Digital services and youth participation in processes of social change: World Café workshops in Finland

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Abstract:

This paper focuses on the role of digital services in empowering youths to participate in social change. The aim is to discover what kind of potential digital services have in creating opportunities for youths of various backgrounds to be active in various processes of change at both the grassroots and policy levels. We also address questions concerning differences between distinct groups in the relationship between ICT proficiency and social participation. The key results of this paper suggest that youths can be engaged to participate by using digital services and becoming active possessors of their human rights. Nevertheless, the role played by power relations and differences in youths' ICT skills must be acknowledged, as they affect opportunities to participate in processes of social change.

Keywords: youth participation, processes of social change, digital services, human rights obligations, legislative processes, user experiences, digital accessibility

Introduction

The growing social and political passivity of young people may lead to lifelong marginalization and radicalization. Youths should be empowered to be active in their own lives and their surroundings, and to play a part in the democratic development of society, both in grassroots and autonomous processes of social change and in more official processes. Consequently, this would also lead to

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youths being active possessors of their human rights. There should be no barriers preventing youths from participating in the various processes of societal change. Various processes of change are essential for the development of society to make it more inclusive, tolerant, and sustainable, issues that are central to the United Nations' Agenda 2030 objectives.[4] Youth participation is a precondition for the sustainable democratic development of all societies, given that they cannot be developed in a sustainable and democratic manner if one group – in this context youths from various backgrounds and with various different agendas – are not part of the development processes. Especially in view of the desired change towards more sustainable well-being and human rights for people(s) across the globe, the active citizenship, participation, and social engagement of young people is an essential requirement to actualize change.

This multidisciplinary paper focuses on how digital services are used by youths. It examines whether digital service usage engages youths to be active in various processes of social change. In this paper, 'processes of social change' refers to grassroots actions – such as organizing and participating in charities, urban city planning projects, protests, city fairs, and local art festivals that aim to invigorate local areas and change municipal policies – and nationwide policy-making processes – such as consultation processes regarding legislation. In a more detailed manner, the focus of this multidisciplinary paper is on how fast-developing digital services, such as social media platforms, survey tools, online collaboration services, and online platforms designed for legal consultation processes regarding state- and municipal-level policies and actions may be used to engage youths in the processes of social change. In this study, we focus on two digital services, lausuntopalvelu.fi and nuortenideat.fi.[5] An additional focus is on how – if at all – digital services can function to empower and motivate youths from various backgrounds to participate and thus become active possessors of their human rights. Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers." [6] Furthermore, according to the case of Magyar Helsinki Bizottság v. Hungary,[7] there is a broad consensus in Europe (and beyond) regarding the need to recognize the individual right of access to State-held information in order to assist the public in forming opinions on matters of general interest. In addition, the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees the right of children to participate.[8]

This paper has been written by researchers working on the All-Youth project.[9] We aim to discover what kind of potential digital services have in creating opportunities for youths of various

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[4] https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/
[5] Lausuntopalvelu.fi is a web-based consultation platform that enables citizens to give their statements in relation to public administrative matters, such as draft legal bills. The platform enables citizens to give their statements publicly and transparently. The purpose of the platform is to facilitate civic participation, strengthen the access to information, and to increase the transparency and quality of the consultation processes. The target groups for the platform include citizens, NGOs, and authorities. The use of the platform is free of charge. The platform is maintained by the Ministry of Justice.
Nuortenideat.fi is a participation platform for all youth in Finland. The national platform is part of internet-based democracy services. The platform has been developed in cooperation with youths and the youth sector (municipalities, NGOs, and schools). The platform is available for youths and the youth sector. Nuortenideat.fi provides opportunities to participate, give opinions, and influence the development of organizations. The platform is maintained by the Ministry of Justice.
[6] https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf
[7] http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-167828
[8] https://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Right-to-Participation.pdf
[9] http://www.allyouthstn.fi/en/all-youth-2/

backgrounds to be active participants in various processes of change. We also address questions concerning the differences between distinct groups in terms of the relationship between ICT proficiency and social participation. Our research questions are:

1. What does theory tell us regarding youths' usage of digital services and equal participation?
2. How do youths perceive the usage of digital services in general and for the purpose of social change?
3. Is there a relationship between social participation and subjectively perceived ICT skills?
4. Is there a difference between workshop groups in the relationship between subjectively perceived ICT skills and social participation?
5. Is there a difference between genders in the relationship between subjectively perceived ICT skills and social participation?

This paper has a two-part structure. First, the theoretical section introduces a multidisciplinary framework that combines communication and power relations theories with digital participation theories. It examines whether – and if so, how – digital services can be used to empower youths from various backgrounds to participate in various processes of social change to become active agenda-setters. In addition, it considers the benefits and disadvantages such usage may bring. Second, the paper introduces two case studies conducted in Finland during the winter-spring of 2018 utilizing the World Café workshop method. These case studies differ in design and purpose: the first case study focused on gaining user experiences that could be included in legislative consultation processes, while second studied how youths used various digital services in Finland. In the discussion section, the theoretical framework is discussed together with the results from the World Café workshops, and conclusions and a roadmap for future research are presented.

Theoretical Framework

Our theoretical framework combines communication and power relations theories with digital participation theories. This selection was made because different communication theories help to explain how processes of social change can be started or re-framed by youths. Additionally, power relations theories explain why there are unequal opportunities to participate in processes of social change, even with digital services. The selection of these theories were made based on the earlier research of one of this paper's authors as well as on a semi-structured literature search using the following keywords: agenda-setting, framing, power relations, and World Cafe. The digital participation theories were chosen through a semi-structural literature search. They are derived from previous publications concerning the relationships between digital platforms and services, social participation, ICT and media skills, access, and relevant education.

Together, this multidisciplinary theoretical framework illustrates how youths can become active in various processes of social change by using digital services; it also highlights the advantages and disadvantages that the usage of such services bring. Next, we present our multidisciplinary theoretical framework.

Youth-Centred Agenda-Setting

According to the United Nations' Agenda 2030 objectives, youths should play an active role as agenda-setters and influencers in the development of their own surroundings at the grassroots levels as well as more widely in policy-making. One of the many ways to engage and empower youths may be to use digital services to enable them to become agenda setters and frame agendas and thus become active in the gatekeepers' networks. In addition to preventing some actors from participating, gatekeepers have the power to decide the dominant agendas and frames and include – or exclude – agendas and frames in the debate (Meriläinen, 2014). We know already that youths are using different digital services in Finland (Granholm, 2016). Youths may be able to become active agenda-setters and framers by being empowered, and digital services may help in this respect. Classical agenda-setting and framing theory highlights the media's influence on public opinion, policy formation, and voting behaviour while also acknowledging that the media, interest groups, NGOs, and various public groups can at times formulate agendas together via negotiations (Lippman, 1922; Cohen, 1963; McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Stone and McCombs, 1981; Entman, 1993; McCombs, 1997; Meriläinen, 2014). A recent study found a correlation between newspaper and television news agendas, meaning there is intermedia agenda-setting (Cushion et al., 2018). Additionally, theory often emphasizes the role of the gatekeeper(s) in shaping public and policy agendas, even the agendas of NGOs and social groups (Lippman, 1922; Lewin, 1947; Easton, 1965; Pettigrew, 1972; Bob, 2009; Carpenter, 2011; Meriläinen, 2014). Walgrave and Van Aelst (2016) have discussed the power of the political elite to influence or update policies. Traditional actors no longer have the exclusive gatekeeper role as agenda-setters, nor do they alone control the policy-making processes (Meriläinen, 2014). In line with this, our paper takes a different approach to the classical agenda-setting and -framing theory. Like Meriläinen (2014), we postulate that various actors – in our case, various young people – can try to be agenda-setters and indeed can act as agenda-setters in processes of social change by using digital services alongside more traditional grassroots actions. However, it must be acknowledged that some youth are more able and empowered to be active agenda-setters and framers, which speaks to the power relations between various actors (Meriläinen, 2014); there are empowered youths and those who are unempowered or indifferent.

Power Relations and Digital Services

There are various concepts of power in many research fields. When referring to processes of social change, we adopt the notion of power adopted by Meriläinen, who states "power is viewed as a strategic means" (2014:17). This relates to both qualitative and quantitative power in terms of the actors' ability to use various forms of agenda-setting and framing processes in the processes of social change for grassroots actions or policy making, such as in legislative processes. This includes negotiations, positioning, empowerment, and information power (e.g. being able to access information via digital devices or being granted the opportunity to utilize these devices and the information gained). In every situation where multiple actors participate with their agendas and frames, some actors become gatekeepers and other actors become gated, thus power relations are

formed (Meriläinen, 2014). Power relations refer to the different positions, abilities, and levels of empowerment between various actors. Some actors are gatekeepers who set and frame agendas, and thus processes of social change are formulated according to their agendas and frames. When various actors such as youths participate – or at least attempt to participate – in the processes of social change, power relations are formed between actors, and gatekeepers often set the agenda. As Pallas and Urpelainen argue, "in the absence of consensus, power becomes a key issue" (2013:405), and the power of the gatekeepers in agenda-setting and framing solidifies (e.g. Lewin, 1947; Barzilai-Nahon, 2008; Bob, 2009; Carpenter, 2011). Especially for youths, digital services may provide opportunities to participate in multiple processes of social change and consequently to influence grassroots and policy agendas, thus shaping existing power relations. Various digital services can also create opportunities for actors to connect with others and to discuss newer and perhaps alternative agendas and frames that aim to influence decision-making in grassroots movements and policy-making. However, these digital services in themselves do not ensure political change (DeLuca et al., 2012; Meriläinen, 2014).

In other disciplines, the power of various digital services, such as social media as agenda-setters, has been studied, as "social media has introduced new social practices, especially new practices that are consumer-centric rather than brand-centric" (Leitch and Merlot, 2018:91). Could the same phenomenon happen in youth engagement with digital services? Could youths act as agenda-setters and framers, and could those without access to processes of social change be empowered with the help of digital services, thus breaking down power relations among youths? As Runciman (2017:4) states, "there has been almost no discussion of how the digital revolution and the spread of information technology may be reshaping the ways in which power and legitimacy are to be understood". In this paper, we focus on the possibilities of digital services while not forgetting the power relations aspect that is present wherever multiple actors try to participate. However, it is evident that digital services may open up opportunities for various youths to participate in framing and re-framing their environments and the policies that affect them. The World Café workshops may be useful in empowering youths and reshaping the existing power relations. In relation to power relations and framing in the World Café context, Jorgenson and Steier (2013:400) argue "becoming more aware of processes of framing that are often taken for granted can afford practitioners a better understanding of dialogic approaches and how they open possibilities for ourselves and for others, should they accept, to gain alternative understandings by seeing familiar phenomena in new ways". This highlights the need to accept alternative agendas and frames, e.g. from youths in World Café events.

Youths and the Digital World

The relationship between digital services and youth engagement opportunities can be approached in various ways. Important domains concerning digital participation and the services enabling it include – but are not limited to – the following: information technology and media skills, and their division (Khan et al., 2014); personal and political identity development (Collin, 2008); the user's socioeconomic background (Schlozman et al., 2010; Khan et al., 2014); and the dichotomy between

real and online worlds wherein engagement through digital services could enable participation in real-world activities and events (Kahne et al., 2013). In addition, the conventions of information representation and digitality enabling multimodality can be addressed (e.g. Nacu et al., 2015). According to Freelon et al. (2013), the way that civic web-affiliated online services for youths communicate citizenship is a key factor contributing to the amount of usage and user participation, whereas the organization administering the service makes less of a difference. Obstacles to online participation and engagement include the fragmented and dispersed nature of information that enables participation (Grossklags et al., 2011) and insufficient ICT and information retrieval skills (Khan et al., 2014; Samsudin et al., 2017). Additionally, according to Granholm (2016), young people in vulnerable positions use digital services in various ways, such as to view entertainment, find information, seek acceptance, and join or be part of a community. However, vulnerable and marginalized youths may not have the skills to use some digital services or have access to technology. Therefore, there must be opportunities to use the services, and services that can be used by marginalized and disadvantaged youths are as important as educating youths on how to use the services; nevertheless, one should keep in mind that youths are not homogenous in their usage and some choose not to use digital services at all (Granholm, 2016). Thus, it is a central issue whether services being used in processes of change for the youths' own interests and from their own starting points. Another key issue is whether youths are able to use the digital services according to their own visions and to their own liking, which may not have been envisioned by the elites.

Digital Services, Enabling User Proficiency, and Enhancing Social Participation

Digital services may play a growing role in engaging youths in social participation. The study by Nacu et al. (2015) discusses the usage of online services allowing multi-directional and real-time social interactions in educational settings among underrepresented youth populations. The study states that both the students and teachers considered the created learning network a social setting, and the students were more comfortable posting work and viewing others' work compared to more formal surroundings. The teachers could provide more encouragement and, for instance, produce online questionnaires. The studied design suggests that youths prefer multimodal information representation, including visual and graphical content to support learning outcomes.

Khan et al. (2014) argue that one key factor in the unequal access to technology and its benefits is a skills gap. They further argue that information-seeking skills combined with the informal use of social media for academic collaboration play a crucial role in determining who benefits from technology the most. According to Khan et al.'s study, the nature of a user's Facebook network contributes to the individual's probability of collaborating online in academic settings. This dimension could be considered commensurate with factors such as access to the Internet, ICT skills, socio-economic background, and other demographic variables associated with online behaviour. The study highlights the enhancement of information-seeking skills.

Schlozman et al. (2010) have also discussed socioeconomic background in relation to online service usage. Their results show a positive correlation between socioeconomic status and online political engagement. The findings also suggest that younger individuals are more represented online than

they are offline, and that social media might have an effect on the forms of political participation undertaken, with online participation being more personal and expressive compared to more traditional forms of participation.

Of course, not everyone uses digital devices or platforms in the same way. Samsudin and Hasan (2017) approach digital participation and engagement through digital services with the aim of improving the digital literacy of youths and facilitating participatory literacy programmes. According to their study conducted in Malaysia, the majority of young people online use the Internet for basic activities, including communications and downloading and uploading materials. More advanced activities such as shopping online, searching for educational materials, and participating in civic and political discussions were less common. According to the study, the tendency to engage in online activities is largely affected by attitudes towards the Internet.

Wagner et al. (1999) define social representation as a holistic approach to the psychosocial factors that address historical, cultural, and macro social contexts in addition to immediate individual affiliations. Pozzebon et al. (2016) discuss the processes underlying the decrease in civic participation through social representation framework theory. They argue that for governments to improve citizens' e-participation, the social representational processes characterizing their web-based initiatives should be given special consideration. The results imply, for instance, that applying digital participatory budgeting (DPB) to enable participation for people who had not previously participated would encourage civic involvement, promote discussion on public works, and permit citizens to engage in decision-making.

Kahne et al. (2013) discuss the possibility of online activity serving as a gateway to participation in civic and political life. The threshold to engage in volunteering, community problem-solving, protest activities, and other forms of political involvement could be lowered by participating in online activities of a similar nature. According to their study, politics-driven participation is associated with an increase in online political action and expression, while online participation that is driven by interests is related to political action, expression, and campaign participation. Participation that is interest-driven is seen as a key predictor for enhanced civic engagement, which also coincides with the various theoretical aspects of selective agenda setting and framing, limited carrying capacities, and value-based agenda-setting and -framing (Brewer, 2001; Schemer et al., 2012; Meriläinen, 2014).

Collin (2008) has examined political identity development in relation to the Internet and the various digital services made possible by it. The Internet can be seen as a possible platform enabling the realization of political identity for youths, and its significance in identity development is undeniable. The Internet is an essential tool for identifying issues, learning, and integrating participation, as it makes information more accessible and participation in activities easier. Collin's study suggests that online environments are experienced as legitimate surroundings for participation, and that old, highly managed adult-centric forms of government are not feasible. There is a demand for participation opportunities that are autonomous in nature. Collin's study also found that online strategies concerning youths are experienced as being controlled by the agendas of others and the interaction tends to be unilateral in direction – from adults to adolescents.

It has been theorized that the amount of online participation and engagement in digital services is related to the amount of experienced conflicts. Middaug et al. (2017) studied participatory media and youth experiences with political discourse, and the results indicate that youths who are more involved in online political discussions or who get news through online participatory media are more likely to encounter conflicts. The type of online community is a factor in the likelihood of experiencing conflicts. Engagement in interest-driven communities online is more associated with conflicts when compared to participation in friendship-driven communities.

Bennett et al. (2009) argue that the concept of good citizenship might require re-evaluation, as, for instance, civic learning happens increasingly outside formal settings. Civic education in schools might therefore be outdated and not necessarily respond to the needs and tendencies of the younger generations. Furthermore, the insufficient development of online civic environments could be an obstacle to participation. Bennett et al.'s results suggest that in addition to self-actualizing civic participation, more interactive and networked activities and participatory media should be implemented in civic education settings.

Digital Participation and Youth-Based Processes of Social Change

The presented theoretical framework illustrates that digital services can engage and enable youths to participate in various processes of change. However, to enable youths to participate – including those with various disabilities and limited access to devices – it is vital to create inclusive digital services that are accessible and user-friendly for everyone. Acknowledging the power relations and weaknesses in the design and (mis)use of digital services is the first step in creating more inclusive participation that aims to engage and enable youth involvement in social change. According to Vromen (2008), in the context of online versus traditional engagement, the barriers for participation should be focused on. Vromen considers the question of whether there should be one site considered inclusive for all or different platforms for distinct communities. Vromen speculates that the nature of political discourse in online settings is peer-produced: the Internet is used to interact with political information produced by young people themselves, as young people consider themselves excluded from the traditional venues of politics. The Internet has the potential to enable the facilitation of a space or a multitude of spaces for young people's political discussion and interaction.

Case Studies: World Café Workshop Method

As this paper has been written by researchers who work in a research project that utilizes the World Café method, the case studies followed the same method and the research data was gathered during the World Cafés. This method was originally developed by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs in 2005.[10] Jorgenson and Steier (2013:393) state that "the World Café has been categorized as one of a

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[10] Book: The World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter

new generation of participatory methods that attempt to achieve collective change by bringing all members or stakeholders of the system together in one place, using a highly structured process of movement to create flexible and coevolving networks of conversations". According to Lindell (2018), the World Café method is a high quality, efficient, and flexible means to bring together various groups of people to discuss issues. There are seven design principles for World Cafés:

1. Set the Context
2. Create Hospitable Space
3. Explore Questions That Matter
4. Encourage Everyone's Contribution
5. Connect Diverse Perspectives
6. Listen Together for Patterns and Insights
7. Share Collective Discoveries

<div align="center">World Café (2018)</div>

In the following sections, we introduce the World Café workshop case studies and their results. The first case study included one World Café workshop, while the second case study included four World Café workshops.

Case Study 1: Accessibility World Café Workshop

Digital services may be a tool to empower youths to become active in policy-making processes. We chose to test the World Café workshop method to see: i) if it is useful for gaining youths' experiences regarding accessibility to various digital services that can be used in policy making, such as in legislative processes, and ii) if knowledge can be gained directly from youths via digital services without intermediary actors. Often youths have important and valuable experience-based or otherwise learned/gained knowledge on a variety of topics, but either that knowledge is not used, recognized, or valued by official policy makers, or there are simply no platforms available for youths to influence and participate in policy-making. An additional problem may be that the platforms for participation are unknown or difficult to use for variety of reasons. It might also be the case that youths are simply not interested or encouraged to use them. Thus, the purpose was to gain insights into the use of digital services from the perspective of youths, especially those with different disabilities and backgrounds.

The Accessibility World Café Workshop

On 19 February 2018, the All-Youth research team from the University of Tampere worked together with the Tampere University of Technology to organize the Accessibility World Café workshop at the facilities of the University of Tampere. The purpose of the workshop was to gain qualitative user experiences from the participants regarding the accessibility and usability of lausuntopalvelu.fi and nuortenideat.fi – along with any other digital service – so that a written statement based on the

comments from the participating youths could be made to the Finnish government regarding a proposed law. The additional purposes of the workshop were i) to gain experiences of how – if at all – youths use digital services to take part in processes of social change, and ii) to discover how the needs of youths from various backgrounds can be met in the development and (re)design of various digital services. As part of the All-Youth project (subproject 4),[11] it was vital to gain qualitative user experiences from youths for a written statement on a proposed law. Indeed, after the Accessibility World Café workshop, based on the user experiences of the youths, an official statement was written[12] to the Ministry of Finance by a researcher and a professor from the University of Tampere regarding digital services and their usability. It was vital that the voices of the youths were included in the statement.

In the Accessibility World Café workshop, four researchers were present, two from the University of Tampere and two from the Tampere University of Technology, as was a professor from the University of Tampere. A mixed group of nine invited youths participated in the Accessibility World Café. Some of the participants were young people with disabilities, learning difficulties, or immigrant backgrounds. The participants were found via local NGOs. Additionally, a few participants from the University of Tampere who worked with various issues related to learning disabilities were invited to gain experiences from youths regarding the accessibility of digital services.

The Accessibility World Café workshop started by introducing the researchers from the University of Tampere and Tampere University of Technology as well as outlining the purpose of the workshop. The participants were told that every idea and experience relating to digital services in any way is valued and everyone is free to express any opinion relating to any other issue and/or subject. After this, the participants were taken to a computer lab with the researchers, and each participant had access to a computer. The members of the research team sat and talked with each participant at the computer. The members of the research team took notes on what was said regarding the theme of the Accessibility World Café. After the computer lab testing, the participants were divided into small groups and invited to discuss their experiences in round table discussions. Afterwards, these experiences and opinions relating to the usage and participation in the processes of social change were shared with the entire group. These discussions were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants, and each researcher from the All-Youth project took notes to be used as research data and for the purposes of writing the official statement to the Ministry.

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[11] Subproject 4: Resolving Legal Obstacles (Professor Jukka Viljanen and working group, University of Tampere). The working group analyses the legal obstacles that prevent youths from participating in the legislative drafting process and is developing an impact assessment of legislation that concerns young people. <http://www.allyouthstn.fi/en/what-are-we-researching/>
[12] The Finnish-language PDF format statement can be accessed:
https://www.lausuntopalvelu.fi/FI/ProposalReport/DownloadResponseAttachmentFile?ProposalId=14f26c36-d945-4e2f-979b-25d3ac6c7898&FileId=9d2d7847-1d6c-4c7c-abec-a89600ac5d98

The Results of the Accessibility World Café Workshop

This section presents the results of the Accessibility World Café workshop. First, the participants tested two specific digital services[13] plus any other digital service(s) they wanted to test. Altogether, the participants tested at least three digital services and shared their experiences regarding the accessibility, usability, and equality of the digital services as well as any other experiences and opinions, as this is the style of the World Café workshop. Overall, the participants were not familiar with the lausuntopalvelu.fi and nuortenideat.fi digital services, and the purpose of the services was unclear. The results show that the premise of the services was good in terms of enabling youths to participate in processes of social change (such as consultation processes in law drafting and encouraging grassroots youth activism, e.g. at the municipal and/or state-wide policy levels), but the execution was poor and there were multiple problems with the accessibility, design, and aims of the services.

Key Findings: lausuntopalvelu.fi

Based on the overall results, youths do not know their rights regarding participation in the consultation processes for law drafting. The results indicate that youths are not aware of the digital services they can use to be actors in the wider democratic development process, an issue that should be examined further in a large study. The results indicate that the service was deemed rigid and the legal language was difficult to understand, potentially hindering young people's interest in writing a statement or becoming a part of the consultation process. The participants expressed an interest in being active participants in consultation processes, but many said that it would be too difficult because they did not fully understand the language of legal texts and they were unfamiliar with the terminology. They were therefore afraid to get involved. Currently, the legal concepts and language used are complicated; one participant questioned the Finnish language skills of the author of the legislative drafts. All of the above themes can be distilled into a quote from one of the participants: "I can imagine that it causes great pain to write down opinions [on this service relating to the legislation drafts]".

Consequently, the participants felt that the purpose of the statements given via lausuntopalvelu.fi should be made clearer. Youths should be educated about the consultation processes in law drafting to enable those who are interested to become more active in writing statements and thus participate in the consultation. The participants felt that currently, youths would not use the service. The service could be made more user-friendly by using understandable language in the legislative texts and explaining the terms used, e.g. in pop-up boxes. Additionally, many participants felt that youths should be educated about their existing opportunities to influence legislative processes at the municipal and grassroots levels. The participants also felt that the pages needed a significant re-design in terms of style, e.g. colours, line spacing, and overall layout. One participant said the service looks old, and this dated look does not encourage participation.

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[13] lausuntopalvelu.fi and nuortenideat.fi

Key Findings: nuortenideat.fi

Based on the overall results, the participants regarded the service as important, since youths can directly submit their grassroots development ideas to organizations, NGOs, or policy makers, and consequently be part of Internet-based democracy and the processes of grassroots-level social change. However, the participants did not understand what would be done with the ideas submitted. Who would read them? Thus, the relevance of expressing ideas on the service was not understood. Some participants wondered if the submitted ideas would just end up on the table of a civil servant, resulting in no real action or change occurring. In addition, some participants wondered whether it would be the youths themselves or the NGOs who would benefit from getting their ideas. One participant was happy that a local development idea was submitted via the service. Additionally, the participants commented on the login features of the digital services, stating that if the digital services require a login, it should be made simple. Furthermore, the instructions on the digital services should be multimodal, including also video and audio in various languages.

Some participants said that it is immediately evident what the service is for and they liked the layout and style of the service. Conversely, some participants commented that the purpose of the service is unclear and this affects their willingness to submit ideas. Some wanted the pages to be re-designed, as is evident from one participant's comment: "[these pages] bring to mind university websites, for example, and how horrible they are". Others said that it is good that the service's clear design allows ideas to be submitted easily. The service uses hashtags for the most popular topics, which was seen as a good idea, since youths use Instagram and are familiar with hashtags. In addition, the option to give thumbs up or down was regarded as a nice function.

Concluding Remarks

The Accessibility World Café workshop provided new and alternative viewpoints relating to digital services. The results indicate that human rights obligations are not being met because not everyone has an equal opportunity to access and use the sites. From the equality and wider human rights perspective, accessibility and usability must be taken into account when designing digital services. Digital services in and of themselves do not ensure participation. Many of the participants stated that as the services are developed, the provider(s) should have an understanding of the various potential users and their special usage needs. If potential users do have special needs, the designers and content providers should be educated about them and the services should be designed to accommodate those needs. If the accessibility and usability do not match the needs of various young people, including those with disabilities and special needs, youths will not access and use the digital services, even if the premise is that the users should be able to participate directly in grassroots and policy change processes.

One participant stated that content providers either lack awareness or are unwilling to change content or make the various digital services more available to various youths with disabilities. According to the participant, this could be explained by one of two reasons: 1) content providers have never met people with disabilities or 2) they do not care about meeting the needs of youths with disabilities.

Additionally, the service providers must be willing to pay for re-designs to improve accessibility and usability for various groups, including those with disabilities. More resources should be put into designing and re-designing digital services to meet human rights obligations and to make the service more accessible to various youth demographics.

We acknowledge that digital services are just one way of engaging youths in the processes of social change. However, the digital services do not meet the needs of youths, and they are perhaps only used by a small number of more empowered youths. Youths are not a homogenous group that speaks with one voice, and they do not all have the same opportunities to participate. Thus, there is the danger of designing "one size fits all" digital services that cannot reach all youths. This can further maintain or create power relations among youths.

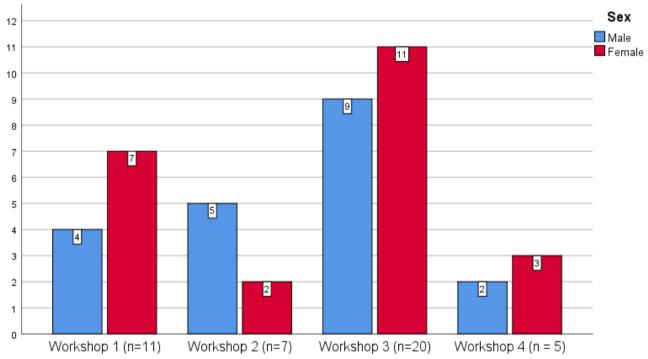## Case Study 2: Digital Participation World Café Workshops

In the second case study, the World Café workshop method was utilized to test how suitable it is for collecting data on youths' views regarding digital participation in a school environment. The aim was to gain insight into how – if at all – youths from different backgrounds utilize digital services to participate and make an impact. Group discussions and presentations of examples of digital services supporting participation were utilized to spark conversation. In addition to the group discussions, a web survey was conducted among the participants to improve the researchers' understanding of the participants' information and communications technology (ICT) skills and tendency to participate in social activities.

Although the differences in relationships between socio-economic background, educational level, and benefiting from ICT literacy have been addressed for instance by Khan et al. (2014), there seem to be gaps in the discussion regarding gender. In addition to the general preliminary study on the relationship between ICT skills and social participation, smaller sub-groups and marginalities should be taken into consideration to enable action regarding possible structural obstacles. In this study, these themes are approached in both a qualitative and quantitative manner.

The Digital Participation World Café Workshops

In May 2018, four World Café workshops were organized through the collaboration of the All-Youth research teams and local educational establishments. Two researchers from Tampere University of Technology and five from the University of Tampere participated in the workshops. The goal was to explore: 1) what kinds of digital services youths have utilized that support grassroots- or national-level participation, and 2) how the youths perceived nuortenideat.fi, a national web service where young people can openly suggest ideas, participate, and influence matters related to their lives. These questions were explored by collecting qualitative data through group discussions. In addition, quantitative data were collected using a survey on information and communications technology (ICT) skills and the tendency to participate in social activities.

The participants included Finnish students from three different educational establishments and four representatives from Tampere City's youth council. In total, 43 people (23 female) aged 16–22 (Mean = 16.7) participated in the workshops. The same workshop procedure was executed in four distinct settings. Figure 1 presents the number of the participants in each workshop. Workshop 1 was set in a comprehensive school elongation (adjunct term) setting. Comprehensive elongation in Finland means that the primary schools can offer an extra year for students without a post-primary school position to improve their grades or to provide them more time to determine their future plans. Workshop 2 was set in an upper secondary vocational school setting, Workshop 3 in an upper secondary school, and Workshop 4 in a group consisting of youth council members (four out of five participants).

Figure 1. Participants of the digital participation World Café workshops. Workshop 1 was set in a comprehensive school elongation (adjunct term), Workshop 2 was set in an upper secondary vocational school, and Workshop 3 was set in an upper secondary school. Workshop 4 included a group of youth council members (4/5 members of the group).

The participants answered a background survey examining their subjectively rated information and communications technology (ICT) skills and tendency to participate in social activities. The questionnaire consisted of 15 statements (agreement measured on a one-to-five Likert scale) in addition to questions on age and gender. Statements 1–8 concerned ICT skills and IT equipment usage tendencies and preferences. Statements 9–15 concerned social participation and civic engagement. The survey data were first handled in Excel and then analysed in SPSS. Sum variables were formed from the results. The sum variables were named "ICT skills" and "social participation". Both sum variables were formed using six sub-variable scores. "ICT skills" had a Cronbach's Alpha of .839 and "social participation" had a Cronbach's Alpha of .839. Thus, both can be considered to be strong in their internal consistency. The variables used to form the sum variables also had high

cross-correlation frequencies and values, which also supports the presumption that the variables reflect the same or similar phenomena.

At the beginning of each World Café workshop, the participating students were served tea and coffee to create a more relaxed and less school-like atmosphere. The students talked in small groups of three to five people, with one researcher acting as a facilitator at each table. In total, there were 11 table groups in the four workshops. The workshops began with a short introduction by the researchers and outline of the study's goal. After this, the participants answered the background survey on paper. Next, the topics for discussion were presented by one researcher acting as the main facilitator of the workshop. The topics included themes related to the following: 1) influencing one's living environment, especially regarding issues in public spaces; 2) digital services the participants had used to make an impact; and 3) the type of impact the participants had aimed for by using digital services. After the initial discussions, the main facilitator presented the nuortenideat.fi service, and more discussions followed regarding how the participants perceived the service. At this point, the participants could also explore the nuortenideat.fi website with their mobile phones. The group discussions were audio-recorded with the exception of those of two groups, who withheld permission. In these instances, one of the researchers made written notes.

In the data analysis phase, all audio recordings were transcribed and then qualitatively analysed by two researchers using NVivo software, resulting in a grouping of similar themes under the main discussion topics. Regarding the quantitative data from the background survey, the formed sum variables were tested for normality using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests. Both variables had a p-value of more than .050 in the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, indicating they were normally distributed. "ICT skills" had a p-value of .135 in the Shapiro–Wilk test, but "social participation" had a p-value of .049, implying non-normal distribution. Nevertheless, we treated both variables as if they were normally distributed, and parametric tests were applied. Outliers in the data were presumed to be the cause of the low p-value for "social participation". The outliers were not removed from the data because in this context, they might be the most interesting individuals and their closer examination had the potential to provide alternative and aberrant insights.

Results

In this section, the quantitative results from the background survey are presented first, followed by the qualitative results from the group discussions.

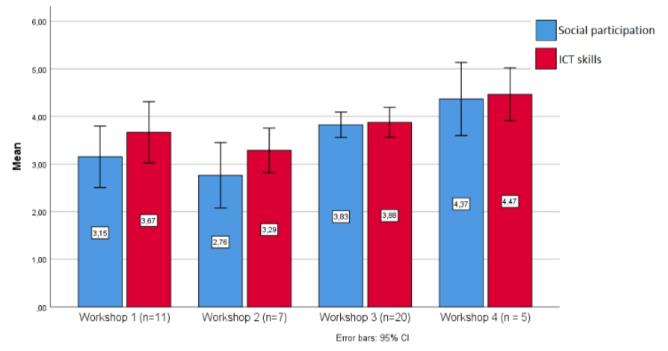## Quantitative Results: Background Survey

To test for a statistically significant difference between the four workshop groups in sum variable scoring, a one-way analysis of variances (ANOVA) was applied. Variances in variables were deemed homogenous ($p = > .050$). A statistically significant difference was found between groups in both sum variables: the ANOVA test results were F(3, 39) = 7.006, $p = .001$ for "social participation" and F(3, 39) = 2.852, $p = .050$ for "ICT skills". Tukey's ANOVA post hoc test was

applied to discover which groups had a statistical difference between them. According to this post hoc test, a difference was found in "social participation" between workshops 1 and 4 ($p = .017$), 2 and 3 ($p = .009$), and 2 and 4 ($p = .003$). In "ICT skills", a statistically significant difference was found between workshops 2 and 4 ($p = .036$).

Table 1. Statistically significant differences between groups tested with ANOVA and the Tukey post hoc test for the variables "social participation" and "ICT skills".

Statistically significant differences between groups in "social participation" (ANOVA + Tukey post hoc)		
Workshop	Workshop	Sig. / *p*-value
Workshop 1	Workshop 4	.017
Workshop 2	Workshop 3	.009
Workshop 2	Workshop 4	.003

Statistically significant differences between groups in "ICT Skills" (ANOVA + Tukey post hoc)		
Workshop	Workshop	Sig. / *p*-value
Workshop 2	Workshop 4	.036

Figure 2. Participants' average scores in social participation and ICT skills at the digital participation World Café workshops. Workshop 1 was set in a comprehensive school elongation (adjunct term), Workshop 2 was set in an upper secondary vocational school, and Workshop 3 was set in an upper secondary school. Workshop 4 included a group of youth council members (4/5 members of the group).

The formed sum variables "social participation" and "ICT skills" were also tested for statistically significant difference between the genders with the independent samples *t*-test, but no statistically

significant difference was found. The same variables were tested for correlation. As the variables were considered normally distributed and the assumption of parallel fluctuation was directional, a one-tailed Pearson correlation coefficient analysis could be applied. The variables had a correlation coefficient (R-value) of .341, indicating a statistically significant correlation, with a p-value of .013 (N = 43). This linear correlation can be considered a weak positive relationship, meaning that as the value of "ICT skills" increases, so does the value of "social participation"; thus, they fluctuate roughly analogously.

Nevertheless, a difference can be seen between the genders in the correlation of the sum variables. The correlation coefficient can be calculated for data divided according to gender. Conducting the Pearson correlation test on females only, a statistically significant correlation between the sum variables is seen, with female only data ($r = .432$, $p = .020$) indicating a statistically significant moderate correlation. However, in the case of male-only data ($r = .195$, $p = .205$), there is no statistical significance. This implies a gender difference in the relationship between "ICT skills" and "social participation" meaning that the aforementioned analogous fluctuation of the sum variables might not be as present as such among males in this sampling as it is among females.
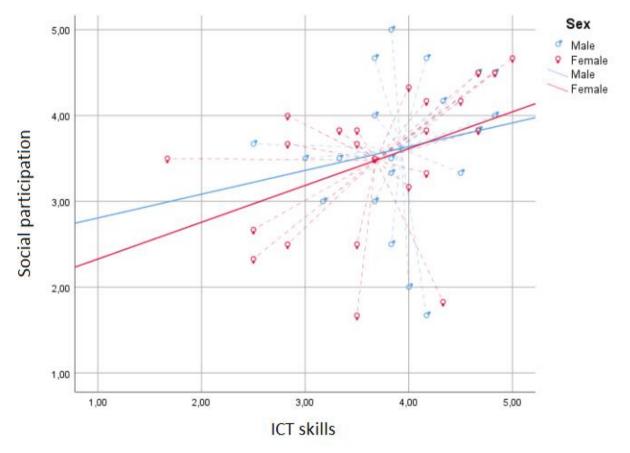

Figure 3. Relationship between the variables "social participation" and "ICT skills" by gender.
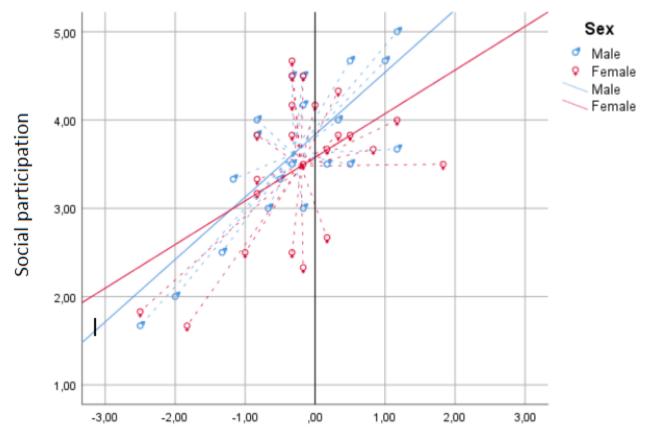
A new variable can be formed to describe the difference between the variables at the individual subject level. This variable is formed by subtracting the value of "ICT skills" from the value of "social participation". The newly formed variable was tested for normality and received a score

lower than .05 in the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($p = .032$, df = 43), and thus it cannot be considered normal in its distribution. Consequently, the non-parametric equivalents of tests were applied.

No statistically significant difference between the genders was found in the variable "social participation (minus) ICT skills" when tested with the non-parametric equivalent of the independent samples t-test, the Mann–Whitney U test. As expected, a positive correlation can be seen between the variables "social participation" and "social participation (minus) ICT skills", as it can be rationalized that the outcome of the subtraction of the two variables increases when the value of "ICT skills" decreases compared to the value of "social participation". The correlation is statistically significant ($p = < .001$) at the value of $r_s = .521$; this can be considered a moderate correlation.

However, the correlation between variables "social participation" and "social participation (minus) ICT skills" is different in its nature when comparing the correlation coefficient values and plot graphs between males and females. Males received $r_s = .685$, $p = < .001$ and females $r_s = .361$, $p = .045$, whereas the correlation can be considered strong for males and weak for females. As can be seen in Figure 4, the dynamics of "social participation" and "ICT skills" differ between genders in this sample. The male participants seem to have a more abrupt and linearly scattered pattern, whereas the females' pattern is somewhat more focused and less linear, especially at the higher end.

The differences in the relationship of subjectively experienced ICT Skills and social participation can also be discussed at the workshop group level (see Figure 5). The survey was executed in four different settings, and these groups can be tested against each other. A statistically significant positive moderate correlation ($r = .411$, $p = .036$) was found only in Workshop 3 between the variables "ICT skills" and "social participation". Although statistically insignificant at this sampling size (n = 7), Workshop 2 has a moderate negative correlation, denoting a decrease in "social participation" as the scoring in "ICT skills" increases ($r = .563$, $p = .094$).

Figure 4. Relationship of the variables "social participation" and the subtraction of "ICT skills" from the "social participation" scoring at the subject level.
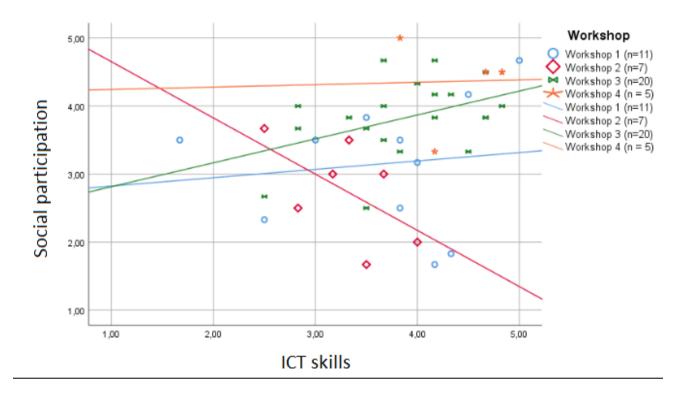
Figure 5. Relationship of the variables "social participation" and "ICT skills" by workshop groups.

Qualitative Results: Group Discussions

Next, the qualitative results analysis from the group discussions are presented. First, the most frequently mentioned digital services used by the participants were Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Tumblr, and Twitter. The most common music and video streaming services included Spotify, YouTube, and Netflix. Examples of other digital services that were brought up in more than one table group include online banking services, bus and train schedules, and an online newspaper. However, when asked if the participants had utilized digital services to make an impact, only a few respondents could give an example of such an activity. For instance, one female in Workshop 1 was an active Google local guide:

> "I used Google maps a lot and then I received a message asking if I would like to collect data and so forth, give feedback... I am a person who often has free time... so I pick up Google maps; there are questions and I answer them, "yes, no, yes, no"".

In Workshop 1, Twitter and Tumblr were mentioned as platforms where the participants can share their opinions: "From Tumblr you can re-blog, share content made by others: many young people write their opinions there."

One group in Workshop 3 mentioned that Finnish discussion forums, such as demi.fi, vauva.fi, and specific Facebook groups, seem to be more popular among adults, and that in such forums people

tend to spend free time instead of trying to really affect the world. In addition, the discussions may be provocative or have an improper tone. The same participants also noted that while there had not been a situation where they would have liked to share their opinions on the Internet, they shared opinions with friends.

In Workshop 4, one participant had some experience of taking part in a petition regarding train schedules. Another participant had worked in youth camps and collected feedback from the participants with a digital survey. Furthermore, members of this group mentioned that in school, they often answered surveys and used the school's digital messaging systems. Finally, one participant commented that if he had an idea regarding other youths that he wanted to share, he would first approach the local youth council. However, if he had not been aware of the youth council, he would probably have posted the idea on social media, e.g. in Snapchat My Story, and see if other people would find it interesting.

Several challenges were identified that may hinder youth participation in the digital world. The data also include discussions related to the utilization of the nuortenideat.fi service.

Table 2. Challenges related to digital participation that were identified in the discussions during the four World Café workshops. The columns contain the themes (challenges), how many different table groups raised the theme, and quotes from the participants.

Theme (challenge)	Groups	Explanation or quotes from participants (I = interviewer)
No interest in participation	4	A: "I think that young people won't participate even if you force them or try to tempt them." B: "If it was in primary school... advertising these events, I think everyone would be excited, or most of them would take part, but when you advertise [events] in high school, then…" C: "Everyone is like, 'no way'."
Participation has no effect	4	A: "What youths think has no importance in Finland, somehow that is the overall understanding, regardless of the service…" B: "It is not necessarily the service, but overall like with this [nuortenideat.fi], there are so many ideas in a big city that it is less likely that your idea will be chosen."
Lack of mutual communication	3	Two-way communication was considered vital in digital services. A: "…there could be something like, 'you gave feedback so we have started to look into this' or something so that one would receive the information that the [message] has been received…"
Making channels for participation more familiar to youths	2	The youth council group note that they could propose ideas through the nuortenideat.fi service, but advertising on social media is required to reach local youths. A: "For instance on Instagram one could pay for it [the ad] to be shown to young people, if the prices are not too high."
Ensuring anonymity	1	A: "It [nuortenideat.fi] should work so that one can use it anonymously, because for some people writing using your own name is really difficult…" … B: "…it could be easier with your idea to write where one [the administrators] can reach you. Or just that you have this one idea, without a properly made plan, so that you could leave it anonymously."
Communication not reaching youth	1	I: "Are there other places than Instagram where one could reach you… when advertising a new service?" A: "Snapchat."

		I: "Would you follow your city's Snapchat feed?" B & C: "Hardly." D: "No. But if they advertise, then their ads will come up when you read someone's 'My story'."
Usability of services	1	I: "What kind of service for ideas or making an impact would motivate you to use it?" A: "Well, [it should be] at least easy to use, and it is important to see how the thing [proposal] proceeds."
Learned caution	1	A: "And it is well imprinted in one's mind that you should not say anything on the Internet. That is what you're told when you're young."
No information on who to contact	1	A: "Well, it is difficult to find any actor to tell about the easier stuff, such as littering, and I don't know who to contact in the municipality…"
Too many user IDs	1	A: "And one application [for multiple purposes] is a good idea, because then you do not need a separate sign-up for every single service…"
Conflicts and disagreements	1	A: "Especially in some Facebook group, whatever you say, someone will always come saying that you have wrong opinions, you can't do that, and then it's the war of the century." B: "Exactly."
Advertising	1	A: "I think that I don't try to influence [others], but you notice that online they try to influence you very strongly, all the advertisements and what you are recommended… your behaviour and shopping decisions and attitudes are being influenced by the Internet."

Next, the positive and negative aspects regarding the nuortenideat.fi service are summarized based on the group discussions. None of the participants was familiar with the service, but this was expected, as the service has not been launched or marketed in the area where the study was conducted.

On the positive side, the service was perceived as having a low entry threshold for suggesting ideas and commenting and building on others' ideas. The service was seen easy to use, and viewing others' ideas, especially those that have resulted in real actions, was considered motivating. The requirement to register was viewed as positive, as it potentially decreases disturbing behaviour.

On the negative side, the service still has few users and requires more marketing – e.g. in schools – to attract more youths and increase the service's credibility. On the other hand, it was noted that if the service became popular in bigger cities, there could be so many ideas that it would be very unlikely that one's idea would be chosen. The participants were also unsure what ideas were genuine and how many were just pranks. One respondent noted that there is a risk that prankers could spam the service with fake ideas.

Concluding Remarks

The results of the digital participation World Café workshop suggest that the participating youths are active users of several social media services and specific music and video streaming platforms. However, traditional newspaper websites and similar news sources are less commonly used, with the exception of one newspaper. Very few had utilized digital services to make an impact, although they had read blogs and answered digital surveys. The main challenges hindering youth participation via

digital channels related to 1) a lack of interest; 2) a belief that youths, especially as individuals, cannot have an impact because they are not listened or their ideas are lost in the crowd; 3) poor communication between youths and officials, e.g. when proposing ideas and seeing how they are taken into account; and 4) a lack of awareness of the "official" channels that they could use to make an impact. The nuortenideat.fi service sparked some interest among the participants, and especially examples of ideas that have resulted in concrete actions were considered motivating. However, advertising – e.g. via schools or social media platforms – is required to make youths aware that such a service exists. Even with such an awareness, it can be challenging to motivate youths to participate. The low threshold for participation via the user-friendly interface and the opportunity to participate at different levels were seen as positive aspects of the nuortenideat.fi service. Finally, the results of the questionnaire suggest that there is a correlative relationship between social participation and ICT skills, and that the dynamics of this relationship varies between groups and genders.

Discussion and Conclusions

The central theme of our paper was to create a multidisciplinary understanding regarding the usage of various digital services in enabling youth to participate in processes of social change at the grassroots and policy levels. Various processes of change are essential for the development of society to make it more inclusive, tolerant, and sustainable, issues that are central to the United Nations' Agenda 2030 objectives. In this study, we focused on two digital services in Finland to test their usability and accessibility in general for youth participation in the processes of social change.

The research questions were:

1. What does theory tell us regarding youths' usage of digital services and equal participation?
2. How do youths perceive the usage of digital services in general and for the purpose of social change?
3. Is there a relationship between social participation and subjectively perceived ICT skills?
4. Is there a difference between workshop groups in the relationship between subjectively perceived ICT skills and social participation?
5. Is there a difference between genders in the relationship between subjectively perceived ICT skills and social participation?

The results of this study suggest that the World Café workshop is a useful method for gaining knowledge and information directly from youths and studying the ICT skills of youths. In case studies 1 and 2, the majority of the youths actively took part in the discussions and shared their opinions. With little effort, the university and school environments could be changed to have a café-like atmosphere, making the session differ from the regular school lessons, thus possibly increasing motivation. Nevertheless, in the workshops, there were a few youths who were passive; they focused on their mobile phones and took no part in the discussions. While participation in the World Café workshops is voluntary, the organizers cannot force any of the participants to take part in discussions.

Regarding our first two research questions, the theoretical framework introduced a multidisciplinary framework for how digital services can be used to empower youths in various processes of social change, while additionally focusing on the possible downsides of digital service use in terms of power relations. The results illustrate that digital services do create opportunities and enable youths to participate in various processes of change. Results also indicate that the youth can become agenda setters by using digital services. However, to enable youths to participate – including those with various disabilities and limited access to devices – it is necessary to create inclusive digital services that are accessible to all. Accessible digital services would also strengthen societal willingness to meet the human rights and equality obligations detailed in the European Convention on Human Rights and the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child. With inclusive digital services, youths from various backgrounds can be empowered and thus be more active possessors of their human rights and actors in the larger democratic development of society.

The Accessibility World Café workshop provided new and alternative viewpoints relating to digital services. It was a suitable method for gaining qualitative knowledge-based information on the lived experiences of youths from various backgrounds. The youths saw potential in the visited digital services, but also many threats. The results indicate that digital services may provide opportunities to participate in various processes of social change. However, the youths felt that lausuntopalvelu.fi had a high threshold for participation due to the complex concepts involved in the legislative language, for example, whereas nuorteideat.fi received more positive feedback. However, the participants suggested that the purpose of the visited digital service should be made clearer in the language so that young people understand more clearly. Furthermore, the services need a re-design and further development to meet the needs of youths from various backgrounds. When these changes are made, the threshold for participation will be lower.

The results also show that human rights obligations are not met by simply having digital services. Not everyone has equal opportunities to access or use digital services. From an equality and wider human rights perspective, accessibility and usability must be taken into account when designing digital services. Digital services in themselves do not ensure participation. Acknowledging the power relations and the strengths and weaknesses in the design and use of digital services is the first step to designing more inclusive services that would enable youths to participate in various processes of social change.

Regarding the usage of digital services, the participating youths seem to be active users of social media services, but activities that relate to processes of social change, such as aiming to have an impact on one's living environment, are unfamiliar to them. The list of popular services was similar to that found in a study by Weissenfelt (2016). Our findings seem to echo the argument by Schlozman et al. (2010) that while youths are active users of digital technologies, they are not especially politically active on the Internet. This may be due to multiple reasons, such as a lack of motivation, being unaware of digital services that support processes of social change, and not believing in their own abilities to have an impact. Considering that the fragmented nature of information has been seen as one obstacle to online participation (Grossklags et al., 2011), the findings of this study also emphasize the need to create digital channels and services supporting

participation that are more familiar to youths. Nuortenideat.fi is a good example of such a service: it ideally supports grassroots-level participation. It was considered to have a low threshold for use compared to lausuntopalvelu.fi. In using similar services, aspects such as anonymous use, access to examples of others' ideas that have had an impact, and ease of use were considered important. Middaug et al. (2017) argue that the amount of online participation and engagement relates to the amount of experienced conflicts; similar themes were raised in the group discussions, as some participants had had negative experiences when sharing their opinions online.

The questionnaire results indicate that a positive correlative relationship between variables social participation and subjectively perceived ICT skills is present in this sample; however, the correlation cannot be considered strong. This result can be seen analogous with those found in the study done by Khan et al. (2014), where the authors state that ICT skills play a crucial role in the equality of access to technology. Placing this study in dialogue with results of Khan et al. (2014) might identify a mechanism in which ICT skills enhance access to technologies and settings; this might enable greater participation. Workshop group 2, on the other hand, displays abrupt behaviour in the terms of the variables' correlation. This result is in conflict with the results of the other workshop groups and the study by Khan et al., as the correlation between ICT skills and social participation is – albeit not statistically significantly – negative. This might reflect the deviant mechanics among marginal groups. Further investigation is needed, as it may offer valuable insights into structural imbalances and possible angles for intervention.

ICT skills may also contribute to finding and combining information. Collin (2008) argues that political identity development can be enabled and promoted by using the Internet and digital services. Perhaps the analogous fluctuation of ICT skills and social participation is mediated by the enhanced opportunities for identity development among those with a higher level of ICT proficiency, thus such individuals are more likely to access the information that enhances development. Due to the small group sampling sizes, we were unable to determine if there was a difference between the workshop groups in the relationship between subjectively perceived ICT skills and social participation. A statistical relationship was present in Workshop 3, but this was presumably caused by the larger sample size compared to the other workshops.

The results also indicate a difference between genders in the relationship between ICT skills and social participation. Even though the mechanical causality between variables could be due to a proxy or multiple proxies, either partially or completely, there is a difference between genders in these dynamics. The results might reflect that females benefit more from ICT skills from a social participation perspective, or that females that participate more socially are more able and/or likely to acquire higher a proficiency in ICT. Ultimately, the results propose that females have a stronger relationship between subjectively experienced ICT skills and social participation than males. When comparing the dynamics of social participation and ICT skills between genders, an interesting observation can be made in the subject-level balances of the variables (see figures 3 and 4). As seen in Figure 4, the females' scoring seems slightly more balanced and the males' seems to have a slightly more linear relationship between the variables. This might reflect differences between the genders in benefit perspective. These results might be linked to overall differences between the genders in Internet behaviour and participation. If there is a causal relationship between ICT skills

and social participation, its difference across the genders could be mediated or amplified by the gateway-like properties of online activities. Kahne et al. (2013) assert that the threshold to engage in volunteering, community problem solving, etc., could be lowered by participating in online activities that are similar in nature. Perhaps females partake in these activities online more often than males and thus benefit more from online activities than males do from a social participation standpoint.

We conclude that digital services can be used to enable and empower youths of different backgrounds to participate in various processes of social change. However, numerous issues – such different abilities to act as agenda setters, as power relations among youths and unequal skills and access to devices – must be acknowledged to make digital services fully inclusive tools in processes of social change. As youths should be a central force in the democratic development of society and active possessors of their surroundings and human rights, digital services and their youth-centric design can be a part of democratic change in society.

Future Research

In future studies, the focus should be on digital human rights and the aspects of power relations as well as on human rights obligations. Another key issue that should be studied is whether youths are able to use digital services according to their own visions and to their own liking – namely in ways that have not been envisioned by the elites. Moreover, studies should also focus on the differences between various marginal youth groups and equality in terms of access to digital services and their usability. ICT and media skills education is another important related field that should be examined, especially in terms of the possible inequalities within the educational system that might cause discrepancies in absolute or subjectively perceived ICT skills.

Research Limitations

This study was conducted with a limited number of case studies and a limited participant sample size. To gain a broader perspective on agenda setting, power relations and digital human rights, a larger multidisciplinary study must be conducted. It must be noted that in the questionnaires concerning subjectively perceived ICT skills and social participation, the sampling size is fairly low. The applied indicator for subjectively perceived ICT skills should be approached with caution due to possible inadequate validity, as subjective measures for skills evaluations are widely considered to be influenced by the respondent's state and self-esteem. In addition, the respondents' subjective evaluation of ICT skills might exceed their objective skills. Not all of the indicators used have been scientifically validated, and reduced, applied versions of previously validated tests were used, which might affect the validity of the results. However, the sum variables were inspected for high consistency, and the sub-variables were inspected for internal strong cross-correlations; the tests indicated high validity.

Acknowledgements

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