlooking the fact these may not actually be the platforms where their target audience uses.

Towards an approach of doing youth work online within a P/CVE context

To do successful youth work, one of the most important requirements for youth workers is to build trust and retain credibility with young people. This is the principle of *voluntary* engagement of the youth: the effectiveness of a youth worker often depends on whether the youngster is 'opting in' to information interaction that could eventually be the basis for developing 'real relationships' (Mason 2015:61). The basic fact that building trust and respect strengthens a relationship is also important in digital youth work.

⁷ Székely, L., & Nagy, Á. (2011). [Online youth work and eYouth—A guide to the world of the digital natives. Children and Youth Services Review, 33\(11\), 2186-2197.](#)

⁸ Idem.

⁹ Dana Cohlmeier (2016). [Digital Youth Work: defining, understanding, and justifying its purpose.](#)

How digital youth work is done also depends on its *objectives*, whether this is online prevention, online promotion, or more complex youth work (e.g. online-offline youth work, online individual youth work, or online groups). There have already been many initiatives that aim to set up a working plan for doing digital youth work in general. Examples of these are the recommendations provided by The Digital Youth Work Plan¹⁰, which provides guidelines for the organisational development of a digital youth work strategy, as shown below:

- Embed: Adopt digital youth work into your organisation's strategy and vision
- Culture: Innovative and experimental - try new approaches, learn from failure and succeed
- Governance and Management: Integrate digital considerations into the organisation's policies, ethical standards, processes and planning
- Human Resources: Provide regular training for staff and volunteers to build their competencies and challenge resistant mindsets
- Infrastructure: Equip staff and young people with essential software, hardware, equipment, tools and connectivity
- Partnerships: Capitalise on cross-sectoral partnerships while maintaining youth work values

In addition to these elements, youth workers highlighted several other elements that should be taken into account. Based on their input in the Guidelines, an approach is suggested below on what to consider and do when planning digital youth work in a P/CVE context.

- In addition to these elements, youth workers highlighted several other elements that should be taken into account. Based on their input in the Guidelines, an approach is suggested below on what to consider and do when planning digital youth work in a P/CVE context.

Digital youth work in a P/CVE context

In a P/CVE context, digital youth work may require some different approaches (in terms, for example of reaching the target group), while other unique challenges and risks may also be encountered. The internet is increasingly becoming a platform for recruiting and sharing radical ideologies. The chance to hide one's identity, as well as the regulatory gap concerning internet-based offences, are examples of conditions that lead to the proliferation of hate speech and radicalisation online (ERYICA 2019)¹¹. Often, initiatives in the field of P/CVE include the goal of education on the abuse of social media and of equipping young people with the necessary information and skills to think critically for themselves. Other projects aim at fostering inclusion of, and dialogue with, young people that are at risk of radicalisation.

As the Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) states in its toolbox¹², there is a strong overlap between the objectives and activities of youth work in general, and the objectives and activities of generic prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism among young people. This highlights an important conclusion: Youth work as such has already proven to be an important and effective tool in preventing radicalisation. Since these projects can all be seen as forms of primary prevention, online youth workers can play a specific and valuable role when it comes to preventing and countering violent extremism. Young people, as do individuals in general, do not become radicalised solely through the internet, as a radicalisation process is unlikely to have only one cause. Nevertheless, the internet can – especially due to algorithms which make you spend more time in a specific content – entice individuals to remain in their 'filter bubble' or echochamber and reinforce a certain perspective. This may lead young followers to believe that this perspective is mainstream. There are ways for youth workers to step in at this point, although this remains challenging. Whereas youth workers can spot certain changes in behaviour or risk factors (e.g. loneliness and isolation) in an offline context, spotting the same factors and changes in an online context is not always possible. Furthermore, an online connection with a youngster can be more fragile than an offline, face-to-face connection. However, specific recommendations for digital youth workers working in a P/CVE include the following:

Approach the online environment of young people in a similar way as their offline environment.

Youth workers are well-equipped to deal with the issue of radicalisation: They are in the front line, and have the skills to talk to young people and stimulate critical thinking. Building up dialogue and building up trust is key to success both in digital and in general youth work efforts. Also, young people should be approached in

¹⁰ See '[European Guidelines for Digital Youth Work](#)'.

¹¹ ERYICA 2019, see <https://www.eryica.org/news/2019/5/3/digital-guide-on-the-prevention-of-violent-extremism>.

¹² As described in the [RAN YF&C ex post paper on 'The role of youth work in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism'](#)

a similar way as in offline settings, e.g. by planting seeds of doubt instead of directly counter-arguing their (radical) ideas.

Train youth workers in recognising and dealing with radicalisation online if they are less experienced on the topic of radicalisation.

Elements that should be included in this training session include among other things: "How do I make a certain decision?" (e.g. on whether to inform the police), "How do I recognise radicalisation?", "How do I act if I believe someone may already be radicalised?". An explicit focus should be put on the online context in which one has to do digital youth work. It is also essential to try to understand in an in-depth manner how others (e.g. extremist groomers) operate online, and what the ways are to counter this (e.g. understanding extremist symbols).

Use tools that can signal and identify hotbeds of radicalisation on the internet, such as [Talkwalker](#) and [Crawlr](#).

By using specific words related to extremism (e.g. to a certain ideology), these tools search for platforms where these words can be found most frequently, for example in blogs, news items and other places on the internet. However, these tools should be used with caution, since radicalisation is a complex process and the framework these tools offer is too simplistic to understand the reality of a young online user. They can therefore be used to locate areas where youth workers can step in, but should not be taken as a suggestion on how to act. Entering an extremist community that can be found through such a tool requires sensitivity from a youth worker. For example, 'lecturing' young people may be counterproductive. The same applies for the gaming platforms: youth workers are often very experienced in working with young people *offline*, but approaching young people *online* may be more difficult, as the youth worker cannot observe a youngster's behaviour there and changes in it.

Aside from these recommendations, practitioners concluded that most digital youth work efforts are similar, whether working in a P/CVE context or not. The following elements are therefore key when doing digital youth work, both in a general or a P/CVE context:

Element 1: Equip the youth worker

Youth workers often do not feel equipped enough to do digital youth work. When planning on doing digital youth work, make sure the basic requirements for online engagement are in place. These include having enough resources secured, which may vary depending on the objectives of the effort. In addition to reserving a budget for continuous activities, think about the following elements:

Have youth workers with the right skills in place.

Not every youth worker in your organisation needs to start doing digital youth work; having a few youth workers in place who make the online contact is enough. As noted by Székely and Nagy (2011), digital youth workers should be just like in regular youth workers: identifiable, verifiable and trustworthy. Treat the situation as if one would meet a stranger in 'real-life' and act and introduce one accordingly. In addition listen actively and ask questions;

- have social educational and cross-cultural skills and counseling experience;
- be nonbiased and sensible to stigmatisation and marginalisation
- have an interest in youth culture and the vocabulary used;
- be accessible;
- respond, and use communication symbols accordingly;
- note that digital communication is never a one-way process. There should always be options in responding;
- avoid making isolated contacts, and build up a network instead; In addition, some specific skills that digital youth workers require are:
- having affinity towards social media; there is no need to know all about the media, but it helps to have an interest in working with social media
- in cases of gaming activities; there is no need to know all about how to do this, but there should be an interest in this and a desire to learn about this from young people.

Make sure youth workers understand the importance of using digital youth work.

Some youth workers may have a reluctant attitude towards online media or towards digital technology in general. This might also come from not feeling technologically savvy enough. Therefore, emphasise that digital youth work is not very different from general youth work, and show youth workers that technology can serve

as a way to make life easier. Show positive examples of digital youth work practice. It can help to emphasise that being in daily contact and being present online with the target audience is more important than having a big programme on this. This can help to make digital youth work less scary.

Provide youth workers with the right devices to engage with young people.

This can be equipment such as smartphones, a proper laptop or computers with an internet connection. Make sure the security standards of these devices are up to date, as youth workers may work with sensitive data. Where possible, track the number of interactions that you have with young people. Working on VPN networks may be advisable. In case of working with young people in a gaming environment, make sure that the gaming devices and the corresponding **games** used are up-to-date and in line with what young people use. If game equipment and games are outdated, young people will not retain interest in it. An ongoing challenge is that what young people are interested in may change rapidly, so your efforts should adapt to these fluctuations.

Train youth workers to work in an online context.

Provide them with mandatory training sessions and make sure online training is communicated in a clear and manageable way, for example, in several training sessions and with supportive handouts. Some examples of what these seminars can focus on include:

- Provide information on the basics of doing digital youth work (how to set up a profile, how to use certain tools in social media, what opportunities it offers);
- Help them understand the economy of social media (which companies run the platforms, what an algorithm is and how it works, what threats and opportunities they offer);
- Provide information on the different platforms young people are active on (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok). Information about these platforms and their target audiences can be found in the [Civil Society Empowerment Programme training seminar](#) and [this C&N ex post paper](#);
- Explain how and where information can be collected, when things are posted and communicated on the internet. This is useful for three reasons. First, it makes youth workers aware of what happens with the information they share on the platforms itself. Second, it gives them the option of conveying this information to young people, so they become aware of this as well. Lastly, it enables youth workers to collect information on the young people.

Make sure youth workers know where to turn to with questions.

Create a safe space where youth workers can share their knowledge, questions and their possible insecurities with each other. This could also be a space for feedback on online activities between youth workers (e.g. peer-to-peer learning sessions).

Understand the language and social 'rules' of the youth.

When youth workers have understood the basics of digital youth work, the focus may turn to in-depth understanding of aspects of working in an online environment necessary to operating successfully. These in-depth elements can include understanding the language and social 'rules' of the youth. For example, understanding jokes in the shape of 'memes' and using this for youth work practice: Youth workers can use memes to wish young people good luck with their exams in a humorous way while at the same time hint that they can come to a youth worker for help if they have trouble studying for the exam or are afraid of failing it. In general, using the right language and being aware of the social 'rules' leads to increased credibility, and could instil young people with the sense they are understood, thus increasing the possibility that the young people will reach out to them.

Inspiring practice: Same message, but different impact

A police officer at the Swedish Police noticed that the messages that were posted on the Swedish Police social media account did not gain much traction. Therefore, he decided to post personal – mostly funny – stories with a serious undertone. These posts gained wide popularity, thereby targeting a large audience.




Polisen i Växjö/Alvesta

Do you recognise the cuttlery in the photo? It was found in the forest near Norrhult! We think that they come from a break and enter where the thief discarded some of the property afterwards.

Are you the owner who has worked hard, saved money and paid for the cuttlery? Or are you the thief without integrity, respect or empathy that has broken in to someone elses home and stolen them? The cuttlery is at the polis station in Växjö. Contact us if you are the owner.

If you are the thief and I have insulted you I would like to appologise. You are more than welcome to the Växjö police station to lodge your complaint. I have an oppening at 11.00am on Friday. Don't forget your ID and your toothbrush. We'll pay for lunch..... and dinner.....and breakfast..... and lunch..... and dinner..... and breakfast..... and lunch and dinner..... and breakfast Etc. //Scott

Gilla · Kommentera · Dela · Redigera · den 30 oktober 2012

 **Maria Nilsson, Rebecca Nilsson, Susanne Lagerström och 8 831 andra gillar detta.**

Recommendations derived from this practice include:

- Critically reflect on the 'norm' that is expected for the platform you are writing on: Is the current 'norm' targeting a wider audience? If not, what could be changed? A suggestion to get a certain point or argument across is to telling it as a story.
- Think critically about boundaries, but do not be afraid to test them.
- Be aware of the fact that most people online are observers, not participants.
- Consider which target audience is most likely to follow your messages. As the picture below shows, targeting your messages to likeminded people or to people who are already violent extremists may not have a lot of impact, but people who are on the verge of becoming violently extreme may respond this better.
- Your target audience does not have to be the group or person you are writing about. Indirect targeting may also be effective. For example, your message may be addressed to the parents of young people, but the young people themselves are most likely to also read the messages and feel addressed as well.
 - Support from your organisation is critical. Discuss the possibly renewed media vision within your organisation, to make sure everybody is on the same page in regard to the new strategy.
 - Avoid writing about very sensitive or very controversial topics. For example, the Swedish Police has decided to not write about animals or drugs.

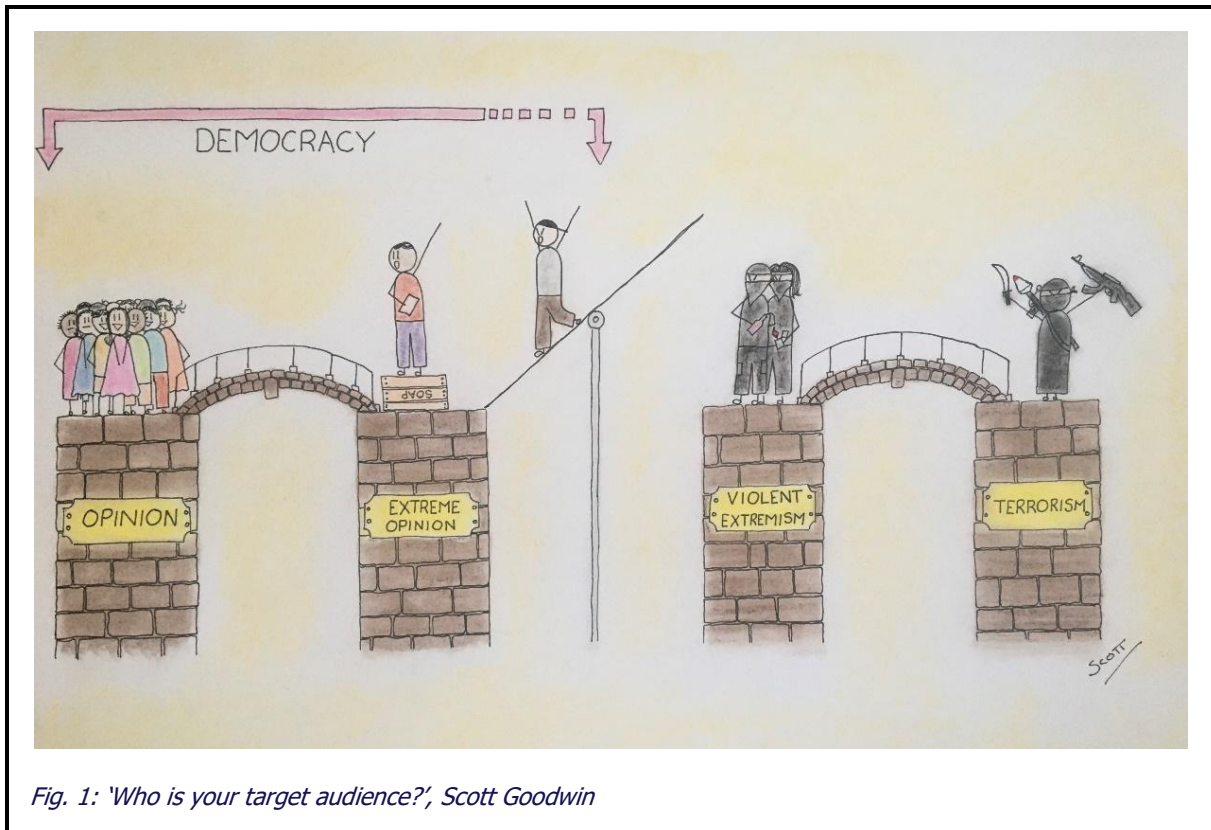


Fig. 1: 'Who is your target audience?', Scott Goodwin

Element 2: Know your target audience and where to find them

Having an in-depth understanding of the young people you are targeting, their priorities, how and where they communicate with each other online, and why they are likely to respond to you is key when doing digital youth work¹³. By knowing this, you can assess which tools, platforms and activities your audience will follow (e.g. gaming, simulated life chats). It may be helpful to test your ideas with members of the target audience. When it comes to identifying your target audience and the platform best suited to your efforts, take the following things into account:

Hyper-target your audience

When trying to identify whether someone is part of your target audience, check their profile, what groups they are part of and the messages they send out, and what they responded to. This can help you to establish for example how far along they are in a possible radicalisation process and how likely it is that they have a cognitive opening to discuss this. Try to interact and even become part of their groups, although this may be difficult in some, especially if these groups adhere to extremist content. Being honest, interested in what they have to say and open-minded can decrease the likelihood of being kicked out. Once you have established contact, try to move the conversation to one of the platforms you are present on.

Have a personal platform

In general, it can be said that having a personal platform is the easiest way of doing digital youth work, since you can facilitate the discussions, produce content and follow up on responses on content you published. This does leave the challenge how to direct your target audience to your platform, which requires a different approach from directly approaching them yourself. Some youth workers find that young people approach you because they are curious about you, but some find this challenging still. **Successful marketing and a strong online presence** can increase the chances of the target audience finding you by directly.

Agree on the use of social media platforms

It is not always possible that youth workers can be actively present on *all* social media their audience uses. Some platforms are easier to use than others, and usability also depends on your goals. Facebook, for example, offers a comment section which is very helpful for interacting with your target audience over a long period

¹³ For further information, see the ex post on [RAN C&N Academy 'How to create, implement and evaluate an effective P/CVE communications campaign'](#), Effective Narratives: Updating the GAMMA+ model.

of time. When using platforms where the comment section is public, also keep in mind that you reach a larger audience than the ones you are targeting, who may not respond but who does read your content. Telegram and Snapchat are more difficult because they do not allow you to trace content by means of the above-mentioned tools (e.g. on a platform like Snapchat photos disappear after a few seconds). These can therefore be difficult mediums to find and work with the audience on. Other tools and platforms that are used by digital youth workers such as Whatsapp, Instagram, Steam community, Skype and Discord tool can help you contact young people.

An example of a helpful tool in that is used for youth work by, amongst others by Safe the Children Finland, is [Ninchat](#). Ninchat is an online customer service platform with many features which makes it very useful for digital youth work. It allows for example powerful moderation of discussions, strong data security, readiness for chatbots, statistical tools and discussion logs.

Have guidelines for working on social media when using social media, have some general (and, where possible, specific) guidelines on how to work on these platforms. Suggested guidelines of the Viennese Youth Centres include the following things:

- Decide whether youth workers need to have **separate professional and private accounts**. **Professional accounts** should be clearly identifiable;
- Establish **which hours** you conduct work on social media;
- Ensure **prompt and careful reactions** to problematic postings;
- **Never act alone** – work in social media is team work;
- **Content, opinions** etc. must agree with the mission and the principles of youth work;
- Postings from target groups are to be handled **professionally and pedagogically** in accordance with the situation;
- Be aware of the fact that communication in social media is always **direct, public and permanent**;
- After local incidents, do **social media observations** in the relevant platforms, groups and individual posts;
- In case of uncertainty regarding, for example, a post, **inform/communicate/check** this with your team;
- In serious cases make sure **everything is documented** (screenshots; who, what, when, which measures were taken? Who was informed?)

Make use of Search Engine Optimisation

Search Engine Optimisation is a method to actively optimise your website or platform (e.g. by the use of relevant keywords and content) to ensure that your website or platform will pop up high when people search for terms around digital youth work. This will increase the likelihood that your website will be found. Make use of tools such as [Google Search Console](#) and [Google Ads Keyword planner](#), or ask Google Ad Grants for a month to optimise your website.

Element 3: Discuss and agree on ethical considerations and safety measures

When working with youth online, several conditions need to be in place regarding safety measures for the youth worker and for youth themselves. Before starting with online youth work, these considerations should be thoroughly assessed and clearly conveyed to everyone in the organisation or project. Topics that should be discussed when setting up online youth work include:

Have a clear agreement and guidelines on data protection, rules of law and questions regarding confidentiality (e.g. on GDPR rules, privacy notifications, intellectual property). There is a risk of harming the relationship when you have not established some ground rules in advance regarding the boundaries of your conversations. Agree on how transparent youth workers can be about their conversations with young people – e.g. whether there should be one coordinator that has access to all conversations, or whether there is a buddy-system. Make sure youth workers do not have sole access to conversations with young people. Also be aware of the laws in your country regarding the reporting of online incidents. Inform young people about the extent of openness of your conversations, the professional ethics that you have and that what they say and do online has the same consequences as doing them offline.

Have an agreement on which personal details youth workers should not share.

Do you refer to the organisation and therefore let them know where you are based? Do youth workers set up a personal profile, or do they keep their professional and personal profile separate? Do you use real profile

pictures, or pictures in which the youth worker cannot be recognised? Do you choose to use a real name, or a different name which is linked to your name? Do note that most platforms require profiles to be genuine and may block profiles that seem fake.

Have an agreement on availability.

Especially when young people are in a crisis, youth workers may feel that they have to be available 24 hours/7 days a week. Make agreements about dedicated times that youth workers can be reached and communicate these clearly to the audience. A possibility available for young people in need of urgent contact is to set up a 'crisis line' on which a youth worker is always available, or establish key words that draw your attention in case of a crisis at off hours.

Element 4: Think about the online/offline component

As indicated before, practitioners find that it may be risky to only do youth work online, but it is not always possible to have an offline component. For example, it is very difficult to get involved in alt-right groups in an offline manner, or to reach young people who live in remote areas. However, many youth workers agree the online youth work can never replace in-person contact. Therefore it is recommended to propose ways online contact can have an offline follow-up, and vice versa. Digital youth work activities can include:

- **Gaming groups:** As described in the example of the Gaming as Youth Work project, online gaming may be done in offline groups.
- **Programming competitions:** Organise after-school programming competitions such as the [Youth Coding League](#), where young people can learn computer coding.
- Connecting your conversations on social media with potential **offline activities** at your youth club.
- **Simulated live chat:** A group of children is placed in front of a computer and has to respond to a cyber bully, which is you. You are in the other room communicating with them, but they do not know that it is you they are talking to. By means of responding to a digital bully they are taught to use key words or sentences (such as 'tell my parents' or 'I will go to the police') to reduce the bullying. After they have finished the simulated chat, reflect together on what was discussed. Practicing this in a simulated setting will make it easier for them to deal with serious cases in real life.
- **Online counselling:** Try to combine this with an offline component: for example, by inviting parents, children and professionals to a kick-off meeting in a actual room and then follow this up with online counselling, or keep in touch via WhatsApp for urgent questions.

Inspiring practice: Web Walkers

The 'Web Walkers' programme, launched in 2019 by the National Family Fund agency (Caisse Nationale des Allocations Familiales, CNAF) focuses on digital youth work within a P/CVE context. This project aims to detect and address behavioural problems, encourage positive behaviour on the internet, work on media literacy and create better equipped cyber-citizens. In addition, its aim is to better equip web coaches through a training programme and face-to-face and online workshops with young people, focused on these topics. The training will enhance youth workers' understanding of the phenomenon of radicalisation, and their capacity to detect early signs of radicalization, assessing their severity and urgency. This will support youth workers to confidently address related issues with young people, and to determine when to intervene, and whom to alert. Activities of the interactions are:

- Sharing information;
- Exchanging daily chat;
- Encouraging young people to take part in offline projects;
- Be of help in writing CVs, motivation letters, what to do in life, and so on.

A Web Walker, whether he/she be a group leader, an educator or a professional working in a community or youth centre, is there to listen, to inform, to accompany, to advise and to prevent. In order to fulfil this mission, Web Walkers contact and connect with young people via their social network pages. Their aim is not to supervise, but mainly to guide young people in their research. Web Walkers are professionals in a vast and largely unrestricted digital environment, communicating and interacting through blogs, chats and forums. Their duties range from giving simple information to supporting entire projects, managing difficulties and taking on board even the most concerning of problems. Web Walkers reach out to young people, creating bonds and encouraging a critical mindset when faced with information and images.

Inspiring practice: Streetwork@online

The prevention project streetwork@online counteracts Islamic-based radicalisation of young people in Berlin and young adults aged 16-27 years. They do so by seeking a conversation with the target group in order to strengthen their reflectivity and to support them in their formation of identity.

They have contacts with adolescents and young adults in the social networks; e.g. on Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. Comments, explanations and questions are used to engage in dialogue with adolescents and young adults, for example, by means of contributions in the comment columns ("one-to-many" and "many-to-many") under existing posts in group chats, with the aim of continuing the conversation in single chat ("one-on-one"). Private conversations in the private chat allow a more direct relationship-building under the protective frame.

The goal of online street work is to help users to reflect on their own actions and views.

- Initiate and lead critical-reflection conversations
- Offer alternatives to radical Islam understanding
- Representing the values of the FDGO
- Support the individual skills for coping with life

In addition, through the Team Streetwork page (on Facebook and Instagram), young people can get in touch directly with the team of online street workers. The "open ear" for young people and young adults allows low-threshold conversations and assistance at eye level. Team Streetwork also publishes information such as counseling and leisure activities, events, as well as self-created content.¹⁴

Gaming and youth work

A specific tool that was highlighted as a useful tool in digital youth work is gaming. Although gaming and gaming cultures are sometimes perceived as unnecessary, unhealthy or have other negative connotations, both can offer several possibilities for young people. They can enable young people to find like-minded friends, remove barriers of social contact that face-to-face contact requires and boost their self-confidence. Furthermore, they can offer the opportunity to stand in someone else's shoes on the one hand, and to be themselves on the other.. As a first-line practitioner involved in a project on gaming in youth centres explained,

"gaming can allow individuals to find their spot in society to a certain extent. They might not be that popular and for example never win a tournament in sports. They sometimes tell me that this is the first time they win a tournament."

Gaming in youth work can be used in multiple ways: to develop a certain skill (for example working in groups), to encourage better social and cultural understanding between people, to reduce isolation, to let a person develop personal reflection, or to promote positive group work. It can be included in an already existing youth work project, but also used as a means on its own to engage young people. According to the Virtual Youth Work¹⁵ project, gamification can motivate individual participation both intrinsically and extrinsically. Understanding these motivations are important for the development and incorporation of gamification in youth work.

¹⁴ See <http://www.streetwork.online/index.html#waswirtun>

¹⁵ For more information, see <http://virtualyouthwork.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/guidelines.pdf>

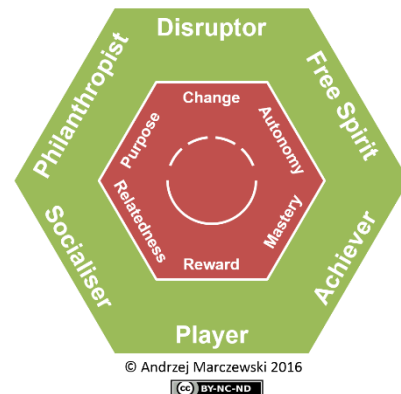
Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

1. Intrinsic motivation occurs when an individual participates simply because he/she is enjoying the activity. It is voluntary and does not depend on external rewards. This motivation is good for long-term engagement.
2. Extrinsic motivation involves some alternate or external goals that individuals are trying to reach. For instance, an individuals are extrinsically motivated to complete a task when they want to receive a reward or prize. These motivations are good for getting young people interested in in a new concept or topic.¹⁶

Gamification can transform an uninteresting activity into something that individuals voluntarily want to be a part of. The application of gamification can be invaluable, since it can spark curiosity and foster autonomous engagement. Besides looking at the motivation of young people, the project recommends looking at different player types. In its guidelines it refers to Marczewski, who outlines how there are six personality types related to motivation within games. This can help to understand someone’s gaming behavior and what they want to get out of it, which can help in your digital youth work efforts.

Marczewski’s six personality types related to motivation within games:

1. Socialisers are motivated by Relatedness. They want to interact with others and create social connections.
2. Free Spirits are motivated by Autonomy and self-expression. They want to create and explore.
3. Achievers are motivated by Mastery. They are looking to learn new things and improve themselves. They want challenges to overcome.
4. Philanthropists are motivated by Purpose and meaning. This group is altruistic, wants to give to other people and enrich the lives of others in some way, with no expectation of reward.
5. Players are motivated by Rewards. They will do what is necessary to collect rewards from a system. They are in it for themselves.
6. Disruptors are motivated by Change. In general, they want to disrupt your system, either directly or through other users, to force positive or negative change.



A lot of social interaction takes place Within gaming activities. Although this offers opportunities for young people to find like-minded friends, it can also serve as a place for harassment and negative influences. For example, research from the City of Helsinki concluded that 68% of minorities stopped playing certain games because of harassment, and that 70% of the targeted gamers had been targeted in online hate speech. In addition, gamification is increasingly used by violent actors to facilitate radicalisation processes and should therefore not be neglected in P/CVE work. Finally, gaming activities may not only cause problems within the online environment – spending too much time gaming can be problematic for young people in the offline world as well. It may lead to health problems, problems in relationships (e.g. with their parents) and school issues.

Gaming activities thus offer opportunities for P/CVE work and make it useful for youth workers to step in, but are challenging for them at the same time. These challenges include having to deal with the fast-changing online and gaming environments and online realities, and dealing with negative attitudes of parents and professionals.

Recommendations for youth workers:

- In line with not denying young people’s online identity, gaming as a hobby should not be disregarded as a whole. Rather, it should be acknowledged that it contains harmful aspects (that can be targeted) but can also serve as a helpful tool in digital youth work.
- Doing this work requires the same skills and activities that general youth work requires.

¹⁶ [Erasmus +, Virtual Youthwork Guidelines, p.14.](#)

- Gaming can be used as an early prevention method and should start with people from a young age on: If they have already learned unwanted gaming behaviour from their siblings, it will be more difficult for youth workers to change this.

Inspiring practice: Gaming as Youth Work project – Centre for Digital Paedagogy Denmark¹⁷

The Gaming as Youth Work project is set up by the Danish Centre for Digital Paedagogy in Denmark. This is a nonprofit organisation that runs several online counselling services such as cyberhus.dk, netstof.dk, mitassist.dk and gruppechat.dk, does various digital projects and talks about digital well-being and education in schools. The aim of the Gaming as Youth Work project is to engage socially isolated young people who might not ordinarily access youth services. It seeks to move beyond youth work norms and develop a youth-led, evidence-based and replicable practice to strengthen the youth work sector's response to gaming and isolation. The target audience is mainly young boys who game so much that it affects their school performance and impacts their relationships. These boys are brought together in groups to game together with peers and youth workers. The project has resulted in the following outcomes:

1. The project has helped in preventing problematic playing behaviour for young boys through the young people's positive social experiences in the Gaming Group and educating their parents on the gains of gaming and the jargon they can use to communicate with them on this. This has resulted in both the parents and the young people experiencing fewer conflicts at home around gaming.
2. The project contributes to both young people and parents experiencing a more positive well-being, especially in the form of increased socialability, the experience of new friendships and increased confidence.
3. The key element of the Gaming Group – that young people meet because of their like of gaming and their skills in it – proves to be fruitful in relation to young people's social development. This is supported by the safe space that is created both physically and mentally. The boys indicate that they highly value the contacts made in this group and have gained new skills such as coaching new members of the group, as senior gamers.

In this way, both parents and boys learn about well-being and rules in gaming. The project can be seen as a form of early and primary prevention.

Conclusions

Doing digital youth work is often a challenge for youth workers because they see work taking place on the internet as not being truly 'real'. However, if practitioners learn to think of 'online' as a space or community where young people meet, then doing digital youth work is not too different from general youth work activities.

This paper explored the topic and practices related to digital youth work as well as the challenges that practitioners encounter in doing this. It provided four key elements to take into account when wanting to do digital youth work: focusing on equipping youth workers, knowing your target audience and understanding their online behaviour, taking ethical considerations and safety measures into account and considering an offline component. With regards to the latter, digital youth work should always aim to include an offline component, although this may in some cases be difficult to do, for example in rural areas.

There is a lot of overlap in doing digital youth work in a P/CVE and a general context. All digital youth workers should, for example, be provided with the right resources and training to develop digital skills. Part of this training also includes understanding which platforms your target audience follows faithfully, how they work and having clear guidelines on how to work on social media (such as under which conditions, during which hours, having private or company accounts, data protection measurements). However, there are also some specific approaches needed when doing this in a P/CVE context. Digital youth workers working in this context require specific training on recognising radicalisation online. Furthermore, there are specific P/CVE tools that can signal and identify hotbeds of radicalisation on the internet, which are helpful in finding a target audience. Finally, an interesting tool to explore within this context is using gaming or gaming platforms as youth working activities.

Despite advanced tools being available, it can be concluded that being in daily contact and being present online with the target audience is more important than having a big digital youth work programme. This paper therefore

¹⁷ See <https://www.digitalyouthwork.eu/?material=gaming-groups-pedagogical-tool-eng>.

aims to lower the threshold by inspiring and helping youth workers showcasing existing practices and by providing accessible recommendations.

Recommendations for further reading:

Recommendations for further reading:

- Digital Youth Work [‘European Guidelines for Digital Youth Work’](#)
- Report Verke & EYWC [‘Digitalisation in Youth Work’](#)
- Report Salto Youth: [‘How To Prevent Radicalization: Digital Guide’](#)
- Report Screenagers: [‘International Research Project: Using ICT, digital and social media in youth work’](#) and the corresponding [infographic](#).
- Report [Erasmus +, Virtual Youthwork Guidelines](#)
- Report [“Developing digital youth work: policy recommendations, training needs and good practices needs”, European Union Work Plan for Youth 2016-2018.](#)
- [Székely, L., & Nagy, Á. \(2011\). Online youth work and eYouth—A guide to the world of the digital natives. Children and Youth Services Review, 33\(11\), 2186-2197.](#)