

Digital Media in Finnish Youth Work

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VERKE

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1. Introduction

Finnish youth work has often harnessed the characteristics and phenomena of new media or technologies very rapidly after their emergence. Since the 1980s, video game consoles have been more or less permanent fixtures, alongside pool tables, at youth centres. Whereas information began to be posted on Finland's first youth work websites in the 1990s, by the dawn of the 2000s youth workers were working in the online communities where young people were spending their time. The social media revolution began to impact on youth work after 2005. Facebook was adopted as a key tool in municipal youth work in particular. The technological advances of recent years, particularly in mobile technology, have also been reflected in youth work as new online tools and social media services have become popular among young people and adults alike.

This report examines the use of digital media and technology in municipal youth work. The objectives are to discover how and to what extent digital media are used in youth work, to examine the possibilities and challenges of using digital media, and to find ways of promoting their use in youth work. The report begins with an overview of the structure of Finnish youth work and digital media in a broader societal context. Next, the use of digital media will be examined from the viewpoint of youth work, based on statistics collected through a survey and qualitative material gathered in focus group interviews. Three case examples will illustrate experiences of using the digital media. The report concludes with a summary of the results and national recommendations for enhancing the use of digital media in youth work.

Compared to several European countries, youth work is a fairly integral part of Finnish society: youth workers are fully trained, their work is regulated by law and has a variety of forms at both local and national level. On the other hand, the status and importance of youth work is a subject of ongoing controversy. For example, in several municipalities youth work has been forcibly merged with other education or adult education services such as sports, library or educational departments. Pressures to cut youth work budgets are felt at Government and local level.

In Finland, youth work is performed by municipalities, NGOs and parishes. This report focuses on municipal youth work, for two main reasons. Firstly, youth work is strongly defined by legislation, and the Finnish Youth Act states that youth work and youth policy form part of local authorities' responsibilities. In other words, municipalities are responsible for conducting youth work at local level. Municipalities may partially or completely outsource their youth work services, or provide such services in cooperation with neighbouring municipalities. Most Finnish municipalities produce their own youth work services.

The second reason for limiting the topic is grounded in the professional definition of youth work. Unlike municipalities, NGOs have no clear definition of youth work. Correspondingly, the content and target group of parish youth work differ somewhat from the municipal version, although their practical execution is broadly similar. For

these reasons, the youth work performed by organisations and parishes is excluded from this report.

The focus on municipal youth work only should not be regarded as a question of values. Rather, it is a technical choice made in order to facilitate discussion of the topic and the resourcing of the study. Another reason for limiting the scope of this study lies in the fact that Verke's previous reports on the use of digital media in the youth work of municipalities and organisations provided parallel results. However, readers should carefully avoid drawing overly broad conclusions about Finnish youth work from these results.

This report uses a variety of terms to describe the use of digital media. In addition to digital media, concepts such as digital technology, information and communications technology (ICT), the Internet and the web will be used. The various terms have been used in a deliberate manner, but still require some explanation. In the Finnish youth work sector, youth work performed with the help of digital technology and media has been traditionally termed *online youth work* and *web-based youth work*. Online youth work has referred to youth work and activities in various online and social media services, while web-based youth work has meant benefiting from the Internet and social media in face-to-face activities. This report sets out to blur this distinction and to examine the digital media as a whole greater than merely online media. The technological advances of recent years in particular have led to a situation where it is no longer reasonable to differentiate between online activities and face-to-face work. At the same time, the importance of the web has broadened and expanded: it can be simultaneously regarded as a tool, a space, content and a new operating environment for youth work. The term *digital youth work* has recently emerged in discussions. This concept seeks to act as an umbrella term for all youth work activities that benefit from digital media and technology.

The research materials were compiled and the report was produced by Verke, the National Development Centre for Online Youth Work. Verke is one of the 13 national service and development centres for youth work appointed by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. Its goal is to promote and develop the use of digital media and technology in Finnish youth work. Among other activities, Verke provides training and consultancy and produces research-based information related to its field. In 2013, Verke conducted its first study of how municipal youth workers use the Internet in their work. The section of this report devoted to the survey results compares them to the 2013 results and examines developments during the two intervening years.

2. Youth work in Finland

The background of youth work

Finnish youth work has a long history dating as far back as the late 19th century. Youth work was pioneered by Christian youth organisations and the temperance movement. It was built around the ideas of Christianity, chastity, popular education and citizenship education. The state and the church began to play a more pronounced role in youth work in the early 1900s, although the first steps towards building an actual system of municipal and parish youth work were only taken in the 1940s and 50s after the wars. This was also the starting point for vocational youth worker education. The development of youth policy and youth work legislation began in the following decades. The first youth act, the Act on Youth Committees and State Subsidies for Municipal Youth Work, entered into force in 1972. Since then, youth work legislation has been amended about once every ten years, in 2006 on the last occasion. The new Youth Act is expected to enter into force in early 2016. (Cederlöf 2012.)

The structure of youth work

Youth work is steered by the Finnish state. The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the general development of youth work and policy. Regional State Administrative Agencies – in charge of taking care of executive, steering and supervisory tasks laid down by Finnish law – act as regional public authorities in matters concerning youth work and policy. The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for coordinating youth policy at national level and the Regional State Administrative Agencies at regional level. (Youth Act.)

Youth work and youth policy are part of a municipality's responsibilities. According to Section 7 of the Youth Act, other parties responsible for youth work in addition to the municipality are viewed as youth associations and other organisations performing youth work. Parishes also play a key role in carrying out youth work, although this is not specifically laid down in the Youth Act. Municipalities can organise youth work services in cooperation with youth associations or other organisations, or regionally in the form of municipal cooperation. Small municipalities commonly provide youth work services in cooperation with neighbouring municipalities. (Youth Act.)

The goals of youth work

The key act governing youth work is the Youth Act (72/2006). Other essential acts defining youth work are the Child Welfare Act (417/2007), the Constitution of Finland (731/1999), the Local Government Act (410/2015), the Local Government Act (410/2015), Church Act (1054/1993) and the Associations Act (503/1989) and the related Government Decrees and other binding decisions.

The Youth Act defines the general principles underlying the implementation and development of youth work and policy, and government funding. According to the Youth Act, the purpose of youth work and policy is to 1) support young people's growth and independence, 2) to promote young people's active citizenship and empowerment

and 3) to improve young people's growth and living conditions. The act defines youth work as “*the promotion of active citizenship in young people's leisure time, their empowerment, support for young people's growth and independence, and interaction between generations.*” (Youth Act.)

The act defines young people as those under 29 years of age. The Act emphasises that young people must be given opportunities to take part in the consideration of matters concerning local and regional youth work and youth policy. They must also be heard in matters that concern them. Although the age-based definition of the act covers all children and young people up to 29 years of age, the key target group for youth work in most municipalities comprises young people aged 13 to 17.

According to Section 4 of the Youth Act, the Government adopts a Child and Youth Policy Programme every four years to ensure the coordination of youth policy measures. The development programme includes the national objectives of youth policy and provides guidelines for youth policy programme work within the state regional administration and the municipalities. The 2012–2015 Child and Youth Policy Programme focuses on three themes: youth *participation*, *non-discrimination* and *everyday life management*. (Child and Youth Policy Programme 2012–2015.) The programme approaches these themes through nine strategic goals:

- 1) Children and young people will grow to become active citizens with shared sense of responsibility.
- 2) Children and young people have equal opportunities to participate in cultural, leisure and physical activities.
- 3) Young people find employment and their employment rate improves.
- 4) Non-discrimination is achieved.
- 5) Girls and boys have equal rights and opportunities.
- 6) Young people have the opportunity to live independently.
- 7) Regardless of background, all children and young people have access to quality education.
- 8) Preventive measures are taken to ensure children's and young people's well-being and health.
- 9) Matters pertaining to children, young people and families are administrated with high competence and through good collaboration.

Youth Act reform is in progress

A new Youth Act is currently being prepared. The aim is to have it enter into force in August 2016. The Government is currently preparing its new Child and Youth Policy Programme. Reasons behind the reform of the Youth Act include a need to revisit the provisions on the definition (age limits) of youth, youth inclusion, subsidies for youth organisations and funding for outreach youth work.

The amendments to the Youth Act have sparked hard discussions within the youth work field on how municipalities will produce youth services in the future. The amended Youth Act is likely to reduce municipalities' obligations to provide various youth work services. Entering into force in August 2016, the Youth Act will not be alone in reducing

municipalities' obligations. While plans have been made to reduce them by means of other legislation as well, the Government Programme includes a new act whose purpose is to increase municipalities' freedom of action. If this came into force, it would give municipalities the freedom to ignore several acts governing municipal operations, the Youth Act included.

Realisation of youth work

Municipalities are the key organisers of youth work. In 2015, Finland consisted of 317 municipalities (Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities). According to the Youth Act, municipal youth work and policy include the *“educational guidance of young people; facilities and hobby opportunities; information and advisory services; support to youth associations and other youth groups; sportive, cultural, international and multicultural youth activities; young people's environmental education”* and, if necessary, youth workshop services, outreach youth work or other forms of activity that meet local circumstances and needs. (Youth Act.)

Regional and national youth work is conducted by municipalities, organisations and associations, and churches. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is particularly active in education and youth work. In 2015, it comprises of a total of 412 Evangelical Lutheran parishes (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland). It is difficult to estimate the precise number of organisations conducting youth work – partly because many do not classify their work with young people as youth work. However, a rough estimate can be made based on a survey sent to 177 organisations by The Finnish Youth Co-operation – Allianssi, a national service and interest organisation within the field of youth work. These organisations were selected based on the following criteria: they operate nationally and have defined themselves as youth organisations or organisations involved in youth work. National organisations have their own member organisations which organise youth work at local level. If these are included, the number of organisations engaged in youth work becomes many times greater. (Taavetti 2015.)

Youth work funding

In Finland, youth work is mainly funded by the state, municipalities and parishes. State support for youth work is mainly financed from the turnover of the betting agency, Veikkaus, which is owned by the Finnish state, and support is allocated by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Money spent on youth work totals 9% of Veikkaus's revenue from betting and lotteries. The Ministry of Education and Culture allocates funding from the state's youth appropriations to e.g. non-governmental organisations engaged in youth work, municipal and cultural youth activities, youth workshops, outreach youth work, national youth centres, development projects in line with the Child and Youth Policy Programme, youth research and international cooperation. (Ministry of Education and Culture.)

The ministry supports municipal youth work through central government transfers determined by the number of each municipality's residents younger than 29. Municipalities themselves decide on their youth work budget. Central government transfers cover some 4 per cent of municipalities' total youth service costs. The

remaining share is covered by the municipality's own budget. On average, youth work accounts for only a small share of municipalities' total budget, around 0.5%. (Ministry of Education and Culture; Allianssi.)

The Ministry of Education and Culture grants support for youth work either as general aid or special grants, depending on the purpose of use. General aid can be granted for the recipient's operations in general, or earmarked for a specific part of its operations. Special grants can be awarded for one-off investments, development projects or other specific activities. For example, municipalities, organisations and non-profit organisations can receive special government grants for launching and developing various youth work activities. The ministry grants a million euros per year for youth information and counselling services and online youth work, for instance. (Ministry of Education and Culture.)

In addition to funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture, another key source of financing for youth work organisations is funding granted by the Slot Machine Association, aimed at the activities of organisations that promote health and social welfare. Other important sources of funding are private donations, support granted by other ministries or local authorities and financial support from the EU. (Taavetti 2015.) Parishes mainly finance their own youth work. The child and youth work performed by parishes account for around a third of the parishes' total operating costs. (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.)

3. Use of information and communications technology

Finland is considered a technologically advanced country. For example, the World Economic Forum ranked Finland in second place after Singapore in its Global Information Technology Report 2015. According to the report, Finland's strengths lie in the high quality of its educational system, highly educated workers, good infrastructure and the excellent opportunities it provides for citizens to use information and communications technology (ICT) (Global Information Technology Report 2015). The Digibarometer 2015, a study that evaluates how digitalisation is utilised in 22 countries, ranked Finland in second place, beaten only by Denmark (Digibarometer 2015).

Despite its good infrastructure and high educational level, Finland has fallen behind the world's digital technology forerunners in many ways. According to the 2015 Digibarometer, Finland is successful in terms of reaching citizens via electronic means of communication, but Finns do not use the Internet actively for participating in society. Finnish people are also relatively mediocre performers in IT-based citizenship skills. (Digibarometer 2015.)

Statistics Finland annually investigates the use of information and communications technology by Finnish individuals. Its 2014 survey indicated that 86% of Finns aged 16–89 had used the Internet during the last three months, and 64% used the Internet

several times a day. (Statistics Finland 2014.) In recent years, Internet use has shifted towards mobile use in particular. Finland differs from other European countries in the fact that the Internet is primarily used through mobile broadband connections (European Commission 2014). In 2014, about 60% of Finns aged 16–89 used a smartphone. A tablet computer was used in 32% of households. Up to 60% of households had two or more Internet subscriptions. (Statistics Finland 2014.)

The national information society policy is fragmented

In recent years, central government has drawn up a number of strategies to promote its national information society policy. These strategies have aimed at improving not only the Finnish economy and economic competitiveness, but also citizens' level of ICT competencies, for example. Launched in 2012 by the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, the ICT 2015 Working Group suggests in its report that Finland's success will largely depend on improving ICT skills and taking account of the ICT industry in the nation's overall education policy. (ICT2015.)

Other similar government strategy programmes have included the National Knowledge Society Strategy 2007–2015, the Public Sector ICT Strategy 2012–2020, as well as intelligent strategies produced by various ministries aimed at promoting the introduction of ICT solutions to various administrative branches. For example, the Strategy for Intelligent Technology 2013–2016 of the Ministry of Education and Culture aims to strengthen the inclusion of citizens in the information society, to improve knowledge-intensive and ICT competences, and to promote the production and use of digital content and services in the fields of education, science, culture, sports and youth work. (Strategy for Intelligent Technology 2013–2016.)

The need for better ICT competencies is particularly prominent in the education sector. The “Survey of Schools – ICT in Education” study conducted by the European Commission in 2013 indicates that Finnish schools have good ICT equipment but their active use in teaching and the development of competencies lag behind that of other countries (European Commission 2013). It has also been observed in Finland that schools have not played a very significant role in equipping students with ICT skills. Instead, young people tend to be rather self-taught as ICT users (Kaarakainen et al. 2013).

The Government has also acknowledged the fragmented nature of its national information society policy, including this in a wider reform of strategic steering. The new Government Programme emphasises clearer strategic steering and the importance of cutting back the strategy jungle. In its Action Plan published in September 2015, the Government states that it intends to use the Government Programme to push through necessary reforms by means of 26 spearhead projects, many of which focus on the digitalisation of various administrative branches as well as strengthening the knowledge and skills required due to the emergence of new technologies. (Prime Minister's Office.)

In addition to the improvement of competencies, another essential area of information society policy and youth policy involves improving the participation of young people.

The Child and Youth Policy Programme 2012–2015 drafted by the Ministry of Education and Culture states that “[a]ll children and young people will be ensured the basic prerequisites for participation and social inclusion in the information society.” According to the programme, the growth of children and young people into active and socially responsible citizens would also be facilitated by, say, improving their media literacy and enhancing their participation in the information society. The Child and Youth Policy Programme focuses on media literacy and technological know-how as areas of general education, and highlights the importance of broad-based literacy as a prerequisite for participation in society. (Child and Youth Policy Programme 2012–2015.)

As part of the goals of child and youth policy, the Ministry of Education and Culture has prepared national policy guidelines for the promotion of good media literacy in the period 2013–2016. The guidelines lay down objectives and measures for child and youth-oriented everyday media education and provide sustainable structures for the promotion of media education. The national policy guidelines approach media education from different perspectives, the most important of which are inclusion, civic activities, criticality, creativity and self-expression. (Good Media Literacy; National Policy Guidelines 2013–2016.)

Use of ICT by young people

According to Statistics Finland's survey on the use of information and communications technology by individuals, practically everyone aged 16–24 (99%) uses the Internet, and up to 89% of them use it several times a day. Young people use the Internet for communication, entertainment, following various media, information retrieval and managing their affairs in particular. (ebrand 2015; Statistics Finland 2014; Kaarakainen et al. 2013; Rahja 2013.) The Internet is still used primarily at home, but also in educational institutions, when on the move and at friends' homes using mobile devices. The most popular social media services among young people are YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook and Facebook Messenger, Instagram and Spotify. They most frequently use social media from 6 to 9 p.m. Up to 92% of young people use social media services on their smartphones. (ebrand 2015.)

Above all, digital media is used for communication

Although young people mainly interact online in order to maintain established friendships, the Internet also allows them to interact with new people. They mainly keep in touch with new and old friends through instant messaging. The use of instant messaging has increased significantly over the last few years. For example, in 2015, 82% of young people are using WhatsApp, whereas two years ago the corresponding figure was 8% (ebrand 2015). As many as 77% of people aged 16–24 use instant messaging daily or almost daily (Statistics Finland 2014). Young people's use of social media has shifted in recent years from public commenting on Facebook to private instant messaging groups – although these can include hundreds of members.

Participation in various online communities is more or less a social obligation for young people today. Almost everyone (91%) aged 16–24 also follows some social networking service on at least a weekly basis (Statistics Finland 2014). Young people often

participate in online groups that are somehow linked to their offline communities (Uusitalo et al. 2011). Virtual role playing games or fan communities online can lead to social interaction and create a sense of community which is maintained both online and face-to-face. (Lehtikangas 2014.)

Young people are interested in the content shared online by their friends; almost half of the population aged 16–24 reads media content shared via social media daily and more than 80% do so at least weekly. (Statistics Finland 2014.) However, young people are less likely to produce and distribute their own media content. Only slightly over half (52%) of young people aged 13–29 report that they create social media updates and comments. (ebrand 2015.)

The online communications of young people are characterised by visuality. Original photographs and edited memes are shared frequently. Images are shared via photo sharing services such as Instagram, but also through instant messaging services. The emphasis on visual communication is also evident in the popularity of video blogs (vlogs). Vloggers have become stars and idols among young people. The most popular Finnish vloggers have more than 200,000 YouTube subscribers.

The development of mobile technology and various social media services have increased the popularity of online communications among young people; according to at least some surveys, this seems to have solidified friendships between them. The Youth Barometer, a survey of young people's lives, attitudes and values, suggests that young people are keeping more in touch with their friends than in previous years. Furthermore, young people who keep actively in touch with their friends over the phone or Internet also tend to meet them face-to-face more often than other young people. (Youth Barometer 2014.)

Digital gaming is popular

The digital world and the Internet offer young people a variety of hobbies and pastimes. Digital games are a highly popular form of entertainment among young Finns. The 2011 Player Barometer suggests that 95% of Finnish young people aged 10–19 play a digital game at least once a month (Finnish Player Barometer 2011). The popularity of digital games among children and young people is also high compared to the European norm: On average, Finnish children aged 9–16 are up to 11% more likely to use the Internet for gaming than their European peers. (Kupiainen et al. 2013.) Mobile and console games are the most popular digital games among young people (Finnish Player Barometer 2013).

A variety of communities and subcultures have emerged around games. Games are a topic of conversation among friends, just like movies and books. There are both single and multiplayer games. The gamers can gather in the same place or form groups over the Internet. The importance of gaming is illustrated by the emergence of many new types of cultural phenomena, such as electronic sports, fandoms, cosplay and various types of self-created content.

The use of ICT by young people varies

Although young people use information and communication technologies actively, their skills and ways of using them vary greatly depending on several factors such as their age, gender, socio-economic background and the support received from parents and other educators. For example, a study conducted by the University of Turku suggests that Finnish young people can be grouped into *contact-oriented* (40%), *intensive* (31%), *social media active* (16%) and *passive* (13%) ICT users. Contact-oriented young people typically use ICT to maintain friendships, but do not create online content actively. Intensive users harness technology for entertainment and communication, but also for activities that require deeper knowledge, such as information retrieval and programming. Social media activists are typically bloggers and participate actively in social media and discussion forums. Passive young people do not use ICT on a daily basis, but mainly use the Internet for surfing the web, watching videos and listening to music. (Kaarakainen et al. 2013.)

The EU Kids Online survey conducted at European level indicates that only a small percentage (5%) of Finnish children and young people aged 9–16 have experienced online bullying. Among the 25 countries studied, Finnish children experienced the least abuse of personal information they had published online. According to the survey, some children had viewed K18 content at primary school age. Some had also encountered sexual harassment and suspicious people online. (Kupiainen et al. 2013.) On the other hand, children and young people have a variety of coping mechanisms, and problems such as sexual harassment may be easier to fight online than offline. (Noppari 2014.)

4. The use of the Internet in municipal youth work – survey results

Realisation of the survey

In spring 2015, Verke issued an extensive questionnaire to municipal youth workers, investigating the use of the Internet in youth work. A similar survey was carried out of municipal youth workers in 2013. Among other things, the respondents were asked about attitudes, ways of using the Internet, the available equipment and their expertise and need for further training. The response options were mainly pre-selected and the majority of the questions were multiple choices. The respondents had the opportunity to add several answers in their own words.

The survey was conducted as an online questionnaire through the Webropol application. A link to the questionnaire was emailed to about 3,000 people working in the youth work sector. Their contact details were collected from municipalities' websites. The survey was open from 9 April to 26 April 2015 and could be taken in Finnish or Swedish. A total of 945 responses were received from 232 municipalities all over Finland. The criterion for sampling the respondents was that they worked with young people. In other words, those with purely administrative tasks, for example, were excluded from the analysis.

The sample consisted of 915 respondents who met this criterion. A total of 67% of the respondents were women, 30% were men and 3% did not want to specify their gender. Workers were grouped according to their ages as follows: younger than 31 (31%), 31–40 (35%), 41–50 years (20%) and older than 50 years of age (14%). The municipalities where they are employed were divided into three categories: small municipalities (less than 10,000 inhabitants), medium-sized municipalities (10,000-100,000 inhabitants) and large municipalities (more than 100,000 inhabitants). A total of 26% of the respondents worked in small, 44% in medium-sized and 30% in large municipalities. The majority of the respondents (67%) reported that young people aged 13–17 are the primary target group of their work. The second largest group of respondents (27%) consisted of youth workers whose primary target group are those aged 18–25. Only 5% of the respondents worked primarily with children younger than 13, whereas less than 1% worked with people older than 25.

The responses were analysed using simple statistical methods based on the SPSS software. The analysis only took account of those sections of the survey in which there is a statistically significant connection between the variables ($\chi^2 < 0.05$). The content of the open answers was analysed in support of the statistical analysis. The percentages presented in this report have been rounded to integers.

Internet mainly used for spreading information and communicating

Of municipal youth workers, 94% report using the Internet in their work with young people. It is most often used for keeping in touch with young people, for spreading information and for providing advice and guidance. More than 80% of the respondents use the Internet at least weekly for communicating with young people. Day-to-day online encounters with young people have increased considerably from 2013. Back then, about one in four respondents indicated that they used the Internet daily to keep in touch with young people, while in 2015 almost one in two (45%) report doing so.

More than three in four respondents (77%) use the Internet for spreading information at least weekly. This most commonly means publishing information about the organisation's activities and events, and increasing the visibility of the youth worker's own work. A total of 70% of workers reported that they also shared content that is relevant to young people.

The most common uses of the Internet in youth work:

1. Communication with young people
2. Spreading information
3. Advice and guidance
4. Supporting the self-arranged activities of young people
5. Media Education

The Internet is used for advising and guidance purposes by 85% of the respondents. The most common advice and guidance methods are individual and group chats, and question and answer columns. About 70% of the respondents engage in real-time discussions with young people online, and 60% reported that they reply to young people's questions online. However, less than half (40%) of the respondents use the Internet for advice and guidance at least once a week. About one in two youth workers report also using the Internet at least monthly to support young people's self-arranged activities (52%) and for media education activities (46%).

How youth workers use the Internet for youth work

More than 75%	50–75%	25–50 %	Less than 25%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - inform young people about youth services' activities - make their work or their organisation's activities visible to young people - keep up to date with young people's latest news 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - share content that is relevant to young people - engage in a real-time conversation with young people - answer young people's questions online - produce text-based online content for young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - comment on online content produced by young people - get to know new young people online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - produce text-based online content together with young people - play online games with young people - blog or vlog with young people

Youth workers produce versatile online content, both on their own and together with young people. Content may be created for different reasons, such as providing information, the inclusion of young people or encouraging them in self-arranged activities. For example, some 60% of the respondents stated that they produce text-based online content *for* young people, while only some 20% reported doing so *alongside* young people. Blogging alongside young people is still rather uncommon: 7% of youth workers do so, while only a small percentage is vlogging alongside young people.

Digital games are common – online gaming still rare

The survey set out to investigate how much and in what ways the Internet is used for gaming in youth work. As the survey did not make fine distinctions between different types of digital games (e.g. mobile, console, PC games), detailed conclusions cannot be drawn on the prevalence of digital games or the ways in which they are used. It seems, however, that certain forms of digital gaming are fairly common in youth work, and attitudes towards gaming are positive. For example, console games are frequently played, particularly in the open house events of youth centres. A total of 57% of all respondents, and as many as 80% of those engaged in open youth work, have a game console at work. In addition, more than 60% of the respondents think that digital games are a good tool in youth work.

Although attitudes towards the use of digital games in youth work are fairly positive, in their gaming activities youth workers do not seem to benefit in a highly active manner from the opportunities presented by the Internet. Nearly two thirds (62%) of municipal youth workers report not using the Internet for gaming in youth work. Less than one in ten respondents use the Internet on at least a monthly basis for gaming as part of youth work.

Mobile devices enable the use of instant messaging services

With respect to equipment provided by the employer, the youth work sector has seen a remarkable change over the past two years. Practically all respondents (over 99%) have access to a desktop or a laptop computer during working hours. Advances in mobile technology are also reflected in youth work: less than one in five (19%) youth workers had a work smartphone in 2013, but now more than 70% use an individual or shared smartphone at work. The majority (62%) of respondents are the sole users of their work smartphone. The number of tablets in youth work has also risen markedly in the last two years: slightly over a third (35%) of the respondents have a tablet in individual or shared use at work. Almost three out of every four respondents (73%) have access to a digital camera or digital video camera.

Equipment provided by the employer (%) n = 915

	Own use	Shared use	None available	Total
Smartphone	62 (18)	10 (<1)	28 (81)	100
Tablet	12 (4)	23 (5)	65 (91)	100
Laptop	43 (38)	31 (28)	26 (34)	100
Desktop computer	40 (44)	36 (33)	24 (23)	100
Game console	7	50	43	100
Digital camera / digital video camera	13	60	27	100

The results of the 2013 survey are indicated in brackets, n = 872

Because the amount of mobile devices and smartphones in particular has increased in youth work, the youth workers are able to use more instant messaging applications for youth work purposes. It can be assumed that the daily interaction of youth workers with young people has increased as the workers' use of mobile devices has become more common and instant messaging applications have become generally available on the Internet. Mobile devices make communication and the spread of information faster and easier; as the results of this survey suggest, youth workers use the Internet most frequently for these two purposes.

Online services and social media – almost everyone is on Facebook

Youth workers use the following online tools most frequently: email (97%), the organisation's own Internet pages (97%) and Facebook (96%). A total of 86% of respondents use email at least weekly, while 73% use the organisation's website and 89% use Facebook. The use of these services for youth work has increased since 2013. For example, twice the number of respondents now report using their organisation's website on a daily basis.

The use of microblogging services has increased significantly since 2013. 15% of respondents use micro-blogging services at least weekly, compared to a much smaller percentage a couple of years ago. Increasing use of Twitter has presumably been a key driver of this change. The number of youth workers who use cloud storage services at least weekly has also doubled since 2013 and is now 21%.

Most used Internet services in youth work:

1. E-mail
2. The organisation's own website
3. Facebook and Facebook Messenger
4. WhatsApp
5. YouTube

In addition to Facebook and Facebook Messenger, the most common social media services include WhatsApp, YouTube and Instagram. The respondents often referred to Facebook in their open answers, and the results suggest this is very commonly used. However, some youth workers are aware that young people have begun to migrate away from Facebook in favour of other services. For example, WhatsApp is perceived as a good communication tool.

"Finding new social media channels has made communications easier. For example, WhatsApp is a good and easy way to contact the young people I know. Sometimes I wonder how much effort I should put into Facebook, as young people are no longer there."

Based on the survey material, Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp are the most popular instant messaging services among youth workers. The majority (81%) of respondents use Facebook Messenger for youth work, and 40% report using it on a daily basis. WhatsApp is used by almost two out of three (63%) respondents. Slightly over a quarter (27%) report using it daily. Over three quarters (77%) of the respondents report using the video service YouTube, although it has relatively fewer daily users than the other services mentioned above (7%).

"I'm currently learning to use Instagram because it's the most popular service among young people in my local area."

60% of respondents report using Instagram and 15% say they use it daily. Instagram is mainly suitable for sharing photos and videos, and is most easily used on a mobile device. Content published on Instagram is more public than content on WhatsApp, for

example. Users of WhatsApp tend to limit their audience more carefully. Based on the survey responses, young workers have introduced Instagram to youth work, while their older colleagues use it relatively little.

It seems that the five most-used social media services among youth workers are also the most popular among young people. However, municipal youth workers have not yet adopted all of the social media services that are currently popular among young people. For example, workers rarely use Ask.fm, even though it is among the most popular social media services among young people aged 13–17. Only 14% of youth workers use Ask.fm at least once a month. Youth workers' written responses reveal that they sometimes find it difficult to stay up to date with young people's favourite applications and to choose suitable applications for their work.

“Young people are continuously discovering new applications. As a youth worker, I find picking the essential applications and choosing how best to use my working hours very challenging.”

Goals for Internet use rarely defined

The survey also investigated the goals of Internet use. Survey questions concerning the goals of Internet use were worded differently for workers in supervisory positions compared to those directed at other workers. A fifth (21%) of the supervisors (n = 117) reported that their organisation had prepared a strategy or action plan for using the Internet for youth work. A total of 29% of respondents in an employee position stated that they had defined goals for using the Internet for youth work, alongside either their supervisor or work community. On the other hand, 43% of employees reported that their supervisor or employer had instructed them on using the Internet for youth work within the last year.

“Our goal is to have all youth services staff use the Internet and social media on at least a basic level.”

The open answers reveal huge variation in the content of the defined goals. Some workers aim to increase the use of the Internet in their youth work and to develop the related competencies, while others have set the introduction of certain applications or better follow-up as their goals.

The results indicate that the most common means of monitoring the realisation of goals include discussions within the work community (46%) and feedback and satisfaction surveys targeted at young people (42%). In a fairly high number of cases, the realisation of goals is also monitored using indicators set by the organisation, self- and peer assessments and feedback, and satisfaction surveys targeted at youth workers. Around one-fifth of the respondents were aware that the realisation of goals had been monitored using statistics. In the survey, 'statistics' referred to software used to monitor website traffic and produce analytics. It seems that youth workers are not always aware of how their organisation monitors the achievement of the goals it has set for Internet use. When potential follow-up measures were described, many respondents were unaware of whether or not a particular measure was used at their workplace.

Means of following up the realisation of Internet-related goals in youth work (%) n = 915

	Yes	No	Do not know	Total
Discussions within the work community	46	37	16	100
Surveys directed at young people	42	41	17	100
Self- and peer assessment	25	51	24	100
Indicators set by the organisation	24	47	28	100
Surveys of youth workers	24	58	18	100
Statistics	19	51	30	100
Interactive assessments alongside young people	16	58	26	100
Assessments performed by experts from outside the organisation	10	60	30	100

On average, young respondents were more likely than their older colleagues to feel that the organisation had not defined sufficiently clear goals for use of the Internet in youth work. On the other hand, they were also more likely than their older peers to have participated in the definition of such goals with their employer. In sum, it seems that younger youth workers find the definition of goals more important than their older colleagues do.

Factors enhancing and hampering the use of the Internet

Less than a tenth (6%) of the respondents reported never using the Internet for youth work. The majority (67%) of these stated that they were able to reach young people by other means and did not therefore use the Internet. Other reasons frequently cited for not using the Internet included the fact that someone else was responsible for this within the work community (29%) or that the respondent felt that it did not add value to their work (24%) and that they had insufficient, Internet-related competencies (22%).

Slightly over half (54%) of those respondents who use the Internet stated that some factors in their work hindered their use the Internet for youth work. The most common hindrances were insufficient equipment (49%), feeling that they lacked personal competence (48%) and insufficient working hours (47%). Many (32%) felt that their use of the Internet was impeded by a lack of clearly defined goals. These negative factors were repeated in the open answers to the survey. Furthermore, the respondents reported the existence of fundamental challenges posed by the work community's negative attitude towards the use of the Internet and poor organisational infrastructure.

The youth workers' responses suggest that personal motivation is the best way to improve the use of the Internet for youth work. According to the results, the factors most frequently contributing to the use of the Internet are, firstly, an understanding of the key role the Internet plays in young people's lives (91%), and secondly, the desire

to harness the possibilities of the Internet in youth work (68%). In addition, less than one third (31%) feel that the opportunity to organise one’s own work flexibly and access to sufficient equipment are key factors contributing to the use of the Internet for youth work. Other frequently mentioned factors include the support provided by the supervisor and the organisation, and the opportunity to update and develop personal competences.

Attitudes positive, competences need to be improved

The respondents have a positive attitude towards using the Internet for youth work. 92% of them think that municipal youth work should include an online dimension. More than 80% of the respondents also believe that more use should be made of the Internet in youth work.

When youth workers assess their competences to use the Internet in youth work, they felt more confident in traditional areas of youth work – such as interaction, guidance and counselling – and less confident about their technical skills. Youth workers feel that media literacy is their strongest Internet-related competence: some three out of four (75%) of the respondents felt that their media literacy was at least good. Another strong area of expertise described in the responses is social media know-how, which seven out of ten respondents estimated as good. Interestingly enough, although youth workers feel that they are competent social media users, they still feel least certain in terms of their skills in using social media for youth work: 55% of respondents assessed their expertise in this area as good or excellent.

The respondents’ assessment of their know-how and expertise

<p style="text-align: center;">Good / excellent (more than 50% of the respondents)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Moderate / poor (more than 50% of the respondents)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Media literacy - Social media and the use of social media tools in youth work - Online interaction and encounters - Youth guidance and counselling - Professional ethics and specific methodological characteristics of working online - Online safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Online culture - Online influencing and activism - Immaterial property rights - Production of media content - Media education and support for young people’s media skills - Support for young people’s self-arranged activities and self-expression online - Use of mobile devices - Digital games and the use of games in youth work - Programming - Technical know-how

Youth workers felt their competences to be weakest in the areas of technical know-how and digital gaming. Only 3% of the respondents felt that their programming skills were good or excellent. Less than 15% felt that their competences in using digital games for youth work were good or excellent, while 20% felt that their competences in digital or

online gaming in general were good or excellent. The respondents estimated that their competences in producing media content were rather poor, since fewer than one in four respondents felt that they had good or excellent skills in this area.

Willingness to develop professional practical capabilities

Youth workers seem to be the most interested in developing their media-content related competences. Over 40% of the respondents would like to become more competent media content producers, while almost one third (30%) would like to develop their competences in media education and supporting young people's media skills. Another popular theme of competence development is the use of social media and mobile devices for youth work: more than a third (37%) of the respondents would like to become more competent users of social media for youth work, while slightly over a quarter (28%) would like to learn more about using mobile devices in youth work. Youth workers are the least interested in strengthening their coding skills, with only about one in ten employees interested in developing their competences in this area.

The technological advances of recent years and the increasing use of mobile devices for youth work are likely reasons for youth workers being most interested in developing their media content production and social media competences. Their desire to develop their competences in these areas perhaps also reveals their increased understanding of how important it is to produce media content and use the Internet in youth work activities. If youth workers' responses are grouped according to age, younger youth workers seem eager to develop areas such as their digital gaming and content production competences. Meanwhile, their older colleagues feel that they should develop their competences as users of mobile devices and social media tools, and in online interaction.

"I would like to see a firmer grip on the issue, with EVERYONE equally well-trained and shown that it's easy and genuinely fun and useful."

A comparison of the responses revealed that training provided by the employer correlated with better evaluations of personal know-how and competence. Slightly under a third (32%) of all respondents reported that within the last 12 months they had received training on the online world of young people or use of the Internet. Based on the open survey responses, more training is very much in demand.

5. Youth workers' experiences of digital media

Introduction

Focus group interviews were conducted with youth workers in four municipalities across Finland. The municipalities were medium-sized (10,000 to 100,000 inhabitants) or large (more than 100,000 inhabitants). Each group consisted of youth workers of various ages, employed in municipal youth services. About 30% of the interviewees were men and 70% were women. The interviews were conducted with 5–10 employees

from each municipality, engaged in various forms of youth work, such as in open youth work, outreach youth work and youth information and counselling services. The average duration of the interviews was 1.5 hours, and the interviews were recorded.

The aim of the focus group interviews was to deepen the information gathered from the municipal survey and to produce qualitative information in support of quantitative data. The interviews began with a discussion of the definition of digital media. After this, the discussion turned to young people's use of digital media and various ways in which youth work can support this. The discussions also sought to examine the ways in which youth workers use digital media in their work, the added value this has provided for youth work, the goals set for its use, and the challenges and opportunities involved in the use of digital media. The interviews concluded with a discussion of the ways in which the use of digital media in youth work has changed in recent years and the interviewees' visions of the future of digital media in youth work.

The nature of the interviews varied greatly, mainly due to differences between the groups' use of digital media. Some groups engaged in a fairly in-depth discussion of the use and functions of digital media, while others referred to the issue on a more superficial level. However, each group of workers included some youth workers who were enthusiastic about the use of digital media in their work, and others who preferred traditional methods of youth work. This report seeks to convey both perspectives.

Digital media – what is that?

The interviewees were first asked to define digital media. Their answers varied. Many viewed all online materials as digital media. Examples included online magazines, blogs, various learning platforms, discussion forums and other online services. Surprisingly, only some groups mentioned TV and radio as examples of digital media. According to one interviewee, "*digital media are always somehow connected to machines.*" During the discussions, the digital media were also associated with their global nature and ability to break down geographical boundaries, since physical distances no longer prevent communications and the relaying of messages.

Many interviewees seemed to have difficulties grasping what the term *digital media* means. They were unable to define offhand what 'digital media' encompasses, or were at least uncertain about the issue. It seemed that the more a work community uses digital media in youth work, the more able the interviewees were to define the digital media in the first place.

In each group interview, the discussion on digital media turned to the social media. The interviewees were asked to describe the last work-related activity they had performed using digital media. All of the interviewees had either updated social media channels or interacted with young people through the social media. During the discussions, the interviewers actively sought to introduce a broader perspective on digital media to the interviewees, to prevent the discussion from focusing too strongly on the social media and its use in youth work. However, many interviewees appeared to find it difficult to grasp meanings of digital media outside the social media.

Youth workers' experiences of young people's use of digital media

The interviewees felt that young people are adept social media users. According to many participants, young people use digital media in a versatile manner, creatively and effortlessly alongside their other activities. In some groups, youth workers suggested that the youth work sector should highlight more young people's digital media know-how. The interviewees would also like people not involved in youth work to take note of how skilled young people are at using the social media.

The interviewees in each group stated that young people who visit the youth centre use digital media on an almost continuous basis. In the experience of youth workers, such youngsters are particularly active users of social media. The interviewees reported that almost all young people seem to have their own smartphone, which they use actively even when interacting face to face. According to the employees, young people often watch YouTube videos on their own and each other's phones. Young people also use "traditional" forms of digital media in youth centres: they play on the PlayStation, watch television and listen to music. However, music is no longer played on the radio or a computer at youth centres, but usually on a young person's smartphone. One interviewee commented on the general usefulness of young people's phones: as games and the Internet are accessible on their mobile devices, they no longer need to queue for the shared computer.

Some interviewees were astonished by young people's continuous use of their smartphones. Young people's tendency to focus on their phones while spending time at the youth centre seemed to bother some youth workers. They also marvelled at young people's habit of using a phone and instant messaging services to communicate with each other even when in the same room. The interviewees felt that young people are physically present but mentally absent. On the other hand, one of the groups pointed out that a mobile device does not necessarily occupy the young person's attention as fully as it occupies that of a youth worker. Young people seem to be able, at least ostensibly, to concentrate on their phones and their surroundings at the same time.

Many interviewees pointed out that young people use mobile devices as a social activity. They use their own telephones, but can do so as a group. Sometimes they show phone-based videos and photos to youth workers. Young people also play together using their own phones. Youth workers find this interesting: young people spend time physically alone in the same room, but are very social online at the same time.

All groups included youth workers who stated that they found it difficult to keep up to date with rapidly fluctuating trends. Young people use so many social media services that the interviewees have difficulties keeping up. Most of the interviewees reported using the most popular social media services at work, but only a few seemed to have a clear grasp of the possibilities of digital media and what the Internet could offer to youth work. In addition, some interviewees felt that the language used by young people online is strange or even impossible to understand. For example, they use abbreviations that the youth workers sometimes find incomprehensible.

“I prefer taking the youngsters to the forest instead of the Internet.”

Although the interviewees' attitudes towards the digital media were mostly positive, some of them were not at all enthusiastic about using digital media at work. They justified their reluctance by saying *“I'm simply not interested”* or in terms of their age, poor skills or insufficient working time. They fondly remembered the past, and suggested outdoors activities, for instance, as a meaningful alternative to using digital media. Many also felt that using digital media in places such as youth centres takes time away from face-to-face work. Most of those interviewed nonetheless had a positive, even enthusiastic attitude towards the use of digital media, and did not see any major obstacles to the technology in their work.

The interviewees also pointed out that young people can pass on their own knowledge and teach youth workers to use the digital media. One interviewee described asking a young person at a youth centre for help in adjusting the settings of a mobile application. Another interviewee had asked a young person to explain an abbreviation used in a conversation. Both youth workers described how their own ignorance had seemed odd and even embarrassing at first, but how happy the young people had been to advise them.

Risks involved in young people's Internet use

Many interviewees were concerned with the amount of time young people spend on digital media and the risks involved in social media. Some interviewees felt that digital media and the Internet have even made life too easy. Young people in danger of social exclusion can easily fail to venture beyond their homes for days because they no longer need to go outdoors to handle their banking and other day-to-day business. Excessive gambling was also regarded as a threat. Some of the interviewees believe that young people easily tend to stay at home to play games alone or with friends instead of coming to the youth centre to meet their peers. On the other hand, they also recognised the social aspect and benefits of gaming activities. One group pointed out that gaming activities at the youth centre could attract young people who would not otherwise visit the centre. Other dangers of digital media mentioned included contact requests from suspicious people on social media and the risks involved in picture sharing.

All interviews also brought up the fact that young people have much to learn in terms of the way they use the Internet, for example in relation to their behaviour and critical thinking. The interviewees feel that young people do not fully understand that the good manners required in face-to-face interaction also largely apply online. Insulting comments hurt equally much on the street and online. According to the interviewees, young people often share information about their private lives online rather carelessly. For example, one youth worker felt that sharing your telephone number on the social media is stupid. When the worker pointed this out to a young person, the youth admitted that it had never occurred to him to think about it. The interviewees thought that youth workers should set the example for young people in terms of how they can and should behave online.

Youth participation

It was evident from all of the interviews that Finnish youth work currently places the emphasis on young people's inclusion, participation and active agency. Activities are designed in order to give young people as large a role as possible in the planning and realisation of activities. In many municipalities, measures have been taken to strengthen the role of young people, for example by encouraging them to publish updates and content for other young people through social media channels. Youth services have given their social media login credentials to young people and encouraged them to use the youth service's hashtags in their personal status updates. One of the groups discussed the development of the municipality's digital gaming activities. The purpose of this is to begin training and activating young people to organise their own activities. Several workers pointed out that youth workers should have the role of enabling and supporting the use of digital media instead of actually organising it.

The discussions indicate that young people seem to be independent and creative users of digital media. Using such media seems to form an integral part of how they hang out and spend time together at youth centres, for example. Young people take selfies and other photos at youth centres fairly often, and often watch YouTube videos on their smartphones or the youth centre's tablet computer.

The interviewees pointed out that use of the digital media is often an accompaniment to other activities. For example, either using their personal phones or devices provided by the youth centre, young people may shoot music videos during band activities, or photograph art created during art activities. According to the youth workers, young people most often use their own phones to take photographs and shoot videos. The interviews suggest that, although such auxiliary use of digital media is typically initiated by young people themselves, youth work plays a significant role in this by providing premises and devices and enabling physical encounters.

It seems that in the municipal youth work services forming the subjects of the interviews, a fairly high number of activities were focused around the use of digital media. The groups stated that digital media is often used in a variety of group and workshop activities. For example, all municipalities have held or are currently offering photography courses and editorial activities, in which young people can try out article writing, blogging, video recording and radio broadcasting. In one interview, the youth workers described their activities based on the production of digital music, DJ activities at the youth centre and an animation workshop for young people. In one municipality, youth workers are planning to launch group activities related to digital gaming. Although youth work services organise a variety of digital media workshops for young people, the interviewees questioned the need for such activities in the future, as young people tend to be highly independent and are sometimes more adept than youth workers in their use of the digital media.

Young people have been successfully involved in updating social media channels and reporting from events. Furthermore, because they often know more about the social

media and the related possibilities, youth workers carefully listen to their ideas and suggestions. For example, youth workers in one municipality opened an Instagram account on the initiative of young people.

Goals and added value

The discussions with the youth workers also touched on the reasons for using digital media in youth work, the goals of doing so, and the value it adds to youth work. All of the groups interviewed acknowledged that young people are online and that the Internet is a “natural” everyday environment for them. Bearing this in mind, the youth workers stated that they have a duty to use digital and social media at work, at least to some extent.

They thought that the use of digital media offers young people new experiences and learning opportunities, as well as an opportunity to experience success. Experiences of success and earned praise increase young people’s self-esteem. In addition, digital media can be a very useful tool for group building and developing social skills. For these reasons in particular, the interviewees viewed the use of digital media in youth work as a positive phenomenon.

According to the interviewees, the benefits of the use of social media include rapid sharing of information and easy means of reaching young people. They find it easy to stay up to date with the latest news on young people and to “like” their updates on the social media, for example. Communication begun online can facilitate the first steps in face-to-face communication. The interviewees also associate a kind of pastoral care with social media use in youth work. If a young person’s social media behaviour becomes strange or radically changes, it may be necessary to contact the young person or, if necessary, delegate the task to other parties such as a social worker or a virtual police officer. The youth workers stressed that the purpose of using the social media is not to spy on young people, but to stay up to date with how they are doing and whether everything is all right.

Many interviewees said a great deal about what they “should” be doing. They recognise the need to use digital media, but insufficient working time, poor equipment and uncertainty about their own competences hinder their use of social media. A few interviewees also admitted that they would not like to use social media in their work any more than now because they find face-to-face encounters more important or do not want to spend time and energy learning about digital media.

The interviewees also revealed their hopes and goals with respect to their personal use of digital media for youth work. Many were interested in digital gaming and would like to know more about it. On the other hand, many interviewees were relatively unfamiliar with digital gaming as an area of digital media, and did not give as much emphasis to the need to know gaming activities as part of their work as they did to issues such as the need to use various social media channels. Instead, youth workers seem to view digital gaming as a special form of youth work, something not everyone needs to know about. As such, they think that this area can be left to youth workers who are interested in the subject.

Challenges, suggestions for improvement and hopes

The interviews revealed that insufficient equipment and competences are the key challenges in terms of the use of digital media in youth work. This supports the findings of the statistical data. Criticism on equipment and training tends to be directed towards supervisors. Some respondents feel that supervisors simply *“sit on the budget paper”* without any actual understanding of what youth is about today, how young people fare and what activities should be organised.

Youth workers have increasing numbers of smartphones and tablets available for work-related use. However, some interviewees regretted the fact that the functions of various applications do not always run smoothly on the smartphone models provided. In addition, some places have poor network connections. One interviewee reported that insufficient network connections had prevented an attempt to participate in an online tournament. Youth workers wished that they, as the users of the devices, would be consulted before new devices are acquired, to ensure that the acquisitions correspond to actual needs.

“If we do this, we should do it properly.”

They also find it challenging to predict how worthwhile investments are. For example, many youth work services offer cameras and video cameras whose actual rate of use is rather low. Young people prefer to take photos and videos using their own phones whose cameras are at least sufficient for the task. Their phones may also have pre-installed photo and video editing applications. On the other hand, proper equipment and photo and video processing software would enable youth workers to set long-term goals for these activities. The interviewees also noted that free editing programs are available online, and that some young people use these independently.

The discussions revealed that youth workers feel that they have insufficient working time for using digital media at work. Several interviewees thought that working hours should be earmarked for using social media, for example, in order to prevent this activity from stealing time from other tasks. Many think that it is more important to concentrate fully on face-to-face interaction at youth centres rather than trying to update social media at the same time.

Some youth workers feel that their workplace takes a rather casual approach to the social media, while others think that their work community has set tight restrictions on what can and cannot be published. Likewise, some interviewees would need more specific guidance as to what kind of content is shared via which social media channel and how often, while others would like their working communities to take a more relaxed approach to using social media. However, the latter group also feels that guidelines would support their work, since coordinated steering would relieve them from having to use their time to make policy definitions. Some interviewees suggested that common sense goes a long way. It seems that social media guidelines and updating practices vary greatly between the interviewed municipalities.

The interviews revealed varying training needs. On the one hand, some interviewees said that they were offered “*as much training as we have the audacity to ask for*”, while others said that their supervisors set narrow criteria for training participation (e.g. free, located nearby and no longer than a day in duration). Supervisors were criticised for not clearly grasping the need of youth workers for continuous digital media training. Most interviewees nonetheless admitted that the majority of daily updates and development depend on their personal level of activity, interest and productivity. They did not view the forcible training of youth workers as an option, but believed that training should be based on a genuine interest in the subject. Some interviewees suggested that training be made available for anyone interested, without obliging anyone to participate against their will. In one interview, the participants suggested that training should be complemented by individual guidance and support on how to use digital media.

A couple of the groups referred to the challenges posed to digital media use due to the differences between the interests of youth workers and young people. For example, youth workers “*should*” watch more YouTube videos by young people, but are “*not at all interested*”. Youth workers may find the videos too silly or boring to watch. At the same time, the youth workers nonetheless emphasised that they should be interested in what young people are doing and, in particular, follow the online content of those who visit their own youth centres. A few interviewees openly admitted that they are not interested in digital media and will not use social media at work until it becomes mandatory.

On the other hand, a large number of the interviewees were interested in the use of digital media – and social media in particular – for youth work, even though they found it difficult to keep up with the latest trends. Almost all of the interviewees felt more or less unable to keep up with young people in terms of the “*new phenomena*” among the digital media. Many hoped for national-level efforts to collect information “*somewhere*” about various social media and ways of using digital media in youth work. Youth workers need information on current trends, as well as practical examples of how the digital media are used elsewhere.

The interviewees were asked how the challenges brought up could be solved. Their answers were vague and they had few practical suggestions to offer. Most of the interviewees believed that “*in time, things will fall into place*” and that time would tell how the digital media would be incorporated into youth work. Many of the interviewees who appeared resistant to change during the discussions admitted that they had already felt an aversion towards technology when computers first became common in the workplace. The interviewees seemed to think that a positive change in attitudes would be the key to making the use of digital media more common and versatile in youth work.

When asked to discuss future prospects, the groups divided into two. Some interviewees saw digital development as a positive issue that facilitates their work, while others were concerned about it. They were concerned that, in the future, everything would be done through devices of some kind. On the other hand, the idea of

virtual youth centres also sparked enthusiastic discussion. The possibilities offered by digital media were viewed as positive, especially in areas where distances are long and young people experience difficulty in getting to youth centres.

6. Case examples

Case 1. Use of digital media for youth event production

Hyvinkää is a town of 47,000 inhabitants, located around 50 kilometres north of Helsinki. The youth services of the City of Hyvinkää offer free and equal opportunities for recreation to local young people. As part of its youth service activities, the city has been organising the HypeCon, an event that combines anime and gaming culture, since 2012. The content and nature of the event are created by the visitors themselves: social media are used in the planning process and everyone can participate regardless of their age and location. In addition to the open planning group, a tighter working group called the Conitea is tasked with the detailed organisation of the event. The youth department of Hyvinkää participates in the organisation of the event, which has enabled it to remain free and without age limits.

The aim of HypeCon is to offer young people an opportunity to participate in all stages of the planning, realisation and organisation of an event built around their personal interests, with the help of social media tools in particular. This form of youth work makes it possible to offer young people with varying interests, skills and ability to commit to an activity suitable means of helping to achieve the common goal, the event in question. From the viewpoint of youth work, the digital media make it possible to meet young people throughout the year-long planning process as well as during the one-day event itself. Young people are also offered opportunities to develop their digital skills at the event itself, where they independently produce an online broadcast of the event.

The first HypeCon was held in 2012. Until now, the event has focused on the non-mainstream hobbies of young people. In the early years, the content was strongly centred around anime, manga and various types of gaming. Since then, the event has brought together enthusiasts from all over Finland. The event was originally conceived of as a small, end-of-season event for youth clubs, but thanks to the use of social media in event production, it expanded in its first year into one of the key youth events in the area. In 2015, the event was attended by around 1,500 young people, and hundreds of people watched the direct broadcast through the Twitch service.

Existing youth groups help with the organisation of the event and helped to launch the shared planning process on the social media. Since the young target group is active on Facebook, a group page has been created there to serve as a planning platform. Various event themes have been planned in separate message chains on the group page. For example, there have been discussion chains built around the anime and manga programmes, talks, miniature games and poster planning. Youth workers have

reacted actively to the ideas presented in these discussion chains, turning them into concrete tasks and handing out smaller sub-tasks to participants. For example, shooting a promotional video can be divided into the sub-tasks of selecting or composing background music, creating graphics and writing the video script, and each task can involve several young people.

The youth workers' role is to monitor the situation and only intervene in the planning process if needed. They also take care of tasks that are too complicated to be left to the young people, such as signing agreements to use the premises and applying for other permits from the city. In addition, youth workers initiate various actions as they become topical. For example, they set a deadline for poster designs, by which time they expect them to be ready.

The HypeCon events have been based on a very small budget. Actual costs have only been accrued in relation to poster and shirt printing and the acquisition of prizes for various tournaments and competitions. The event has been held on the city's premises, whose use and prices have been separately negotiated within the city organisation. Youth workers do not need to be highly familiar with technology or content, since the key issue is to involve young people according to their personal strengths. They can act as experts in website administration or video recording, for example.

The participating youth workers assess the activities throughout the year-long process. This approach highlights the perspectives of youth groups and individuals because the actual realisation of the process is continuously shaped according to the wishes of the young people in question. They are asked to fill in questionnaires providing feedback on the event, its content, organisation and premises. The results are used in the planning and realisation of the following year's event.

Young people's experiences of HypeCon

As part of the description of HypeCon, we also interviewed five young people among its active participants. The interviewees were aged 19 to 28. They had all been interested in Japanese popular culture before participating in HypeCon, some for a long time beforehand. The youths had found HypeCon through friends or other acquaintances.

They revealed that the idea to organise the first HypeCon had originally been a joke, but had quickly gathered momentum. Despite being planned and organised rapidly, the first event attracted a surprisingly large audience. The number of participants has grown year by year, which is something that the young people like. They enjoy participating in the creation of an event that competes in the same category as other major Finnish conventions.

The most active participants (the Conitea working group) have face-to-face meetings twice a month throughout the year, and slightly more often as the event draws nearer. The interviewees would like the activities to be held on a more regular basis. However, finding suitable meeting times for everyone is challenging and the other tasks of the participating youth worker limit the opportunities to meet regularly.

Facebook is used a great deal in the process and the young interviewees find it a good tool for event planning. Everyone can share their ideas there and it is also used to ensure that all of the young participants perform their tasks as agreed. On the other hand, the interviewees have noticed that people tend to commit themselves more strongly to issues agreed in person, as opposed to ones agreed on Facebook. Although everyone involved in organising the event has their own area of responsibility, in practice everyone does a bit of everything due to the small number of actual organisers.

The young interviewees regarded the youth worker's role as a coordinator to be highly important. The youth worker is the head organiser. She organises the planning meetings, keeps track of young people's responsibilities and guides them through the practical arrangements. The interviewees described the youth worker as *"the mother of the event, but also our mother"* who *"supports us in every possible way"*.

The young interviewees thought that being a part of such a major phenomenon is the best thing about participating: *"The feeling you get when you see 1,500 people rushing through the doors to your event."* The abundance of positive feedback has also pleased them. A willingness to do something useful but fun and a desire to see the event evolve year after year are the reasons for their continuing involvement. They do not need other activities to complement the core activity: the event and its organisation. The young persons felt that organising the event has provided them with new, insightful experiences and the feeling of success.

They felt finding time for meetings to be a challenging aspect of the activity. There has also been disappointment when someone has not taken care of their mutually agreed responsibilities. They feel that in the future they most need to attract more young people to organise the event.

Case 2. The youth centre gaming group

Merirasti is a youth centre in the Vuosaari district of eastern Helsinki. The youth centre organises various activities, such as digital gaming, at which the digital media are used. Since spring 2013, the youth centre has organised a group for boys aged 13 to 19 who are interested in digital gaming and the organisation of gaming events.

The group meets on a weekly basis and currently has seven members. So far, its activities have been focused on the League of Legends game. The purpose of the activity is to create new friendships, immerse the participants in their hobby at a deeper level, and to help them to learn new things about the League of Legends and organise gaming events. The activities are supervised and a programme is planned for each meeting. In addition to weekly meetings, group members chat on Facebook. They also organise and participate in various gaming events and LAN parties. The group has organised three LAN parties at the youth centre. LANs are gaming events where gamers gather on the same premises to play and engage in digital culture using their own computers. The computers are connected to each other via a local area network

(LAN). A LAN party can last from one to several days. The group has also collected money through voluntary work and participated twice in the Assembly gaming event, Finland's largest LAN event.

One participant has even become a member of the eSport organisation Good Game Squad, after being inspired to play League of Legends in the youth group. The Good Game Squad is a youth work-oriented electronic sports organisation that offers young competitive gaming enthusiasts an opportunity to take their first steps into electronic sport, guided by professional coaches and a professional organisation.

A key factor behind the group's success lies in the fact that a youth worker was allowed to spend his working hours organising the activities. This has necessitated spending a great deal of time with the group and taking responsibility for its operations. Finding suitable meeting times for the group has been a challenge, as the youth centre's gaming room is highly popular and the members also have other hobbies. Personal activity by the participants has also been a key component in the success of the project. The group has proven that young people can actively organise gaming events if they are offered support, encouragement and the experience of success.

Digital gaming has given young people in the youth centre gaming group a sense of community while introducing them to learning and organising events together, and has deepened their knowledge of competitive digital gaming. Through its activities, the group has become a solid circle of friends whose members play together outside meetings on an almost daily basis. Youth workers also participate in the gaming sessions during and even outside working hours.

Young people's experiences of the gaming group

For this report, we interviewed six young men aged 17–18, all of whom are members of the Merirasti gaming group. All of them have a multicultural background. Some already knew each other from school or the same neighbourhood. All of them had already visited the Merirasti youth centre before the gaming group was formed. The majority had played a great deal before joining the group, but mainly alone at home.

The youth worker in charge of the group came up with the idea of forming a League of Legends gaming group. When the group started out, the young people and the youth worker decided that the group should meet once a week. The League of Legends game requires that group members cooperate and communicate. The group can practice by dividing up into smaller teams that compete against each other. They play online as a single, unified team against other, usually unknown teams. Their aim is to win as many games as they can and climb as high in the statistics as possible.

Team play required some practice, particularly in the early days of the group. As all of the group members had mainly played alone before joining, learning to act as a team was not easy to begin with: *"Playing the game alone is so different to having five team members who talk between themselves and describe what they are doing. We had to practice how to really play as a team."*

The group sometimes goes to play at the youth centre outside its opening hours. Group members aged 18 or older have been given keys to the premises and the group has the youth worker's permission to play there without supervision. Gaming is the core activity that brings the group together. They talk about both the ongoing game and a wide variety of other issues.

They also go to gaming events and organise LANs together at the youth centre. Since it gives them the opportunity to make the leap from being visitors to working on "*the other side*," they enjoy organising their own events. They particularly enjoy being able to make virtually all of the decisions by themselves. More experienced LAN party organisers shoulder a larger share of the responsibilities, while others handle smaller tasks. Everyone can have a say on what they do, although some tasks are raffled out among them. They have not found event organisation too difficult. Youth workers have helped them whenever necessary.

The gaming group is highly active in the social media. They talk on Facebook and the youth worker participates in these discussions. The interviewees stated that most such discussions consist of "*trivial spamming*". However, reading between the lines their comments suggested that chatting via the social media is important to strengthening their team spirit and solidarity. They do not feel that they need other forms of digital or social media to complement the group's activities. Neither do they feel the need to advertise their activities (e.g. by blogging about them) because they do not believe that the group needs new members.

The young interviewees felt that the youth worker plays an important role. He plays the game with them and comes up with new in-game challenges that would not otherwise occur to the young players. The youth worker is very close to the group. One young person said: "*He's a kind of a father to us.*" The young people believe that if another youth worker took over the group, it would no longer be the same. As the youth worker participates in all group activities, their ties have grown strong.

Many young people felt that they had learned social skills while gaming. One of them revealed that he used to become angry about other group members' mistakes and harangue them. However, he began to notice his own mistakes and that harping on individual errors did not feel good or help the game progress. He learned the hard way that "*we play better when there's a little less criticism.*"

Of course, the group members' favourite activity is gaming. "*That means playing together,*" one of the interviewees specified. The group is bound together by a shared interest in games and gaming and a desire to do things together (e.g. instead of playing alone). They also think it is a good thing that they play with the same friends every week.

We asked the young interviewees about their hopes with respect to their gaming activities. They wished that the youth centre would acquire new, better equipment to make gaming smoother. In addition, they hoped that their youth worker "*would not*

abandon us” and that the group would continue operating for as long as possible. “This format is as good as it could be. Why change anything?”

Case 3. Multi-professional chat service provided by youth services

Byström youth services is a multi-professional, low-threshold service for young people living in Oulu. The service is provided by the Educational and Cultural Services of the City of Oulu. The service provides individual, cross-sectoral guidance, support and advice under a single roof. Young people can visit the Byström house with or without an appointment. Some workers involved in the Byström youth services are available via the Byström chat service from 8 to 10 p.m. on Mondays. Young people can talk to a youth worker, a nurse, a school counsellor, a vocational psychologist and a sexual health counsellor in a one-to-one chat. The target audience of the Byström chat service are young people aged 12 to 29 who live in the Oulu region.

The aim of the services is to provide regional-level personal support and advice, both online and offline. They also aim to lower the threshold for seeking help and advice from local professionals outside the Internet. The service also benefits young people in sparsely populated areas, since services may not be available nearby. Combining physical and online services is advantageous, as it enables professionals to refer young people onwards and provide them with a low-threshold service. Young people gain a real-time contact with a desired professional, both online and offline. For example, a young person can chat with a vocational psychologist and, if necessary, book a face-to-face appointment with her. Network encounters lower the threshold for young people wishing to visit the service in person. The goal is to be where young people are and conduct multi-professional youth work online.

The professionals are trained to work online. Their training has included matters such as online encounters, online slang and practical issues like the process involved in working a chat shift. Professionals whose chat shift occurs at the same time also communicate with each other using Google Hangouts, which provides them with a collective, multi-professional channel for sharing challenging situations. Targeted marketing has played a key role in the implementation of the local service, since the target audience is narrower than that of national services. The work requires a commitment from all of the professionals involved, as well as a coordinator that takes charge of maintenance and monitoring. During weeks when they are on chat duty, professionals work an average of three hours per week on the chat service. This work is coordinated by the employees of the Youth Information and Counselling Centre Nappi.

Anonymous one-to-one chats tend to be more problem-oriented by nature than group chats. Young persons often have a specific matter or problem they wish to talk about. If necessary, the young person is advised to visit the Byström youth services or contact other local professionals after the chat. At the beginning of operation, its opening hours were one of the main challenges. The Byström chat initially ran during office hours from

3 to 5 p.m., but feedback from young people prompted the service to change its opening hours to 8 to 10 p.m.

Key figures for the Byström chat service reveal that the average age of visitors is 17 years and around 25 per cent of them live in Oulu or the surrounding areas. The home municipality of the young person is not revealed in around 60 per cent of the discussions. Short chats of less than 10 minutes form the largest group of discussions, followed by long chats lasting more than an hour. The most popular topics include family problems, feeling low, sexuality, jobs and study places.

The Byström chat workers record each conversation on an electronic reporting form that prompts them to rate the success of the discussion and the young person's need for support and guidance. In addition, they are asked to assess how well they personally succeeded in the discussion. After the chat, the young person also receives a link to a questionnaire asking for his or her opinion of the discussion. Every six months, the employees of the Youth Information and Counselling Centre Nappi use the assessments to organise a development day in order to plan operations and improvements for the coming season and to provide chat workers with training on the themes they have reported as necessary.

7. Summary and recommendations

In international terms, youth work has a strong position in Finnish society, which is understandable in the light of its historical and structural development: youth work has been professionalised, being carried out by municipalities, organisations and parishes, and its aims, structure and funding are subject to legislation.

Finland is also known as a highly skilled and technological country. This is reflected in its youth work. Digital media opportunities have already been long exploited in youth work. In the 1990s, one of the initial forms of action was youth information and counselling websites. In the early stages, their contents were limited, communication was unidirectional and their usability rather poor. In the next decade, the first online communities gained popularity among young people. As a result, youth workers understood that they could and should work in the online environments where young people were spending their time. In many ways, Finnish youth work has been a pioneer of online youth work. This is illustrated by examples such as the online youth work forum Nusuvefo, founded in 2007, with the purpose of sharing the best online working practices and developing this type of youth work. Forum members are committed to a set of ethical principles drawn up for online work.

Although Finland has, in many ways, been a pioneer in information and communications technology, it has nonetheless fallen behind other countries in recent years according to several indicators of digital media and technology use. This trend is also evident in Finnish youth work: working methods and online services have

remained largely the same for almost a decade. The development of mobile technology and increasingly diverse online services have presented new challenges to youth work. Meanwhile, the physical and digital worlds are merging at an increasing rate.

The results of this study suggest that Finnish youth work has clearly progressed in the last two years. The use of digital media in youth work is a phenomenon that appears to be permeating the entire youth work sector to an increasing extent. This is evidenced by the increasing number of devices at the disposal of youth workers, the increasing use of various online services for youth work, and the emergence of a wider variety of activities that benefit from the Internet. There are many reasons for this change: not only have mobile devices become more common and attitudes improved, but the work is also better organised. Increasing numbers of youth workers use digital media and technology in their work.

The use of digital media is active but one-sided

Digital media is used a great deal in youth work. More than 94% of municipal youth workers say that they use the Internet in their work with young people. Practically all employees have access to a work computer. Mobile devices are also common among youth workers, as nearly three quarters have access to a smartphone provided by their employer. The number of smartphones has seen a considerable increase: only two years ago, less than one in five youth workers were using a smartphone provided by their employer.

Among Finnish youth workers, the digital media are mainly understood to consist of social media. More than 90% of all youth workers use Facebook in their work. Well over half of them also use YouTube, Instagram and WhatsApp for work-related purposes. These services are mainly used for communication and spreading information. In particular, real-time interaction has become easier thanks to advanced online tools. This was also emphasised in the focus group interviews: although they seemed to name plenty of negative aspects and challenges presented by digital media use, they also recognised that reaching young people and providing them with information has become substantially easier. The interviewed youth workers also emphasised the fact that the Internet and social media have lowered young people's threshold for contacting them, as they can now communicate anonymously and free of charge.

Although digital media is frequently used in youth work, such use is largely focused around a few social media services. Even the interviewees themselves had difficulties grasping what digital media actually means. On the one hand, the results may be affected by the fact that the interviews were conducted by Verke, whose role as the National Development Centre for Online Youth Work causes many youth workers to perceive it from the viewpoint of online youth work and the social media. On the other hand, the results may also indicate that the digital media have always been closely connected to web-based youth work in Finland.

Digital media content and digital media-based activities have so far been used to a rather narrow extent in youth work. Many forms of information retrieval and the sharing

of information via the digital media are common, but blogging or producing media content alongside young people are rarer activities. Furthermore, only one in five workers report using the Internet at least weekly for advocacy, or for supporting young people's self-arranged activities. The combination of face-to-face and digital activities remains rare. The youth workers expressed the need to improve their competences in using the digital media and new technologies in the context of youth work. On the other hand, HypeCon in Hyvinkää and the gaming group in Helsinki are good examples of how social media and digital games can be used in a wide range of small-group activities and for supporting self-arranged activities among young people, where the activities in question are flexibly conducted in a simultaneously physical and digital environment.

Competence is needed, and motivation is the main driver of digital media use

The key obstacles to digital media use include insufficient tools, the feeling of having insufficient competences, and insufficient working hours. It is worth noting that, although statistics suggest that practically every youth worker has access to a computer and 70% use a smartphone, equipment is still the most common factor hindering their work. The open answers and focus group interviews included in this survey offer explanations for this finding. Both data sets indicate that decisions on equipment acquisitions and network installations are often made without consulting the youth workers and young people in question. This could result in a situation in which firewalls impede online youth work or connections to the world outside the youth centre, or that the devices do not support the services actively used by young people.

The second most-common obstacle to using digital media is the feeling that one's personal competences are insufficient. In their self-assessment, the youth workers awarded the weakest scores to their IT and digital gaming competences. Youth workers feel that, in their own case, most development is required in the production of media content and the use of social media tools in youth work. Their own perception of their competence and training needs reveal the demand on a deeper understanding of digital technology and digital culture as the youth work opportunities they truly are.

According to youth workers, personal motivation and an interest in young people's lives and phenomena provide the best means of supporting the use of digital media and competence development. For example, the participants in one focus group interview highlighted the fact that, although youth workers need to be where young people are, they do not need to understand or know everything young people do online. They do not need to be confident users of all devices and applications, nor competent in every aspect of the digital media. The key issue is to acknowledge the opportunities created by the digital media and to have a sense of "*what's going on.*" An interest in what young people are doing can also go a long way.

Identifying and supporting young people's skills is also an important part of using the digital media in youth work. Youth workers need to strengthen and develop their competences by trying out and using digital media together with young people, as well as through training. This would also support youth work activities and inclusive youth work and provide young people with experiences of success and empowerment. As

one interviewee said when summing up the issue: *“It’s not that big a deal. If you don’t understand, just ask a young person.”*

Call for more target-orientedness and quality assessments

The results suggest that youth workers rarely have clearly defined goals for their use of digital media. Many respondents felt the lack of goals to be a key factor impeding the use of digital media in youth work. They also have few means of evaluating defined goals and are often unaware of what such means might be.

However, a lack of targets and evaluation models does not mean that the actions of youth workers lack target orientation. Statistical data and focus group interviews both suggest that, while such goals are not expressly stated, they are fairly well integrated into the practices of youth work. This argument is also supported by the observation that the most common evaluation methods include discussions within the work community and feedback and satisfaction surveys targeted at young people.

However, more concrete targets should be set to ensure operational development and quality improvements. Qualitative and quantitative indicators are also needed. Development will also require strategic planning in which the use of digital media is approached from a comprehensive viewpoint, from the perspective of the entire organisation. Planning at the strategic level is primarily a management tool that enables the better coordination and long-term development of operations: strategic planning is a means of anticipating and preparing for the challenges and opportunities of digitalisation. Strategic planning also ensures that youth work can demonstrate its impacts and effectiveness to those not working in the field. In the future, it is important that youth work is even better able to demonstrate its position and importance in society.

National recommendations for promoting the use of digital media in youth work:

1. *Youth work must invest in the development of an infrastructure to support the use of online tools and digital media.*

Youth workers and young people should be heard before the purchase of equipment for youth work activities. To ensure the development of youth work, youth workers should be provided with conditions, which enable them to use various software and applications on their work devices and to try out new types of digital technology. The equipment and infrastructure provided must support the realisation of educational and youth work goals.

2. *When digital media is used, more attention should be paid not only to the medium itself and a communicative approach, but also to contents and activities related to digital media.*

Digital media must be understood as a key growth and operating environment for young people, in which youth work can support agency and independent initiatives among young people. Digital media should also be understood as part of the key content of youth work. This will require that youth workers recognise their role as media educators and have the competences required to encourage young people to produce media content.

3. *Developing the use of digital media requires strategic planning.*

An essential part of strategic-level planning involves identifying the various factors that affect youth work activities and developing them in a comprehensive manner. The use of digital media must be target-oriented and youth workers must have sufficient resources and competences for carrying out their work. To improve the quality of youth work, it must be evaluated using various indicators and key figures.

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