Online political behaviour and ideological production by young people

A comparative study of ICT and civic participation in Estonia, Greece and the United Kingdom

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Abstract: This report showcases netnographic research (online observation, content and 65 interviews in total) conducted between September 2020 and April 2021 in Estonia, Greece and the United Kingdom, comparing the reasons and the means by which youth engaged in online civic participation, focusing on online movements mobilising for racial, social and environmental justice.

Key words: Youth activism, digital media, Estonia, Greece, United Kingdom

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Executive Summary

This report showcases netnographic research (online observation, content and 65 interviews in total) conducted between September 2020 and April 2021 in Estonia, Greece and the United Kingdom, comparing the reasons and the means by which youth engaged in online civic participation, focusing on online movements mobilising for racial, social and environmental justice.

In Greece, we collected primary data of youth mobilising against gender-based violence and against police brutality, in Estonia we focused on online youth activism regarding LGBTQ+ and Black Lives Matter (BLM), while we focused on anti-racist civic participation BLM Leicester and environmental civic participation Extinction Rebellion (XR and XR Youth) in the UK. In the latter case, we also interviewed older participants to find out how they were mentoring the youth in these organisations and their own experience of adolescent political education and ICT use development.

In Estonia, speaking out for the marginalised is seen as a matter of responsibility and the only way forward to a better society, leading to other people becoming more informed and changing their minds. Reasons for political engagement are linked to personal experience of discrimination that informs a person's capacity for empathy, as well as cultural discourses surrounding social justice. In Greece, there is mistrust of political parties and governmental organisations and there is interest to do some things, not to change the world, but first to change everyday life. Activation and politicisation are triggered by personal experiences linked to the ways (multiple) gender identities are treated in a specific social context, but also in society at large. In the UK, there is adoption of new more effective approaches to environmental activism, anger about police brutality and fight for equal rights, because of widespread inequality: 'people relying on handouts to feed their children in a rich country'.

In terms of organisational and communication aspects, in Estonia there is use of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, VKontakte and Tiktok, with participants not preoccupied with questions of surveillance and taking no extra steps to protect themselves. International (English speaking) accounts are seen as much better for informational purposes

than local Estonian ones, which are often accused of being ill informed, narrow minded, even racist and homophobic. In Greece, there is use of Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and messaging apps as well as video conferencing platforms. There is reluctance, distrust and criticism towards platforms and apps and preference for open-source software. Digital networks are seen more as means of (counter)information diffusion and less as a meaningful space where political strategies can be deployed. In the UK, there is innovation in organisation and communication, for example in XR and XR Youth (holacracy model, carbon neutral cloud, use of glassfrog, basecamp, mattermost), while at BLM Leicester we see pre-existing networks supporting very social media savvy young people. Adolescents tend to not use Facebook, unless they want to reach parents, but use Twitter and Instagram a lot for their information, coordination and publicization of political participation.

Estonia is different to Greece and the UK, because participants are speaking out for the marginalised, but might not be themselves marginalised, and are less worried about issues of privacy and surveillance. Similarities include that their civic participation is linked to personal experience of discrimination and injustice and there is similar use of commercial platforms. Greece is different to Estonia and UK, because there is far more distrust to political parties and commercial platforms, and ICT is seen as less of a space for organisation and strategy. A similarity here is that politicisation may be triggered by personal experiences. UK is different to Greece and Estonia, in that there is organisational and communication innovation, there is heavy reliance on pre-existing networks, and there is more systematic mentoring for the younger activists. The UK is similar to Estonia, in that there is anger about inequality, racial, social injustice, and with Greece in terms of a certain level of distrust of police and government.

Overall, participants who are active members of civic society organisations which are robustly organised (decentralised or hierarchical) utilise specialised types of platforms for different activities and are mindful of internet safety and surveillance issues, while those that are members of less organised movements rely on more commercial and general platforms to organise, communicate, coordinate, and publicise their activities.

1. Introduction

DigiGen Work Package 6 was originally designed to address the question: What are the socio-economic, gendered, and political culture-related issues influencing the digital political engagement of young people? WP 6 aims to: a) research and analyse the context within which the political behaviour of young people is manifested online, b) assess the extent to which it affects offline political practices.

This deliverable is based on Task 6.1 Conducting netnography of online civic participation. This task will focus on how young people make use of blogs, websites of youth organisations, and social media networks in relation to their online civic participation. An emphasis will be placed on how socio-economic, gender and political culture-related factors influence young people's online civic participation. Fieldwork will include the following research methods:

- Discourse and semiotic analysis of youth narratives, images, including videos, with an emphasis on the role of young people in producing online content; and
- Online interviews with young people as users in the UK, Greece and Estonia (65 interviews in total).

For this work we use multimodal critical discourse analysis of youth narratives, images, including videos, with an emphasis on the role of young people in producing online content, and online interviews with young people, mainly 16-20 years of age, but in the UK case we also discussed with older participants, because we are also asking about the development of digital political participation in adolescence of older activists and intergenerational mentoring[1].

Overview of D6.1: This report offers a comparative analysis of ICT use in civic participation in the three countries. Section 2 offers a brief historical, sociopolitical and digital communication context for each country, so it can enable the reader to grasp the digital political atmospheres and ground the comparison in terms of the different environments involved. In section 3, we specify key debates, elements of theories and sets of scholarship that are relevant to the research at hand. This includes the general issues regarding overall use of ICTs by societal actors, ideological and organizational impact, intersectional convergence issues for mobilisation and debate in the public sphere; the use of several theories (social movement, conflict, digital media in an integrated framework); issues regarding the digital political environment pre- and post-pandemic in relation to securitization by governments and dependence on corporate platforms. We end up with key sets of scholarship: digital citizenship, ICT use by adolescents, digital activism broadly and digital political culture particular to each country. In section 4, we explain the broader methodological approach and then the sampling and research design implementation in each country. In section 5, we compare the reasons for political participation in terms of ideology, identity and community in each country, whilst in section 6 we look at questions around organisation, ICT use and broader political economy questions to specify how ICTs were used to facilitate civic participation and political engagement, be it in terms of consuming, debating, sharing, or organising and mobilising with others in the three countries. In section 7, we offer key comparative findings. In the final sections, Appendix A offers three tables for research participants which we interviewed and observed netnographically in each country and Appendix B includes the interview guide we used. Lastly, Appendix C offers a sample from the netnographic images we collected for the study.

1 Intergenerational mentoring seems to be a common occurrence in UK-based organisations and thus it was important to include the voices of those who are mentors as well as the youth themselves.

2. Historical, sociopolitical and digital communication environment in Estonia, Greece and the UK

Estonia was declared as a republic in 1920, Soviet occupation 1940 – 1991, independence restored 1991, and joined NATO and EU in 2004. Soviet policies changed the ethnic composition by introducing a large Russian speaking minority (35% in 1989, currently it is 25%). In 2017 85% of Estonian population had Estonian citizenship, 6% had unidentified citizenship and 7% had Russian citizenship, while minorities still have a weaker position on the job market (Eesti ühiskonna integratsiooni monitooring 2017). Tensions between Estonian and Russian speaking population peaked in 2007 with the so-called Bronze Night (two nights of rioting) surrounding the relocation of the Bronze Soldier statue (which Estonians interpreted as a symbol of Soviet repression and the Russian community interpreted as a symbol of the Soviet army's victory over Nazis). Four people were on trial for organizing the riots but acquitted. The Bronze night was followed by three weeks of concentrated cyberattacks from Russia against the websites of Estonian ministries, government agencies, political parties, newspapers and banks (on the Estonia cyberconflict, see Karatzogianni, 2010). In terms of political youth culture, people have to be 18 years old to vote, but since 2015 those at least 16 years of age are allowed vote in local elections. There are about 24 000 people who are 16 – 17 years old in Estonia (Riigikogu 2015).

Based on the 2016 Eurobarometer data 51% of Estonian youths (compared to 46% average) thought social networks allow everyone to take part in public debate and thus represent progress for democracy and 23% (compared to 27%) thought that social networks represent a risk (Allaste & Saari 2019). While this data indicates a higher than average belief in the democratic capacities of social media among Estonian youths, Tiidenberg and Allaste (2016) found that the percentage of youth, who consider social media to be an efficient tool for influencing politics is lower in Estonia (24%) than in the Nordic countries (Finland 32%, Denmark 44%) (Tiidenberg and Allaste 2016). Further, Beilmann and Kalmus (2019) analysed the survey data collected in 2016 from 15-30 year old Estonians as part of the H2020 CATCH-EyoU project and divided young people into four participatory types - politically-minded activists (5%), volunteers/benefactors (30%), digital activists (28%) and passive young citizens (37%). The digital activist group actively discusses social and political topics on the internet.

Tiidenberg and Allaste (2016) analysed data from the FP7 project Myplace, focusing both on the area that is primarily ethnic Estonian and an area that is primarily minority Russian, they found that youth's civic engagement and political participation online was different in these two areas. For example, 21% of the youths in the dominantly Estonian area said they had signed petitions, but only 8% in the Russian speaking area did. The qualitative data in that study showed that young Estonians can be described as "standby citizens" (Amnå and Ekman 2014), they are rather unvocal and inactive in areas conventionally categorized as political activism, do not belong in organizations, but do express interest in politics and keep informed on topics of public debate via social media. They are careful about commenting on social media and prone to self-censorship for a variety of reasons, but do sometimes share both civically minded (lost dogs, crowdfunding) and political (satire, humour and memes) content on social media (primarily Facebook and Twitter). However, they do not perceive these actions as politically engaged. Young people in post-socialist countries are generally even less likely to participate in formal politics than their counterparts in mature democracies. This is linked to overall low levels of engagement and negative connotations of the word "activist" inherited from the Soviet system (Vukelic & Stanojevic, 2012, Allaste 2014), as well as the preoccupation with individual material wellbeing (linked to post-Soviet poverty and spread of neoliberal values). More recently an argument has been made that the political passivity as well as the dislike for protest and the label

of “activist,” might be slowly lifting among the youngest people.

In terms of incidents of digital activism in Estonia, the anti-ACTA (Anti-Counterfeit Trade Agreement) protests organized in Tallinn (about 2000 people) and Tartu (about 1000 people) in 2012 are most noteworthy. People were mobilized to join these protests via the internet, mostly Facebook. The turnout was significant and the protests were framed as an issue of “internet freedom.” Nonetheless, more recently, young people have been somewhat active regarding the issues of climate (climate strikes), and students supported the protests regarding science funding. The conservative party (EKRE) that made it into the parliament last election has a youth organization (Sinine Äratus), which, according to media reports, conducts social media training, trolling, and runs a meme factory. Last fall there was a scandal where the children belonging to Sinine Äratus were posting antisemitic content and selfies with guns (obviously emulating American gun culture and intimidation rhetoric, which is very peculiar in Estonia, where guns are usually associated with and owned by hunters only). LGBT and feminist activism has also become more visible (partly because the conservative party has harassed them). Finally, anti-fur and vegan activism is notable on Facebook.

Digital practices are entangled with both the activists and the moderately and latently active Estonian youths’ political repertoires, indicating that separations along the lines of “online participation” and “offline participation” are not fruitful in these contexts (Nugin et al. 2018). Differentiations along the lines of socio-economic and ethnic lines also need to be approached with nuance. The most active could be from higher as well as lower than average economic backgrounds and parental education households (Nugin et al., 2018; Belimann 2018), with those of lower economic status and living in rural areas more likely to lean towards non-conformist, anti-authoritarian, but also anti-democratic protest activity and those from higher social economic status and higher education backgrounds to pro-democratic and anti-establishment or conformist forms of activity (Beilmann 2018).

In Greece, since 1974, and the ‘Metapolitefsi’ (fall of the military dictatorship) (Kassimeris, 2005) and up to the Greek crisis (2010-present), the political system was dominated by two political parties in government the social democratic PASOK – Panhellenic Socialist Movement (1981–89, 1993–2004) and conservative right ND - New Democracy (1974–81, 1990–93, 2004–09) reflecting the traditional Left-Right spectrum from the early 20th century (Lyrintzis, 2007). The devastating wildfires of 2007 with 70 people dead, and corruption scandals, saw the country go to elections, in which the New Democracy won. However, the 2008 December Riots (Karamichas, 2009) and popular resistance to reforms saw smaller parties challenging the two-party monopoly. It is in that moment that the Coalition of Left, Ecology and Movements (SYNASPISMOS) converted to the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) with leadership passing to Alexis Tsipras. In April 2010 Greece declared bankruptcy. The Greek crisis and the three-year bail out followed by the Memoranda with the Troika (International Monetary Fund, European Commission, European Central Bank) witnessed the collapse of political institutions and the financial crisis becoming an economic, political and social one. In 2011, Papandreou resigned and PASOK, ND and LAOS formed a ‘government of national unity’, led by the former head of the Bank of Greece, Loucas Papadimos. The breakdown of the two-party system came fast and furious in May 2012, witnessing the rise of SYRIZA and the fascist Golden Dawn. In what is unquestionably a major political event with wider impact beyond the small peripheral European country, in January 2015 SYRIZA wins snap elections with an anti-austerity agenda and forms a coalition government with a small nationalist party, ANEL (On Syriza and social media, see Smyrnaios and Karatzogianni, 2020).

Turning now to the Greek media context. This was under state monopoly until 1989, where the sector undergoes broadcasting deregulation and privatisation, becoming hostage to ownership by political and economic elites (investors, shipping tycoons and businessmen). From two television channels and four radio stations, it turned into an overcrowded market of 160 private

channels and 1,200 radio stations (Papathanassopoulos, 1999). The Greek government made several attempts at regulating the sector: 'In 2001, the Greek government decided to close 70 radio stations in Athens, due the opening of the new airport in Athens; in 2013, it closed ERT, and in 2016, it organised a licence auction…in most cases these bumbling attempts failed, highlighting the vulnerable relationship between the media and the state, as well as questions of corruption. After 2008, the development of the internet in juxtaposition to the outbreak of the Greek crisis dramatically affected the media sector' … 'In 2013, the financial and political crisis had already influenced every business sector and the market, while the internet had started demonstrating multiple usages that this medium could have within the Greek crisis context (e.g, independent media initiatives, etc.)' (Ferra, 2018: 51).

In Greece, the first digital mobilizations start in 2007, because this is occurring in parallel to the mobile communications and broadband digital development evolution in Greece. Digital activism continues with the December 2008 riots all the way to the waves of anti-austerity protests starting in 2010-11. The Greek anti-austerity mobilisations are in sync globally with the fourth wave of digital activism between 2010–2014 (Karatzogianni, 2015), which starts with the WikiLeaks video release in the summer of 2010, the 'Arab Spring' revolutions in the MENA region, the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011, and the spread of Occupy across the globe. The years 2011–2014 witness protests in countries as diverse as Portugal, Spain, Brazil, Turkey, Nigeria and India, to name but a few, as well as digital activism relating to feminist, LGBT, and environmental issues (Karatzogianni and Schandorf, 2016). This period is also crucially marked by the Snowden revelations in the summer of 2013 (Karatzogianni and Gak, 2015), which provide significant evidence for the crackdown on digital activism by the United States and the United Kingdom and the allegedly forced cooperation of tech corporations, culminating in the mainstreaming of digital activism, and the end of its uniqueness and exoticism as phenomenon. This is the period that Zeynep Tufekci (2017) calls "networked protests" where movements and publics are reconfigured through the incorporation of digital technologies and connectivity. Indeed, the Syntagma Square mobilisation took place entirely via social networking sites and microblogs, and the networks established during the mobilisations were subsequently used to support bottom-up solidarity initiatives (Theocharis, 2016).

In the UK context, contemporary political culture in the UK was affected by the Cambridge Analytica/ Facebook Data breech scandal – embroiled also in the US Elections 2016 scandals, which saw the Cambridge Analytica entangled in the Vote Leave campaign during the Brexit referendum of 2016. Vote Leave and Be Leave used identical datasets to target Facebook users. Vote Leave spent millions of pounds buying targeted online advertising through AggregateIQ during the referendum campaign, pushing up against its strict £7m spending limit. However, in the closing days of the campaign, Vote Leave donated £625,000 and created illegally the Be Leave campaign which resulted in its fining by the Electoral Commission. Cambridge Analytica used data file custom audiences, which allow advertisers to upload data such as existing customers' email addresses or other identifying information so as to target them directly on Facebook; Website custom audiences, which allow advertisers to target people on Facebook based on whether they have been detected browsing the advertiser's website; and Lookalike audiences, which enable advertisers to target Facebook users that are likely to be interested because they are similar to the advertiser's existing customers.

An interesting aspect of the UK political culture involves the establishment of Momentum in the Labour party. The need for intense use of digital media by the party and grassroots mobilisation lies in the fact that the mainstream media and Jeremy Corbyn, its previous leader, were always at odds with each other. Since its inception in 2015, it successfully enrolled hundreds of thousands of supporters, but also polarised the party with what was referred to widely as the 'more radical left militant tendency'. In the run-up to the general election in June 2017, Momentum worked to mobilise voters and encourage volunteers to canvass on its behalf. Their strategy was to target marginal seats. Corbyn said at the time that he was proud of community organ-

isers and the work Momentum had done in moving beyond voter ID-focussed campaigning and towards empowering communities through genuine engagement. By contrast, the Conservative Party hired Australian social media experts who helped elect Scott Morrison as PM. They released a '12 questions' video with Boris Johnson, which served as a social media party political broadcast and was shared widely. Johnson has also done live Q&As on Facebook, a significant step forward from Theresa May's limited use of social media. The use of social media by the two political parties did not influence the 2019 elections. Structural conditions and the extreme polarisation of the public regarding the central issue of Brexit had far more influence than how the political parties utilised social media. Having said that, grassroots supporters from both the Brexit and anti-Brexit camps intensified their digital battles across the key social media platforms. Disinformation architectures, fake news, hate speech, trolling and leaktivism in the UK digital political culture were rampant during the Brexit question and the crisis it brought to UK politics between 2015-2020.

3. Theoretical framework

Digital transformations have undoubtedly had a strong impact on civic participation and on the ways in which active digital citizenship is conceived, perceived and experienced. Scholarly debates around the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) by non-state actors, such as NGOs, protest groups, insurgents, militant and terrorist organizations are extensive, addressing issues such as surveillance and censorship (Bauman and Lyon 2013; Fuchs, et al. 2012) and the impact of ICTs on the ideology, organization, mobilization and structures of social movements (Morozov, 2011; Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Dahlberg and Siapera, 2007; Van de Donk et al. 2004; Diani and McAdam, 2003; McCaughey and Ayers, 2003; Bennet and Entman, 2001). Other scholarly debates address the role of digital networks in supporting social movements and protest groups around the globe (Gerbaudo, 2016; Castells 2012; Stepanova, 2011); the influence of non-state actors on debating ethics and rights at all levels of governance - migration, the environment, the rights of cultural and other minorities - in the digital public sphere (Zuckerman, 2013; Karatzogianni et al. 2016); and the use of ICTs by terrorist groups and online radicalisation (Conway, 2012; O'Loughlin and Hoskins, 2009; Pilkington and Vestel, 2020).

Here, in building the theoretical and contextual country context, we employ the Cyberconflict theoretical framework (Karatzogianni, 2006, 2015; et al. 2017). It relies on a combination of elements from three overlapping theories: digital media theory, conflict theory, and social movement theory/resource mobilization. It is based on four parameters: The first focuses on the environment and the mapping of conflict. It examines the historical, sociopolitical and economic context and the digital development structure in which ICTs are utilized by competing actors to organize, mobilize, co-ordinate, fund and publicize their cause (see summary of this in section 1). The second parameter examines the ICT use for organization, mobilizing structures, framing processes, the political opportunity structure, and hacktivism (see section 6). The third parameter focuses on ethnic/religious/cultural affiliation, chauvinism, exclusionist or inclusionist national identity discourses, and conflict resolution (across sections). The fourth parameter concentrates on representational and politico-economical aspects of the digital such as social relations, the identities and ideologies of the antagonists, the control of information, censorship, and alternative sources/structure of information and organization, as well as examining who initiates, controls and dominates the political discourse in a given cyberconflict scenario (see section 5).

This intense protest activity taking place even during the coronavirus pandemic with the global anti-racist uprising of June 2020 forced scholars to refocus on the use of digital technologies, the latter being defined as widely as possible, to look at broader trends and patterns, rather than focusing on events in each country separately, or the use of specific platforms by a single movement. Consequently, research was conducted within the constant transformation of digital activism beyond its symbolic and mobilisational qualities. In our view these patterns show key issues emerging and resurfacing with every instance of protest technologies and media revolutions across the globe: the securitization of digital networks and the crackdown on dissent by authoritarian regimes, as well as by so called liberal democratic states; the effect of digital activists' dependence on commercial platforms and the broader importance of this dependence; digital media's influence on ideology, identity, privacy, organization, mobilization, leadership emergence, and coordination of digital activist communities; the problem of ideology and consensus in the global public sphere in defining whether protest events are legitimate. Other questions include: whether digital networks are an alternative means of inclusion in democratic society or means to achieve democratization; under what conditions they are responsible for the amplification of an event; whether online participation indicates the intention to participate

offline; and the quality of political engagement and the formation of collective identity in movements emerging on social media platforms, other than the indirect impact on citizen self-expression. Here the interest lies on whether these technologies can have an impact on long term sustained political participation. Although there is intense protest activity across the globe, the various challenges remain in terms of filter bubbles, echo chamber effects, disinformation, digital divide, and state strategies (surveillance, censorship, internet shutdowns, police violence) in terminating movements.

Therefore, for the comparison of the three European countries, Estonia, Greece and the UK, the following sets of literatures were identified to inform our theoretical framework:

a. Digital Citizenship (e.g., access, commerce, communication, literacy, etiquette, rights and responsibilities, health and well-being, security/safety) (Mann et al., 2003; Mossberger et al., 2007; Thorson, 2012; Vivienne et al., 2016; Hintz et al., 2017). Here for example, Frau-Meigs argues (2014: 441) that 'citizenship has also led to an increased fight against censorship, to promote transparency and access. The general well-being of society has been predicated on media freedoms and rights, especially for voting adults (around 18 years old). This can sometimes run counter to children's expected well-being because their early exposure to all sorts of content and mediated conduct can be perceived as inhibiting their own civic agency'.
b. Digital Media Use by Adolescents (specific problems relating to adolescence). For example, Moran-Ellis et al. (2014: 417), cite a study from Nelles et al. (2007; 2011), which looked at the intergenerational effects of growing up in Nazi Germany as a child of resistance fighters, which revealed that 'children's political development can be compromised by their exposure to extremely negative consequences of political actions during their childhoods'. Investigating intergenerational mentoring for digital citizenship amongst research participants is therefore important.
c. Digital activism and social movements scholarship (with specific focus on youth participation in social movements, everyday activism, new participatory repertoires, and leadership emergence theories in social movements) (examples of scholarship see above). In this sense, we also follow concepts and insights relevant to political sociology, as it has been fashioned by critical accounts that bring to the fore new questions and new forms of politics (Faulks 1999; Taylor 2010; Nash 2010; Clemens 2016). The tradition built within new social movement theory (NSM) and resource mobilisation theory (RMT) is one of the key elements in the Cyberconflict theoretical framework mentioned above (for a summary of NSM and RMT see Karatzogiannni, 2006) and holds significant position in our approach. In this sense, our endeavour is inscribed within an effort to provide insights for a potential incorporation of digital space into sociological reflection and not vice versa, i.e., to provide sociological concepts in order to disentangle digital space(s). This stems from a necessity to understand through sociological concepts an over-researched but still neglected area of social interactions and social meanings, that is the digital space. Leaving aside perceptions of the digital as a mirror reflecting the physical, we attempt to examine potential shifts in the social meanings of political participation, irrespective of where it takes place: online, offline or both (hybrid, blended etc.).
d. Youth political culture and digital activism/citizenship scholarship specific to each country (for a synopsis see Section 1).

European electoral turnout and party membership has been waning since the 1970s, especially among young people (Van Biezen et al., 2012), scholars have interpreted this both as a sign of democracy in decline (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007) as well as of alternative forms of participation becoming more prevalent (Bennett, 2012; Loader et al., 2014). Young people's participatory repertoires (Thorson, 2012) are increasingly entangled with, shaped and constrained by ICTs, in particular the internet and social media. While skepticism about the political potential of socially mediated participatory practices was prevalent in earlier work (Morozov, 2012) there is

mounting empirical work that demonstrates that seemingly non-political spaces and practices (sharing memes, starting and signing petitions, commenting, liking and sharing posts) may lead to political participation (Jenkins et al., 2016; Tiidenberg et al. 2021), because they afford connecting to like-minded audiences, sharing of symbolic resources and through that collective political expression (Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019). That being said, the narrative of political participation on the internet being 'pointless' and drowned out by all the 'noise' continues to shape young people's own articulations and experiences (Sipos, 2017).

Thus, when thinking about socially mediated political participation, it is important to take into account which social media mechanisms affect engagement (Theocharis and Quintelier, 2014), how particular social media are used and which social media is used (e.g., a focus on practices and affordances). Thus, information-rich, discussion-oriented and overtly political use is linked more clearly to political participation, although even entertainment oriented and "escapist" social media use may also emerge (Kligler-Vilenchik and Literat, 2018; Hoffman et al., 2017). Based on a meta-analysis of survey studies conducted between 1995 – 2016, Boulianne and Theocharis (2020) report a strong correlation between online and offline political activities, but caution that it is difficult to ascertain the (direction of the) causality. Further, online participation can be disincentivized by presumed lack of rhetorical prowess and lack of moderation in civil discourse on social media (Sipos, 2017). Generalizing to platforms should also be avoided, as while the context collapse typical for Facebook may make some young people apprehensive about speaking up, it may offer others an easier way to get their messages to go 'viral' (cf Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019; Kalmus and Siibak 2020).

From this theoretical platform, we launched the following two sets of research questions, which in turn are answered in sections 4 (RQ1A) and 5 (RQ2A), with RQ1B and RQ2B answered in section 6:

Research Questions Set 1:

A. Why do participants engage in civil participation on digital networks in the three countries?
B. What are the similarities and differences by comparison (i.e., ideology, identity and community, framing - socioeconomic and gender factors)?

Research Questions Set 2:

A. How do participants engage in civil participation on digital networks in the three countries?
B. What are the similarities and differences by comparison (i.e., digital affordances, problems of surveillance, censorship, organisation, mobilisation - online and offline behaviour)?

4. Methodology

This qualitative comparative study (D6.1) across the three countries uses netnography (Kozinets, 2009). This technique involves adapting ethnographic techniques to digital environments, focusing on political discourse and practice in digital networks used by young people, as well as in more youth-specific blogs, websites of youth organisations, and social media networks, with particular emphasis on how socio-economic, gender and political culture-related factors influence ICT use by young people. In conducting the netnography, DigiGen researchers used critical multimodal discourse analysis to understand and analyse narratives, images, including videos, with emphasis on the role of young people in producing online content for political purposes (Roderick 2016; Wodak and Forchtner, 2017). We also collected original data through the use of qualitative interviews with participants involved in the production of online political discourse (65 interviews in total, for detailed dates and nature of participation see Appendix A). The next deliverable D6.2 will complement this study (D6.1) by the use of focus group discussions organized as digital storytelling workshops (DSWs) with young people involved in the production of online political discourse focusing on how they are affected by the online environment of choice. During the workshops, a DSW application will be used as a tool for the co-production of relevant material that will inform on the motivations, the causes and the means that young people find appropriate and meaningful in their civic participation.

Estonia: We conducted 32 interviews with Estonian 16 – 18-year olds (with the exception of one 20-year-old organizer) in 2020/21 (11 with the context group, 10 with the LGBTQ rights active group and 11 with the #BLM active group). All interviews were conducted online, using the platforms, tools and forms of conversation chosen by the interviewees (Zoom call, Skype audio, Messenger typed chat). Sampling and setting up of interviews varied by case study, with the context group[2] sampling happening via letters sent to schools (we aimed for maximum variation, contacting rural and urban, Estonian language and Russian language, elite and ordinary schools), #BLM sampling started from ethnographic online observation on BLM tagged content, events and accounts on social media (reaching out to people posting and sharing it on Instagram and Facebook) and them snowballing, while the LGBTQ+ rights sampling started from reaching out to the organizations and groups that were highly visible at, or part of organizing the marriage equality protests (the Estonian LGBT Association, Rhythms of Resistance drum group, Young Social Democrats of Estonia) and snowballing from their suggestions. Information sheets and consent forms were sent to the participants prior to the interview, while all interviews were conducted and recorded on the Zoom platform. Netnographic fieldwork can be divided into two phases – pre interviews explorative observations primarily of the hashtagged content, committed accounts and events pages on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook (Oct – Dec 2020), and post-interview selective observation of hashtagged content, topical accounts, groups, channels and pages highlighted as relevant by interviewees on Instagram, Facebook, Reddit, TikTok, VKontakte and YouTube (Dec 2020 – April 2021). Fieldwork included observation, systematic taking of fieldnotes and screencaptures. The pieces of online content for multimodal analysis (screengrabs of Insta stories, memes shared on Instagram, Reddit or in Messenger groups, Instagram posts by interviewees as well as accounts they were following, Facebook event page screengrabs, etc) were selected from both phases of fieldwork.

Greece: Data was collected through two heuristic paths: online material posted in different platforms, mainly Facebook, Instagram and Twitter; and online interviews with young people

2 We studied BLM activists and LBTQ rights activists and then because of previous research in Estonia that has shown that activists are a minority, and to be able to contextualise their experiences with “ordinary youths” we added a ‘context group’.

who engaged to a certain extent in activism. The first step was to identify specific digital spaces where discourse and calls for actions relevant to the two mini case studies are produced. A significant number of posts, videos, photos, and comments around the issues of police violence and sexual harassment were identified and could be classified according to the type of the producers as follows: a) material coming from formal or quasi-formal campaigns, for example, the https://metoogreece.gr created by the General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality[3] or the relevant Police/Ministry of Citizen Protection campaign (#exeisfoni) and particularly the comments that it generated; b) material coming from collectivities, active among others on the issues we are examining; c) material coming from individuals, activists or not, who have acted or reacted on Police and/or gender-based violence. Through netnography and snowball sampling we identified the potential individual interviewees who would participate in our research. The research team conducted thirteen semi-structured online interviews based on the common interview guide drafted by the WP leader and discussed among the research teams. Information sheets and consent forms were sent to the participants prior to the interview, while all interviews were conducted and recorded on the Zoom platform.

United Kingdom: After netnographic observation on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and key organisations' websites, we decided to both focus on the two most significant protest organisations in the UK in the last two years active in the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic context (Extinction Rebellion, XR and Black Lives Matter, BLM). We interviewed young people 16-18-years old who were engaged with key political currents in the UK, but we also interviewed older activists mentoring younger activists (ages ranging from 21 to 70) to find out about their ideological development in their adolescence and how their (digital) political engagement evolved since. We interviewed most of the 21 participants on zoom, except the participants 13,1 4, 15 (audio recording only). Information sheets and consent forms were sent to the participants prior to the interview. Activists we interviewed for XR and BLM have an overwhelming marketing, communications and digital media educational and/or professional background and are mostly engaged in freelance work (P1, P2, P3, P7, P12, P13, P14). Also, we have participants from the environment sector (P4), working for government, such as city council and parliament (P5, P18, P20, P21), engaged in youth work (P6), activist academics (P19, P16), a university student movement leader (P17) and a movement co-founder/leader (P8). Four participants are between 16-18 years of age and still in high school/six form college/lyceum specialising in subjects particularly relevant to this research, such as politics, economics and sociology. Two of those are involved in Youth Strike (P15) and XR Youth (P11), with the other two participants each being/or having been a member of the two dominant political parties in the UK (P9 Conservative and P10 Labour). All participants are UK based, except participants 13,14,15 who reside in France, and whom we interviewed to give us information about communication and organisation matters transnationally and in XR and its relationship to the Youthstrike movement. Participant 16 who resides in the United States and whom we interviewed amongst other reasons for providing knowledge of the political atmosphere regarding the BLM protests of June 2020. Participants 17-21 took part in the online workshop 'Leicester in Protest Leicester in Lockdown' (16 September 2020). The nationalities, ethnic and minority status of the participants vary. Indicatively the participants include migrants (e.g., from Italy, France), British ethnic and racial minorities (with Caribbean, Southeast Asian) and diverse sociodemographic status (mostly lower and middle class).

3 It is the former General Secretariat for Gender Equality, formerly affiliated to the Ministry of Interior and now to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, indicating the shift of how gender equality policies are understood by the government elected in July 2019.

5. Why: ICT use, ideology, identity and community in Estonia, Greece and the UK

Estonia

The Estonian youths we talked to tended to describe their own political views as liberal, sometimes using the term, sometimes using the word "left" or just describing an ideology built on equal rights, non-discrimination, social justice and tolerance. A 16 year old BLM activist explained it as follows: *'I am more left-leaning. I believe that everyone should have equal opportunities, should be treated equally, so that the world would be a good place to live for everyone'* (EE P24, 7 November 2020).

This was similar across all three participant groups, including the context case, although while the activist groups framed standing and speaking up for social justice as a matter of responsibility and a fight for a better world, the context group often articulated tolerance as a rational, effective way for a society to function, or as a matter of manners (being kind, respectful, polite). There were significant overlaps in the issues elevated by youths as important (or as those they have noticed getting increasing attention by the context group), with LGBTQ+ rights, BLM protest and climate action being at the forefront at the time of interviews. Similarly, to previous research (Beilmann et al., 2018) some in our two activist groups were active across issues. Youths we interviewed as LGBTQ+ activists told us about making posts about BLM, while those in the BLM groups spoke of going to climate strikes or taking up (and fighting with their parents about veganism).

However, some youths in the context group explicitly disapproved of what they called increasing polarisation, situating their own views as centrist and centrism as a rational, compromise-ready response to extremism and populism.

> *The problem right now is that compromises are disappearing. Rather, now when it is so much easier to come together and join in movements and communities, it has led to less compromise. Different sides can find a common voice less and less. Just because everyone is stuck on their own idea and sure that they are right. I've even seen it at school, where different classes won't work together, because 'we're the best, we want to stay best, we don't want to help,' (...) and the same in politics, parties cannot even agree on what the problems are. The focus is on part views and how to push those. Especially in the US, where a new president will tear down everything the previous one did, and the next one will tear down everything that one did* (EE P7, 23 November 2020).

This difference in framing of tolerance as just and tolerance as rational also leads to different perspectives on what the reasonable responses to intolerance are. The youths in the BLM and LGBTQ+ rights active groups saw speaking out for the marginalised (both on social media and in the form of protest actions) as a matter of responsibility and the only way forward to a better society. For example, a Russian Estonian LGBTQ+ activist told us: *'If we let this hatefulness and lack of tolerance spread then we'll end up like Poland, where the situation is very bad for minorities'* (EE Participant 12, 19 October 2020).

The active youths' responses indicated both self-reflexivity and a sense of self efficacy. Active youths reflected on the choice to speak up or not to speak up through the lens of privilege, for example, a 16-year-old LGBTQ+ active girl told us:

> *I mean … the movement, for me BLM doesn't mean that we work towards dark-skinned people to be like … treated better than other people, the entire point of the BLM movement,*

> *and also feminist movement is that people would be treated equally, it is important for me that I value other people as much as I value myself, and this means that if I don't share, or if I don't speak about these things, then that means I've decided that I don't want to deal with that stuff, and that is ... like my privilege, I have the option of saying 'I don't want to deal with this'* (EE P21, 19 November 2020)

Further, active youths also indicated a level of optimism regarding their self-efficacy when participating in political and social justice discourse. They portrayed actively speaking up on issues of BLM and LGBTQ+, especially on social media, as leading to other people becoming more informed and changing their minds. An LGBTQ+ activist explained it like this: *'I have been in discussion with people, for example an editor of a large newspaper didn't know anything about BLM protest (...) but I was happy, because they listened to me, and started getting and, in the end they said OK, maybe I wasn't informed enough'* (EE P14, 13 December 2020).

Whereas in the context group it was common to say that some groups are indeed marginalized and should indeed have equal rights. A participant from an elite school in the context group described it in these terms: *'LGBTQ+ marches and pride parades are still annoying' and even if they logically know that climate change is a serious issue 'I am not experiencing the shock and the fear'* (EE P7, 23 November 2020).

Our participants' perspectives on what activism is and what political participation means can be imagined on a scale, where some deemed any kind of expression of one's principles and views as activism, especially in Estonia, which was routinely described as passive and even hostile towards more expressive acts of speaking up for those marginalized, while others had a more demanding definition, arguing that activism is: *'Regular and loud engagement with social issues (sharing, commenting) in a variety of social media channels, a desire to participate in organizations to help other people, promoting the results of this work and the organizations on social media'* (EE P11 2 December 2020).

The context group justified their inactivity by pointing to uneven or irregular interest in politics, lacking communication skills, inability to deal with the stress of engaging in politics and engaging on social media, information overdose, fear of negative feedback and a sense that it is pointless. We would like to elevate a sense of lacking political self-efficacy as a red thread throughout the context groups' arguments. These youths supposed their activities wouldn't have an impact either because it is 'impossible to change the world', or from lacking the self-confidence to express one's thoughts, especially on social media, where it is easy to be harassed or trolled (cf Kalmus and Siibak 2020). Fearing the judgement and retribution from peers, and often, disturbingly, from parents, was very often cited as an inhibitor of political participation. This was the case for all three groups. Activist groups met their own parents' judgement with conflict or with avoiding talking to them, but still being active, while the context group was more likely to say that they were not active, because their parents would disapprove. This extended to avoiding voicing certain opinions on social media, when parents or extended family were among the audience. When active groups were asked about why other Estonian youths were inactive, they would often cite fear of parental disapproval. As a 16-year-old BLM activist told us: *'The low levels of youth activism are because of their families. Kids are afraid of being punished when their opinions don't match up to those of their families'* (EE P22, 3 November 2020).

Thus, it was common for our participants to openly acknowledge the central role of the internet and social media in shaping their political identity, as well as friends' and own experiences of being in a marginalized group and the role of parents and grandparents. While the repressive role of parental disapproval and clashing political views between parents/grandparents and youths were addressed above (for instance inter-generational differences), parents could also have a positive impact. Youths, both reflecting on their own and their peers' experiences, pointed out how important it is when one can discuss social justice issues with their family members

and feeling like 'they'll react more or less positively, or at least hear you out.' Interestingly social media and parental influence on the formation of one's political views was occasionally described antagonistically. A 16-year-old LGBTG+right ally, also interested in BLM and climate action told us: *'Back when I didn't know much about the political stuff … or anything, I would listen to what my parents had to say, but after I started searching for information on Instagram and even the homepages of different political parties, about what they believe in and do. This is when I decided that my parents' world view doesn't really work for me'* (EE 13, 21 October 2020).

Moreover, gender, socioeconomic status and ethnicity were variously linked to political identity and participation. Girls (and queer people) were consistently portrayed as more active. This was predominantly linked to a belief that personal experience of at least some discrimination informs a person's capacity for empathy, as well as stereotypes concerning gendered capacity for empathy and cultural discourses surrounding social justice work: *'Girls are definitely twice as active as boys, that's my experience, so few boys, who use their platform and their voice to make the world a better place, because most boys worry that they'll be bullied as others will think it's "gay" to care'* (EE32, 22 November 2020).

Yet, our participants almost entirely disregarded socioeconomic status and issues of class as shapers of their own or others' political participation. Whether youths considered their own families as middle class (most), well off, below average or preferred not to specify, they did not link their political participation or interest at all to their economic status. It seems likely that youths, as a function of their young age (16-18) and their role within the causes they supported (as allies and community members in the case of LGBTQ+rights movement and as allies in the case of the BLM movement) found it difficult to connect the discrimination and marginalization to systemic and structural economic inequalities. They also predominantly believed that all young people in Estonia have similar access to the internet and social media, thus their participation and non-participation hinges on issues other than access (see also, Ayllón et al., 2021). As argued above, parents were seen as a central force shaping other young people's and their own political ideologies and desires to be politically active, while some young people made tentative connections between their parents' occupation and their political views (for example working for police or military was linked to more conservative views when it came to LGBTQ+rights), and as an extension their own need to develop countering views, education levels and political views were not linked. In rare cases implicit links were articulate through saying that the family's ability to travel the world has played a role in the participant having open minded and tolerant views.

In terms of the role of ethnic and linguistic background, opinions varied. Both arguments that Russian and Estonian speaking youths are similarly politically active, but also that those *'whose first language is Russian can find it hard to voice their opinions, because they don't speak the official language'* (EE P2, 15 December 2020) were present. Among the few Russian speaking activists in our sample, however, some parallels were drawn between personal experiences of othering and discrimination, in particular from earlier childhood and the current desire to stand up for marginalized groups:

> *… we're not pure Estonians, we have Ukrainian and Russian blood, my dad is more Ukrainian and my mom is more Russian (…) so I can relate to BLM, not because I am Black, but because when I was a kid, there was a lot of of 'oh, you're Russian, you're this, you're that,' everyone would always quote Russian curse words at me, like 'look what I can do,' and stuff like that, so I can relate, and of course this isn't comparable to what is going on in the US, for example, where people are shot dead because of how they look, I've had a very light version, where I am picked on, but it still feels … shit, you know* (EE 29, 06 December 2020)

While there is statistical evidence of Russian speaking people subscribing to more normative

and patriarchal views of the gender order, no links were made by our participants between anti-LGBTQ+ views among parents and their ethnicity, rather the links were predominantly articulated as a matter of age and generation. Overall, our participants articulated their political ideologies as a result of active work of informing themselves, formulating opinions and acquainting themselves with varying perspectives.

Greece

When we search for motivations and initial stimuli for participation in the Greek case, we see that the findings of other studies (Kakepaki, 2020) are verified for the most in the narratives of our participants. For most of them, political or social activism comes as a result of personal and/or family experience or as a 'spontaneous' reaction towards specific events. For activists organised in political youth organisations with broader purposes than specific issues, such as protest against police violence or sexism, the fact that *'people usually get active/mobilised on the grounds of a specific event, for example, what happened with police violence in Nea Smyrni, and not for a more general purpose/cause or for a broader change'* (GR P8, 13 April 2021) hinders overall politicisation.

The latter takes place or is linked more to socialisation than to adherence to a specific party/organisation or to a specific political programme. Even active and politicised in a broad sense but not organised in a formal political formation, participants show a certain mistrust of political parties and organisations, condensed in the pejorative term of *κομματικοποίηση* ('*partification*' in the sense of parties' predominance in political action). Moreover, militancy through membership in political organisations is considered as a step/decision to be taken/or not in the future, and not in the years of upper high school (16-20 years of age). In the case of university students that we interviewed or followed, concrete participation in students' initiatives and also political organisations took place at university, even if some of them were interested and sporadically active during high school.

Recruitment, therefore, follows personal paths towards 'political adulthood'. Certainly representations and information coming from established movements or organisations play a role in shaping or reinforcing interest in social issues and politics in general, but young people define their initiation as a personal choice, linked to their everyday life: *'discussing with other students at the university there was an interest to do some things, not to change the world, but first to change our everyday life; so, we started like that, based on our experiences'* (GR P4, 6 April 2021). Or, in other cases, activation and politicisation are triggered by personal experiences linked to the ways (multiple) gender identities are treated in a specific social context, but also in society at large (e.g., the case of Participant 8 who is active in an anti-sexist initiative in a medium-sized city in Greece).

Based on the above, one can assume that the sense of community, although existing, takes different forms than in previous sociopolitical temporalities (Gillan 2020). Both for those who opt for a more flexible affiliation with movements and organisations, but also for those who belong to a specific organisation and distinguish their sense of belonging from that of 'older-generation' members. Part of this differentiation is due to different approaches regarding the means to propagate ideas and achieve political goals, i.e., the 'exploitation' of digital possibilities, another part has to do with mere practical difficulties stemming from different level of familiarisation with ICT:

> [smiling] *Most organisations are divided in several thematic groups. For example, in our organisation we have different thematic groups, among which the Communication group. There we make for example videos to present our position or to inform about something, we check the feed on Facebook, the technical issues of several accounts (the website etc.). Every time something happens and we have to inform the members of the organisation to share it with other people, we have the issue of older people on 'how do we share', 'how*

> *should I have a Facebook account', phone calls etc. At a first stage we had this kind of problems. When the sites were banned, there was a chaos, we were sending videos with screen recordings on how you send an invitation to friends to 'like' something, and they were still calling because they couldn't understand. Or when we started using other platforms in order to discuss more freely we had issues again. This is one part and another is the issue of politicisation which is understood [by the older] somehow in a more let's say traditional way. They don't understand how someone who is not in your union, in your assembly, might come to a meeting because they saw the form on the website. They don't accept it yet* (GRP4, 6 April 2021).

United Kingdom

In the UK, participants reported that their political activism and ideology were influenced by close relatives (e.g., a pioneer Asian union grandparent, a veteran social movement activist mother, coming from a civil rights or environmentalist family), peers (fellow pupils, YouthStrike recruitment), and colleagues (e.g., a colleague who worked as PR for Occupy; a colleague organising already in XR that was moving cities and the participant ended up replacing as coordinator in the local group). Older participants were more likely to refer to movement icons such as Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Malcom X, theorists of civil disobedience (Chenoweth), while the younger activists referred to Greta Thunberg, reading XR books such as 'This is not a Drill', and also the journalist Owen Jones. Our participants joined the BLM and XR protests, initiated, organised and participated in anti-Brexit, educational reform and anti-police bill legislation protests and became members of political organisations, parties and online political communities in diverse circumstances, and for different reasons: all relating to their own ideologisation process, lifeworld and external events occurring in relation to reacting to socio-economic and political structural conditions.

One of the founders of XR who helped to introduce non-violent civil disobedience to XR talks of his involvement in radical politics this way: *'Situation is that I've been involved in radical politics since I was 14 or 15 and in the 1980s when I was a teenager…I was involved in the peace movement and got arrested and went to prison and what have you during that period. So, I was well aware of civil disobedience as a method of bringing about political change'* (UK P8, 18 February 2021). Another XR activist (UK P7 25 February 2021) reminisces of the exact time they started their activism watching a particular theatre show landownership in the U.K. and making friends with activists in the pub on the very same night. At the same time, in 2015, Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader of the Labour Party. And for our participant that was a seminal moment as well,

> *because that's the first time in my generation and I'm nearly 50, the first time in my generation that there was a politician I trusted and believed in to make a change and make a difference. So, I got very involved in back in the Corbyn project and Momentum, and I did a similar role in digital with momentum with and they were seen as a very young organisation with lots of technological solutions for mass mobilisation with and we worked closely with Bernie Sanders team.* (UK P7 25 February 2021)

Participant 7, who ended up also doing significant work for digital media (internal XR communication), explained that XR was formed in May 2018, however it involved co-founders like Gail Bradbrook and Roger Hallam, holding town halls around the country or going to festivals and just talking and soliciting interest, but the first XR action was blocking bridges in November 2018 in London. While lonely to begin with due to going to London on his own it ended up 'a very positive experience in terms of sharing it with others…I made lots of contacts, friends.' When asked whether he reflected on his one lifeworld and what being a political activist meant, he replied:

> *I was in sales and marketing, so pretty much all of my professional career, I've been a corporate life, suits and ties and boardrooms and venture capitalists, investors, business*

> *planning styles. So, I've spent 25 years telling the wrong stories for the wrong people, for the wrong reasons. And decided to change that about seven years ago now. And step off that corporate treadmill, you know, and do something different* (UK P7 25 February 2021).

Meanwhile, an XR activist in her early 30s talked about watching that very same XR protest like this: *'We were starting to talk about these zealots, these weird people who were blockading bridges and rebelling and trying to prove something new. And so, I went to what they call The Talk'* (UK P2, 30 October 2020), after which she joined her local group and took part in the fall 2019 Rebellion in London. Another participant in his 30s who was always interested in the environmental problem but hadn't engaged so much in protest, describes joining his local group after they *'bumped into protests in central London…it was the big pink boat that stopped the junction between Oxford Circus and Regent Street. And I started getting more like a sense of what the protesters were asking, what it was about'* (UK P1, 29 October 2020). A retired professional conservationist with previous involvement in Greenpeace joined XR because:

> *All our polite lobbying of government, all our campaigns, lawful campaigns were achieving nothing significant. We were winning small battles, but we were losing the war basically. So, some time in 2019, I heard about extinction rebellion and I saw that they were adopting a new approach. They were ringing the alarm more effectively than anybody else about climate change and biodiversity loss* (UK P4, 14 January 2021).

The 16 year old XR Youth activist (UK P11, 19 March 2021) we interviewed joined XR Youth after being part of the Youth Strike movement. He felt that although he was originally skeptical of XR's tactics, such as civil disobedience and direct action, after spending more time around activists realized that those might actually be the kind of tactics that are needed to really create change and then joined XR Youth.

Between the April 2019 Rebellion to October 2019, XR saw a massive explosion in recruitment of movement participants. By joining local groups in 2019, XR activists that we interviewed received *'training in non-violent direct action, knowing legal rights, and understanding all the information that you need to know if you're going to put yourself in a position possibly of breaking the law'* (UK P4, 14 January 20121). All the activists had roles inside XR (these have mandate and are given 'by consent'). For example, working as coordinator (internal or external), others assigned to coordinate 'digital media' which takes care of the internal communication or 'media messaging' which means working for external and publicity reach out communication (see indication of that in participants table).

By the 'October Rebellion' of 2019, with thousands of movement participants entering the movement the experience was not the same as in April 2019:

> *I didn't enjoy it at all because it was much harder in terms of police response. I was six months pregnant and it was really hard emotionally because we were trying to take so many sites, which was not necessary in hindsight, and build up so many infrastructures and in a way trying to please everyone, the new recruits, as well as the old ones, as well as trying to do something new… our focus as a local group was meant to be around climate justice and social justice, not just be this white middle class of London* (UK P2, 30 October 2020).

During the same period, another XR activist joined XR (UK P12, 14 April 2021), and it is worth quoting parts of her explanation:

> *I've never felt that I was an activist before XR…And my mum was quite active in terms of certain campaigns that were happening in the 80s…I didn't really think of them. Until more recently, that they've obviously informed my own practice and things that I do. But I would*

> *say for many years, although I have you know, promoted green ways of living in sustainable ways of living. Now, in hindsight, I don't think I was very sustainable at all. You know, it was very surface level individual actions...And I think that's working in a design agency, working with advertising and working with different brands to help them make their brands, but also to help sell their products. It's quite interesting to sort of be completely conscious and aware of how society and people are manipulated... I think when I went and left one of the jobs, I was at a few years back, I had a bit of time. And actually, having that time is when I got involved in XR a little bit. So, I thought to myself, I had the space and time to think about it. And I've always worked very hard. And in some respects you realise that as a nation and as a country, we are working so much that sometimes people don't have the time to reflect and think about all the things that are happening in the community and in society as a whole, because you're so focused on the day to day grind and juggling the things that these gradual changes and shifts in the way that we live take place without you even noticing... Especially now, since I've set up this food bank, how different it can be from having a jet set lifestyle of like flying around and owning X, Y, and Z, whatever you want, when there are people who are literally relying on handouts to feed their children. And it's it doesn't make sense in such a rich country.*

There are two important points to make here regarding XR. The first is that XR is multifaceted in terms of ideological spectrum: *'And it's different things for different people, and depending on who you ask, you'll get a very different response. From the very beginning, XR created a slogan which is beyond politics, and the premise of that slogan was that the climate emergency is bigger than any ideological difference that we might have. So, we say we need everybody. We need to come together to fix it. And really that means that we're non-partisan. Often that was confused by people as being apolitical'* (UK P7, 25 February 2021). An example of this paradox is the 16 year old XR Youth (UK P11, 19 March 2021) we interviewed:

> *I think on things like social justice, I tend to be an environmentalist and more radical, whereas I think on things such as many social issues or cultural issues I tend to lean to the right. I was a member of the Tories, but I ended up leaving because of the recent developments with the anti-protest bill. I very much believe that we still need a mainly conservative government...And I think watching not a single conservative MP vote against the new policing bill was when I had enough.*

These above quotes reflect some of the key reasons, ideological perspectives and ways that activists joined XR. The BLM participants we interviewed were involved in three BLM political actions in June 2020 in Leicester prompted by the global protests in reaction to the murder of George Floyd in the United States. Two of those were protests, one was a small one with 30 participants observing pandemic safety rules and the second one was one of the biggest protests Leicester has seen in the last two decades. Both took place at the Clocktower, a key protest place in the city centre. Another political activity was 'a vigil' held at Victoria Park. Our participants initiated, organised and communicated both internally and externally for these events.

Leicester's demographics played a particular role in the proliferation of protest and its success. This is partly because Leicester is an ethically diversity city and was named the first majority minority city in the UK where more than 50% of the population is from an ethnic or racial minority group. During the summer of 2020 scandals of modern slavery emerged as news of Leicester's 'dark factories' in the food and garment industry were linked to surges of cases and weak enforcement of covid safety rules. The high Covid rates meant the city stayed in lockdown for the longest period than anywhere else in the UK. To give you a sense of political atmosphere, this is how a Leicester Member of Parliament (UK P20, 16 September 2020) talked about her city and the BLM protests:

> *A black person is five times more likely to be stopped and searched than a white person, as*

> *in America. It appears the police can act with impunity, as very little will be done in terms of enabling them to face criminal prosecution. And it's also been of particular concern to see the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus upon African, Asian and minority ethnic communities…The grim intersection of racial and class discrimination has a deadly consequence during this pandemic. Nowhere is this clearer than in the sections of Leicester's garment industry, where a resurgence of media reports has highlighted instances of severe exploitation…One of the most inspiring aspects of the Black Lives Matter movement has been the leadership, energy and contribution of young people. It fills me with hope for the future to actually see the fantastic organizing that the younger generation has already demonstrated, because the existential crisis we face from institutional racism to climate breakdown require radical solutions. Yet I know that young people have been creative but have had the creative ambition and skills to tackle these injustices head on'.*

A leader (UK P5, 21 January 2021) in one of the long established anti-racist organisations in Leicester explained why she helped (like many others her age) those much younger to organise protests:

> *But the anger is anger for when I talk to people, black members of our organisation or wider community, like my friend who is asylum seeker, and her children are stateless. They came. They joined because the anger…Initially I didn't see the video; I couldn't see the video. But then I said, I have to see it personally. It created anger in me. Like, what else? What else? Like a knee on neck, someone's neck. Even if he's a criminal, he doesn't deserve this. Why? Who gave you the right to take that life? Yes. Like he was begging you. You have to listen to him. Stop it. But anger was what brought us all together… And yes, someone who is not black cannot feel that. But as a human, it goes beyond race. It goes beyond race.*

She helped organise with her long-established organisation the first smaller protest of about thirty people. Within three days, a second massive demonstration was initiated by 'black bloom' youth organisation in their late teens and early 20s, which were supported by older activists who contacted the city council to ensure that pandemic rules were enforced. Her explanation was very much to the point: *'Because they were contacted by young people, not us. That plays that's the thing that we didn't have. I speak to them like a mom…We speak about ideologies… We might we are able to communicate that to people our age. I strongly believe only young people can speak soul to soul to young people and can wake them up'* (UK P5, 21 January 2021).

Two other activists (UK P3, 12 November 2020 & UK P6 4 February 2021) met up a bit before the George Floyd murder broke in the news to look at material one of them found showing that her grandfather was a pioneering union activist in the 1960s and 1970s, the first Asian to lead a strike in the UK. While they were looking at newspaper cuttings and news items of that period, they realised that some of these stories about police violence and civil rights could be in one of the newspapers today. After the BLM protests started, they decided to hold a 'vigil' in the park instead of a protest. Because of the racial politics and tensions in Leicester regarding country origin and wealth/social stratification status, which are further complicated by religious faiths, there was always the fear of being seen as the Asian hijacking the BLM movement. There were black organisers who argued that only black people should be at the forefront. Historically, this is also a bit more complex 'in my grandfather's generation, someone who's black included everyone of colour'. Here she justifies her in co-organising the vigil (UK P3, 12 November 2020):

> *I think for me, I had to really pick my speech, so to speak, because I know that there were people in the community that thought that by me organising, I am hijacking. So, I remember it was conversation of a sort of making reassuring people that that's not what this is about. So when I stood up there, it was really important for me to tell my grandfather's story, to almost signify that actually what I tried to do when I stood up was to say. We need to go back to working together if we want to combat racism it is about unity. They did it, they tried to*

> *unify to do it, and we need to continue to unify to do it, which is why I'm stood here today and which is why I'm standing up for the rights and for Black Lives Matter.*

We asked also two of the adolescent participants who are members/supporters of the two dominant political parties (Conservatives and Labour) in the UK (UK P9, 7 March 2021, UK P10, 10 March 2021) about their political standpoint, but also what they thought about the XR and BLM political activities. The Conservative participant, said the following about BLM: 'I think it's a bit pointless because in America they were responding to the George Floyd case. But I'm not really sure what that has to do with politics in Leicester or in Britain' (UK P9, 7 March 2021). And this about XR:

> *I don't really agree with it that much...I think have you seen the Michael Moore documentary? Yes, the humans, Yes, I thought a lot of it was accurate, these kind of climate groups. A lot of the times they have good intentions, but really. The green energy sector is funding a lot of the movement...I would say I tried to avoid ideology... And I think that probably the best way to do that isn't by engaging in these big political movements. Just sort of in your own life...If you if you're someone who's a climate activist and someone who really believes in that stuff, I think it's more useful to, you know, plant a really nice garden than to try and go on Twitter or something and get into arguments with people.*

We asked P9 whether he feels he is part of a community and his reply was that national identity is not much of a meaningful identity, *'because I think with in the modern age, with television and the Internet, everyone's sort of divided'* and *'I think a lot of what Boris Johnson was saying about how kind of get Brexit done, that was very appealing. But I think after COVID, I definitely wouldn't vote for him'*. As for his opinion on the pandemic measures: *'for someone like me who's had no health problems, who is very young. It's not something that I am really scared of. I think it should be if you're kind of vulnerable, then you should be under lockdown. I don't think I need to be under lockdown'*.

The adolescent participant who is a Labour party member (UK P10, March 2021) writes opinion pieces on media literacy for a youth organisation and has been at many protests ranging from education reform to Brexit and climate change. He went to the three main protests against Brexit with his parents and another family, whilst he organised a local education reform with a very small group from his school. We asked him why he went to the anti-Brexit demo: '*The main reason for going was I wasn't able to vote in that first one. And, you know, I think that it's a great loss that I won't be able to participate in Erasmus or travel around Europe for free or if I so choose, go and live and work in another European country'.* We enquired into whether he felt that had an impact in the small educational reform demo he co-organised: *'We got a lovely letter, but not much else, so, no, I think actually more of an impact will be post coverage when the whole exam grading fiasco last year happened and people began to ask the question, are GCSE* [UK school exams] *really necessary*'. We also asked about XR as the participant had been in one of the London protests:

> *I think that the role of extinction rebellion is really to aggravate, and I don't think that it's an organisation which necessarily provides all the solutions, but I think it certainly is the best driver of the conversation. Although I don't necessarily agree with all the protest action...I think the on the whole, they are very efficient at moving the conversation in the right direction and making it a discussion point for a considerable amount of time after they do something'. When asked about the BLM protest, he said: 'I have my two my cousins are mixed race and they were, you know, incredibly angry about what had happened to them when they were in that teenage years. And they were regularly stopped and searched and profiled by the police... And, you know, I did support much of what the BLM movement did, at least in this country* (UK P10, March 2021).

While this section has attempted to look at ICT use, ideology, identify and community in the three countries the next section will look at the ways participants used ICT for debating, organising, coordinating and mobilizing political activities in the three countries. Finally, in section 6, we will offer a comparison across the three countries to conclude the report.

6. How: ICT use for civic participation in Estonia, Greece and the UK

Estonia

As argued above, studied youths (16-18 years old) credited the internet and social media with having a central role in their political identity and in their political participation. Most youths considered themselves to be very active social media users for entertainment and everyday logistics, but social media was also cast as central for informing themselves and developing their political views. The diversity of platforms used for consumptive purposes was higher than those used for expressive or mobilizing purposes. Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, VKontakte and Tiktok were mentioned as sources of political information. Social media content was argued to inform and lead to a development of political views through a combination of learning new information, broadening one's perspective as well as being faced with emotionally impactful personal stories of discrimination: *'Actually it was the internet that made me get involved in BLM, because the videos circulating online really had a very strong emotional impact on me'* (EE P24, 07 November 2020).

As youths started becoming more interested in social justice or particular movements, their preference for platforms shifted, indicating that the information, networks of content creators and content they have access to on these platforms, or consider following on those platforms, varies by topic, and more significantly by country of origin. Across three groups, but in particular in the BLM and LGBTQ+rights active groups it was argued that international (English speaking) accounts were much better for informational purposes than local Estonian ones, that were often accused of being ill-informed, narrow minded, even racist and homophobic. Very few local political or activist accounts were elevated, mostly these were meme accounts, remixing politics, humour and sarcasm. Thus, one of our LGBTQ+ active participants told us (note that she is talking about her interest in BLM): *'I don't use Twitter, but … as my friends send me a lot of stuff from there then, in a way, I get content from there. I tend to not use TikTok, but I did, a lot, when BLM movement rose up, I used it a lot for content from the US and other countries, to find out what is going on elsewhere. But right now, I don't really see a point in using it'* (EE P18, 9 December 2020).

When our interviewed youths started working more actively towards their preferred issues of justice their perception of the affordances of particular platforms could shift as well. Thus a 17-year-old participant describes his changing relationship to Facebook because of its popularity in Estonia and its particular features (Event pages) and affordances (spreadability, in particular):

> *I didn't really used to be on Facebook that much, Facebook – and I'm lumping it in with Messenger - was just for interaction, but no new content reached me through there. My main places for informing myself and figuring the world out used to be Tumblr and Instagram. Facebook has become more relevant now, when there are events or protest actions like Heameeleavaldus (a portmanteau of words 'being glad or pleased' (heameel) and 'demonstration' (meeleavaldus)), because then you can share an event or set up an event, say that you are attending an event, also share people's speeches, articles. It's still not the most important platform, but it has become more significant for me. I still don't spend time on Facebook, but I go there, when events or protests are forthcoming, to contribute towards their success. I'm not waiting for a mouse to run into my mouth* (EE P12, 19 October 2020).

Active youths also pointed out that they turn to social media to learn how to be more persuasive when advocating for the causes they believed in. Beyond factual information, this also included

learning rhetorical techniques form international social justice content creators:

> *I search for arguments, I don't want to be superficial when I argue for something, I don't want it to seem like I don't know what I am talking about. So … these accounts that I follow, they are much better than I am at explaining what they believe in, or better at posing the arguments to make it clear why and what, so I definitely get that form there, this ability to explain that this is why it is important, and this is why you should care* (EE P18, 9 December 2020).

Social media was credited with amplifying both the feeling that the situation is, in terms of social justice, really bad, which was linked to the personal realization that something has to be done or a solidification of one's activist views as well as amplifying the messages of other people who share one's concerns for social justice:

> *Maybe you don't even see LGBT people in your everyday life, or people who are active like you are, and then you go on social media and realize that actually the number of people who support these ideas is pretty big, or that there are many people standing up for a cause, and that can be so important for the minority group or an individual member of a minority group, both mentally and physically* (EE P18, 9 December 2020).

In our discussions about social media platforms, their role, affordances, constraints and needs for regulation, questions of surveillance never came up, and the interviewed youth took no extra steps to protect themselves from possible data-leak or surveillance related harm. They did however have experiences with and were concerned about online harassment and cyberbullying and did (especially in the context group) self-censor in lieu of managing which audiences see which facets of their (political) identities and their worldviews: *'Cyberbullying makes me hesitant; I have experienced bullying and it feels like my country doesn't care about me. It's scary to show local people who I am (…) it's complicated, on the one hand I don't think that the government should interject in information flows, but when it's hostile then someone certainly should interject'* (EE P15, 4 January 2021).

Even the context group, who were not active themselves, argued that in general, social media is crucial for forming opinions and making sense of the world, but they were less likely to believe in the capacity of their own social media content (because of their limited knowledge, communication skills or follower counts) to change the minds of others. Our two active groups however strongly believed that explaining issues on social media leads to changing minds. Internet specific practices (posting petitions, sharing experiences, posting information and calls to action) were generally all seen as 'real' forms of activism, although a few of our informants in the context group did point out that social media activism can be too '*performative*' (EE P5, 1 December 2020) or a bit *'pointless' at least when you're not like an influencer or something, with lots of followers'* (EE P7, 23 November 2020) (cf Sipos 2017).

Greece

There is no mobilisation without (any) use of digital media. Regardless of the type of activism, militancy and (sense of) belonging, all individuals and communities make use of digital media and digital space(s). Facebook, Instagram – showing a steadily growing tendency among younger people in Greece – YouTube and different kinds of messaging apps as well as video conferencing platforms are used for both internal and external communication and information.

This undeniable and irreversible reality does not, however, erase reluctance, distrust and criticism towards platforms and apps. There was a case among our respondents, where Facebook banned the site of the organisation during the *'rise of censorship incidents in the beginning of 2021 on Facebook and on Instagram. Sites of reporters, posts of lawyers, for example that of Thanassis Kambagiannis who was in the Golden Dawn trial, sites of political organisations, our*

site was banned twice' (GR P4, 6 April 2021). These incidents are mostly linked to censorship automatically generated when the name of a person convicted for terrorism who was on a hunger strike for several weeks was mentioned and it:

> *generated a discussion within the movement(s) inviting people also outside the movement to seek new ways of politicisation in the so-called "digital sphere"; to use what we call the digital space, because this is a major issue in the condition of the pandemic, but to have discussions outside [these platforms], in more open-source stuff, for example to stop organising things through Messenger but through Signal and so on* (GR P4, 6 April 2021).

Others avoid posting personal opinions for security reasons because they *'don't know how data on Facebook and Instagram is used, because they are private companies'* (GR P2, 31 March 2021). In the same vein, online meetings are avoided, especially when operational matters such as tactics to occupy a university are discussed (GR P7, 12 April 2021).

As far as the question of the distinction or fusion between online and offline political spaces is concerned, our respondents not only distinguish between the two areas, but they also tend to classify them in a clearly hierarchical manner. Some note that *scripta manent*, in the sense that *'having something in written in Messenger that is not just said in a meeting or in a gathering, but is simply written, this certainly helps'* (GR P1, 26 February 2021). Nevertheless, digital media serve for the most as a means of (counter)information diffusion and less as a meaningful space where political strategies can be deployed. Participant 8, who is an activist on gender issues, describes this distinction in a rather eloquent manner: *'For me, the online is more for informing people on a specific issue and making some incidents known; and when we talk about osmosis and communication and maybe better understanding of some things, this is very difficult to do online and you need a dynamic communication that is mostly communicating with people face-to-face.'*

For organised activists, the online world cannot substitute offline, face-to-face interactions and mobilisations. It is helpful but not necessary for practical issues and it has gained importance during the COVID pandemic, but *'face-to-face communication cannot by any means be compared with online communication; the latter plays a role only in arranging the time and the place'* (GR P1, 26 February 2021). However, in some cases, for example, *'when it comes to global issues, online mobilisations can be very helpful'* (GR P2, 31 March 2021).

In a sense, there is a distinction between levels of action, where the online is considered more useful in terms of information, while actual political mobilisation is held offline. The importance of face-to-face interactions leads to an increasing anxiety towards the possible repercussions of the pandemic and the generalisation of ICT use. Participant 7 who is a first-year university student – not yet attending any face-to-face classes – and has been mobilising against Police violence describes the fears she shares with her colleagues:

> *This is something we are much afraid of. We believe that in general the government has found the solution and once we have a demonstration etc., yes I personally believe that the government will have the easy solution, that is 'Oh, you are having an occupation? Go ahead! There will be no result at all because the classes will be held online'. So, I think that this is a tactic that will be consolidated. I am not saying that we won't go back to our faculties, but it is convenient for them [government] to be remotely, not to have interactions with the other students or the professors; everyone being at their home, alienated, not participating, not understanding what is going on, so that they can pass their bills etc.* (GR P7, 12 April 2021).

United Kingdom

In this section, we lay out organisational (mobilisation, recruitment) and communication as-

pects of XR and BLM, as collected during netnographic research (included participating in online training, physical activities, such as protests) and online interviews.

XR follows a self-organising model called 'holacracy'. This system was designed to actively mitigate power and has different groups at the local, national and global level. The principles of the model are: 1 Shared purpose, 2. Distributed authority, 3. Decision-making by consent; 4. Role descriptions; 5. Advice process; 6. Coordination. In this logic there is distributed authority which gives permission to make decisions and through roles with different mandates and purposes and with individuals acquiring 'roles' (power mandate accountability). Authority is given to individual by the group by consent decision-making. This works by being willing to lower the bar to consent, asking: Is this safe enough to try? If you don't consent you have to show how this will cause harm to the movement. Because of consent, things take ages to decide, but not as long as by consensus, which activists term 'stuck in the muddle of Occupy'. Activists use to working in hierarchical organisations need to make a cultural shift to work in this system. As Participant 4 (21 January 2021) explains:

> *It's unusual that it takes some getting used to, particularly when you've come through a career where you're used to structures which are very much top down and directed from above. And it's actually quite empowering, quite refreshing to be given the freedom to make your own decisions locally, as basically the rule is, as long as we comply with the ten principles and values of XR and as long as we kind of stand up for the three demands, then we can do pretty much what we like.*

From the outside no one can tell the person with a role what to do: they have autonomy within their role description which makes them accountable because their role can be withdrawn, but that function is not used frequently because people find it hard to withdraw authority. During the pandemic, XR went through a major restructuring and dissolving of circles in XR. There are problems with 'roles' because in teams if roles do not work, then you a have brittle organisational structure that can break. Some of the problems with roles is that things can go wrong because one role takes power over another, there might be duplication of effort, or confusion if no one knows what the other is doing. For the 'Advice Process' activists with roles can ask for advice, but they don't have to follow it. It is recommended that people don't overuse this process because it 'ties their shoelaces' and it all goes back to consensus muddle of 'trying to make everyone happy'.

There is a mechanism called 'Coordination' of a team circle. An external coordinator is a representative for a team while an internal coordinator keeps track and checks things are happening, makes suggestions and might reassign a person if they don't carry out their role. Important is the culture of teams, which is supposed to shift from hierarchical to embracing everyone: 'We put feelings second to that of the group', 'In XR we work with the speed of trust'. Importance is placed in being open and transparent and there have to be social connections to make and a good working culture. Facilitation of meetings – which during the lockdown usually took place on zoom – is carried by a 'Facilitator' who ensures that all voices are heard. There are rotations of roles every six months and there are elections to elect coordinators (they can be re-elected). Changes are done through what is called the 'Tensions' mechanism. The change is response to tensions that need to be resolved so the activist states what tensions the change it is resolving. There is XR constitution that states how all this works. With the pandemic there was more turnover of XR members especially after living expenses were withdrawn. One of the co-founders of XR (UK P8, 18 February 2021) explained how this system was organised:

> *It took about a year and a half of research and conversations, so it didn't come out of anywhere. It wasn't like Occupy where there was no pre-organisation. Already 20 or 30 people involved in designing a modern social movement. And there were six or seven sort of key elements which made it successful. One, of course, was mass civil disobedience and anoth-*

> *er one was trying to transcend the conflict between hierarchy and horizontalism. And the middle way or the transcendent sort of notion was a holacratic structure where there's delegated authority to mandated groups to have autonomy to get on and initiate creative action within their mandates and on. The big advantage was that is that it created an institutionalisation of the social movement, so it doesn't collapse quickly because of structurelessness, as has happened with all the horizontal movements over the last 20, 30 years... But in my view, it's been extremely unsuccessful in being able to create a leadership structure that can create strategic coherence and inspiration.*

There are some key events in XR's history that we discussed with all XR members. That members as long as they adhere to XR principles can act means that even when there is disagreement and negative polling about a specific action that action could go ahead. The action that received extensive negative publicity was of an affiliated group to XR which did the disruption in the London underground: '[we] *were mortified, because we knew that they were they were targeting people, working class people that were that had nothing to do with what they were talking about and that could not understand the whole meaning of what they were doing because they were just trying to go to work at six o'clock in the morning to put bread on the table'* (UK P2, 30 October 2020).

XR Youth literally barged in and occupied an XR meeting making demands with part of the conflict being about the disruption of Heathrow airport designed by Roger Hallam, one of the co-founders. An XR Youth activist explained categorically that XR Youth is autonomous from (main/central/national) XR: *'So, we tend to be significantly more radical and more focused on working with other communities and supporting things like racial justice... but I think recently we very much try to improve our relations with main XR.... There's a rather different culture within the two different groups and I mean, officially, XR youth is not part of XR'* (UK P11, 19 March 2021).

There are conflicts amongst groups and at leadership level which one participant put rather beautifully (UK P7):

> *It's ideological. It's cultural, it's organisational. And the key question is who gets to decide? Still, we still don't know the answer to that. We're still figuring that one out, we're getting better. And yes, there are disagreements in relation to strategy or tactics and also disagreements about what is considered non-violent, for instance. And these traditionally and ideological disagreements are traditionally why the left fails. This is why all movements fail. This is why the labour left in socialism fails.*

In terms of ICT use, participants explained that there is the 'media and messaging' group for external communication and the 'tech group' later called 'digital group' for internal communication. We interviewed a leading figure in the digital media group in main XR, two more local activist (one XR and one XR Youth) who had both internal and external communication roles at the same time. Key platforms used by XR are: Glassfrog.com – commercial app to support holacracy, where XR members organise roles, hives, circles, and there are currently complaints that another platform might need to be developed. Originally basecamp was used but had to be abandoned after it couldn't scale after 8,000 XR members went on it. Communication international leaders met in Germany to discuss the problem of digital infrastructure and a decision was made to use for cloud storage infrastructure in Switzerland, which is carbon neutral to address concerns of digitization impact on the environment and law enforcement issue, as Swiss law is more protective. Mattermost is being used which is an open-source version of slack for project management. Publicizing and coordinating moved from WhatsApp to Signal and Telegram broadcast groups from May 2019 onwards because of perceived privacy issues related to WhatsApp. For mass audience publicity and for introduction recruitment talk and training XR uses Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and recording training can be found YouTube. It is interesting

that XR Youth activist argued that they mainly targeted Facebook at older people *'because we have a lot of parents of primary school age children that want to engage with on that. Whereas in XR Youth, you know, many young people don't use Facebook, so we mainly focus on Instagram and Twitter and like save the Facebook when we have the need to break events'* (UK P11, 19 March 2021).

In relation to BLM protest groups in Leicester, organisation was carried out by pre-established organisations supporting very young activists organising impromptu. The former had the know-how and networks with city council, police, fire services and plenty of organizational experience which they made available to the young firebrands who used incredibly effectively digital media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram to publicize the protests and several platforms to coordinate and organise including zoom meetings of the key organisers. There was no innovation in the use of platforms, or an organizational one as in the case of XR.

There is an extensive discussion that we had with activists both in XR and BLM about alliances with other groups, mentoring, online hate speech and policing. We share a few key points before wrapping up this section. In XR several activists mentioned how the BLM protests jolted them to activism again during the pandemic in the summer and how much need there is to make those alliances. Empirically this became evident when there were common racial, social and environmental justice platforms of BLM and XR during the September 2020 Rebellion in London. Worth mentioning also is that there is a conflict inside BLM regarding 'allyship' by whites in particular. This is how a participant (herself black) described it:

> *And she said, I am an activist. I believe in this. Why I'm pushed aside because I'm not black. So, they came to us saying: 'We were rejected. We were not allowed to be on the forefront because we are not black, we are white... they told us: you cannot understand, you should be black to understand'. And people obviously in all fights are different people from different backgrounds. So, we didn't agree with that bit. And they stopped working with us because we had a mixture* (UK P5, 21 January 2021).

In terms of mentoring this was evident with XR Youth activist mentioning being mentored by an older activist in their late twenties, and in France when a Youth Strike leader we interviewed told us that he got a lot of his mentoring from an XR activist in their seventies, a veteran grandmother that was in XR, and before then in other movements going all the way back to the 1960s. In BLM Leicester this was even more pronounced as you had mentoring of the late teens and early twenties by anti-racist long-time organisers in their forties, and these in turn were mentored by old-time activists in their sixties and seventies. We asked an activist about this:

> *I didn't think they needed much to be honest. They really organised themselves. You know, they knew what they wanted to do. And all we did was put, you know, put the boat in the legs on that. They knew what they wanted to do. They were amazing. Got it. I don't think they had any idea of how big this was going to be* (UK P6, 4 February 2021).

Another fascinating intergenerational moment is also offered here by one the BLM organisers (UK P3, 12 November 2020):

> *I really did notice that the older community did want the youth to dictate what they wanted to do...to sort of talk about how they were feeling, and how they wanted to go... there was the elder black generation was sort of almost relieved that there was a new generation that was going to continue fighting for equal rights, because it almost felt to me like they felt like that the conversation will end with them passing away, sadly, and it will not continue. They said, we can die happy now because we know that there's a generation that is not going to leave all the work that's gone on up until now forgotten.*

To conclude, there were discussions about hate speech, online trolling and disinformation with all participants which reflect the usual experiences with interesting but atypical events. The policing and pandemic impact we did ask about and there were concerns raised by every single participant, except one that found the Metropolitan police's approach a good one. The reasons for this connect to the recent backlash against the policing bill brought in by the conservative UK government which has important consequences for XR, as part of its tactic includes getting arrested (that in itself has attracted criticism of only the white middle class who can afford to be arrested) and BLM as key register for framing the movement of course was the violent illegal murder of a black man by the police. In that sense, defunding the police and demands for abolition that were made in the US found their way in the UK BLM scene. However, what is possibly more important is the suspicion stemming from the disproportionate attention and stop and search directed against black and Asian people. This BLM activist (mixed race) explains how she felt when a police woman approached her at the end of the BLM event she organised and how she felt about it:

> *And this woman came up to me and said, can you make sure these people have dispersed immediately because you don't want what has been a positive event to turn into something negative to which I just looked and just said, not now, not today. And her face I know she was annoyed and I know if it had been any other day, she would have probably pulled me aside, stopped and searched me. And then I made a complaint about that because I felt that it was out of order. And I felt that she was biased. And I felt that, you know, obviously in her head, as soon as she saw a collection of black people, she felt threatened* (UK P6, 4 February 2021).

7. Comparisons and concluding thoughts

This final section summarises the key findings for each country, followed by a table which offers key observations, identifying similarities and differences in why our participants participated and how, in terms of ICT use in particular. In **Estonia** it can be argued that the difference between the context group and the activist groups was not based on political interest, informedness, or views, but on how acute the problems seemed to young people (with both too acute and not acute enough leading to chosen inactivity), with their sense of political self-efficacy, with a tendency towards rationalizing inactivity as morally valuable because of its centrism and presumed 'rationality,' and with presumed risks, including from racist and homophobic family members' negative feedback. Young people in all three groups were eloquent and informed in discussing their own, their peers and their parents' political views, indicating that neither the subject matter nor the vocabulary was new to them. While youths in the context group were more likely to say that they took self-care motivated breaks from consuming social and political news, youths in all three groups seemed highly informed and highly interested in having a debate. As Boulianne and Theocharis (2020: 4) point out 'if young people are turned off by electoral and party politics, they have not lost the willingness or desire to participate in civic life in general'. The main difference here was that the context group were adamant about avoiding having these conversations in public fora, especially on social media, where they had to articulate their thoughts to unknown audiences, while the activist youths saw 'using their voice and their platform' as an undeniable responsibility and the risks of harassment, hate speech and trolling as an acceptable cost of being able to change some minds.

In **Greece**, despite changes in communication generated by the spread of digital media and even though online political content and interactions are omnipresent, the crucial area of political encounters is still considered to be the street. Demonstrations are still considered to be the most effective means of protest, while online spaces are, both by activists and non-activists, reified as a means of alternative or counterinformation that should lead to most active participation, always situated in physical space(s). Even recruitment processes or assessment of political actions' results follow the above-mentioned distinction. When asked to assess whether specific struggles, such as that against the law on tertiary education that led to occupations confronted with police violence in Thessaloniki, have been successful or not, the response is usually two-fold: from a practical standpoint, the mobilisations have not succeeded in preventing the bill from passing in the Parliament or enforcing the government to dismantle specific forces accused for recurrent violent incidents. From a symbolic view, however, the fact that an increasing number of people have defied lockdown and restrictive measures and demonstrated in the streets and squares of several cities and neighbourhoods is considered as a proof of a disposition for future mobilisations.

In the **UK**, participants who are active members of civic society organisations which are robustly organised (decentralised or hierarchical) utilise specialised types of platforms for different activities and are mindful of internet safety and surveillance issues, while those that are members of less organised movements rely on more commercial and general platforms to organise, communicate, coordinate, and publicise their activities. Due to the pandemic, most activities moved online and in one of the organisations there was intense restructuring taking advantage of the pandemic period. In the less organised settings, participants seem to rely more on inter-generational mentoring to acquire skills and experience of organising offline events, for example in relation to acquiring permission to hold social or political events during the pandemic to adhere to covid19 safety measures. This inter-generational mentoring is not without conflict especially in the more organised settings. Participants which are active, and have been active

since their adolescent years, have consistently talked of their family and overall lifeworld experience (i.e. working, travelling, certain traumatic experiences) playing a significant role in their decision to be active in political life, and by extension for their active political participation on digital networks. In the table below, we identify key issues which may offer a snapshot of how the sociopolitical, economic and digital environments in each country (see section 1) affect the choice of issues active youth and older activists are more readily taking up. In the table below we offer a summary table for the three countries.

	Why	How	Comparison
Estonia LGBTQ BLM General	Speaking out for the marginalised as a matter of responsibility and an only way forward to a better society. Leading to other people becoming more informed and changing their minds. Linked to personal experience of discrimination that informs a person's capacity for empathy, as well as cultural discourses surrounding social justice.	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, VKontakte and Tiktok. Not preoccupied with questions of surveillance and took no extra steps to protect themselves. International (English speaking) accounts were much better for informational purposes than local Estonian ones, that were often accused of being ill informed, narrow minded, even racist and homophobic.	**Estonia to Greece and UK** **Differences:** Speaking out for the marginalised. Less worried about issues of privacy and surveillance. **Similarities:** Linked to personal experience of discrimination an injustice. Some use of similar platforms.
Greece Anti-police violence Anti-gender violence General	Mistrust of political parties and organisations. Interest to do some things, not to change the world, but first to change our everyday life. Activation and politicisation are triggered by personal experiences linked to the ways (multiple) gender identities are treated in a specific social context, but also in society at large.	Facebook, Instagram, YouTubeMessaging apps as well as video conferencing platforms Reluctance, distrust and criticism towards platforms and apps – preference for open source A means of (counter) information diffusion and less as a meaningful space where political strategies can be deployed.	**Greece to Estonia and UK** **Differences:** More distrust to political parties and commercial platforms ICT less a space for organisation and strategy **Similarities:** Politicisation are triggered by personal experiences Some use of similar platforms

	Why	How	Comparison
UK XR local national global BLM Leicester General	Adopting new more affective approach to environmental activism. Anger about police brutality and fight for equal rights. Inequality: people relying on handouts to feed their children in a rich country.	Innovation in organisation and communication in XR (holacracy model, carbon neutral cloud, glassfrog, basecamp, mattermost). BLM Leicester: pre-existing networks supporting very social media savvy young people. Adolescents don't use Facebook but use Twitter and Instagram a lot for their political participation.	**UK to Greece and Estonia** **Differences:** In XR there is organisational and communication innovation. In BLM there is reliance on pre-existing networks There is mentoring for the younger activists. **Similarities:** With Estonia: Anger about inequality, racial, social injustice. With Greece: Distrust of police and government

To conclude, Estonian participants are active for equal rights for the BLM movement and against discrimination for the LGBTQ, but they are less worried about issues of privacy and surveillance in comparison to participants in Greece and the UK. Perhaps this is because the media and political system are far more polarised due to EU related crisis of recent years. Greek participants have far more distrust to political parties and commercial platforms than the Estonians and see ICTs less a space for organisation and strategy than the UK participants. UK participants differ in that there is organisational and more widespread mentoring for the younger activists. The three countries exhibit similarities however. Political engagement is linked to personal experience of discrimination an injustice and influenced by familial and peer networks. Politicisation are triggered by personal life experiences and specific events especially anger surrounding inequality, racial, social and environmental injustice. There is also some use of similar platforms, but the ways these are used varies in the three countries (i.e., young people use less Facebook in Estonia and UK, but still do use it for publicization UK to reach parents or older people, Estonians and UK participants use more Instagram and Tik Tok than Greek participants, and all follow debates on Twitter in particular. More comparisons should arise from the Digital Storytelling Workshops taking place in each country (2 in each) and one with participants from all three countries, which could illuminate further the comparisons for WP6 as a whole.

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Appendix A Table of Participants

Table 1: Participants Estonia [EE]

Participant	Nature of participation	Date
Participant 1	Context group	22.12.2020
Participant 2	Context group	15.12.2020
Participant 3	Context group	29.11.2020
Participant 4	Context group	21.12.2020
Participant 5	Context group	01.12.2020
Participant 6	Context group	21.12.2020
Participant 7	Context group	23.11.2020
Participant 8	Context group	18.12.2020
Participant 9	Context group	08.12.2020
Participant 10	Context group	16.12.2020
Participant 11	Context group	02.12.2020
Participant 12	LGBT+ activist / ally	19.10.2020
Participant 13	LGBT+ activist / ally	21.10.2020
Participant 14	LGBT+ activist / ally	13.12.2020
Participant 15	LGBT+ activist / ally	04.01.2021
Participant 16	LGBT+ activist / ally	06.01.2021
Participant 17	LGBT+ activist / ally	14.12.2020
Participant 18	LGBT+ activist / ally	09.12.2020
Participant 19	LGBT+ activist / ally	12.12.2020
Participant 20	LGBT+ activist / ally	18.11.2020
Participant 21	LGBT+ activist / ally	19.11.2020
Participant 22	BLM activist / ally	03.11.2020
Participant 23	BLM activist / ally	03.08.2020
Participant 24	BLM activist / ally	07.11.2020
Participant 25	BLM activist / ally	07.11.2020
Participant 26	BLM activist / ally	29.07.2020
Participant 27	BLM activist / ally	12.11.2020
Participant 28	BLM activist / ally	01.12.2020
Participant 29	BLM activist / ally	06.12.2020
Participant 30	BLM activist / ally	22.12.2020
Participant 31	BLM activist / ally	19.11.2020
Participant 32	BLM activist / ally	22.11.2020

Table 2: Participants Greece [GR]

Participant	Nature of participation	Date
Participant 1	Student, activist	26.02.2021
Participant 2	Student, activist against Police violence	31.03.2021
Participant 3	Student, activist against Police violence	05.04.2021
Participant 4	Activist in anti-sexist org + against Police violence	06.04.2021
Participant 5	Non-activist, participated in action against Police violence	10.04.2021
Participant 6	Student, activist in several areas	11.04.2021
Participant 7	Student, activist against Police violence	12.04.2021
Participant 8	Activist in anti-sexist org	13.04.2021
Participant 9	Student, actions against Police violence	13.04.2021
Participant 10	Student, non-activist	15.04.2021
Participant 11	Organised activist in an anarchist group, active against Police violence	16.04.2021
Participant 12	Student, activist in anti-sexist organisation	21.04.2021

Table 3: Participants United Kingdom [UK]

Participant	Nature of participation	Date
Participant 1	XR Activist	29.10.2020
Participant 2	XR Activist	30.10.2020
Participant 3	BLM Activist	12.11.2020
Participant 4	XR Activist (Coordinator)	14.01.2021
Participant 5	BLM Activist	21.01.2021
Participant 6	BLM Activist	04.02.2021
Participant 7	XR Activist (Comm&Org)	25.02.2021
Participant 8	XR Activist (Leader&Org)	18.02.2021 04.03.2021
Participant 9	17Y Conservative party member	07.03.2021
Participant 10	18Y Labour party member	10.03.2021
Participant 11	XRYouth Activist	19.03.2021
Participant 12	XR Activist	14.04.2021
Participant 13	XR Activist France (Comm&Org)	16.10.2020
Participant 14	XR Activist France (Lead&Org)	16.10.2020
Participant 15	Youth Strike Activist France (Lead&Comm)	16.10.2020
Participant 16	International aspects US activist	13.04.2021

Participant	Nature of participation	Date
W Participant 17	BLM Activist	16.09.2020
W Participant 18	BLM Activist	16.09.2020
W Participant 19	BLM Activist	16.09.2020
W Participant 20	Member of UK Parliament	16.09.2020
W Participant 21	Local City Counsellor England	16.09.2020

Appendix B Online interview guide for WP6

The semi-structured questions in this section provide a guideline for the interviews with participants asking them about their online political participation activities and behaviour.

[Please note: This is a broad guide that covers the basics of formal style of political participation. However, during the interview, the interviewer might also follow up on questions where the participant identifies a social media practice that is simultaneously political or civic participation, a form of socializing, relationship building or community making, a form of creative self-expression or self-presentation.]

It is expected to last between 30-40 minutes.

- Did you participate in any online and/or offline political communities or political activities? If yes,
- Who were the organisers?
- What role did you play?
- How were individuals mobilised to participate? Internally and externally
- What were the social media used in this engagement?
- How did participants communicate with each other?
- Did the use of social media foster (if any) better organising, planning and mobilization? How or Why not?
- Did social media play any role in the process? If yes
- What were the most dominant social media networks during your online and offline political engagement?
- If not, what factors constrained your uses of social media during political participation?
- Was there a prior recruitment by a specific organisation? If yes,
- How were you recruited?
- Did social media networks play any role during this process?
- What perceived problems led to the formation of your online and offline mobilisation?
- Who were the targets of your advocacy?
- What mobilization tactics did you deploy? How successfully?
- Was the organization you were part of funded? If yes, how/ who were its sponsors?
- If not, how was this bypassed?
- How did the organisation you were part of pressure or support the government? What was the result? Any losers and winners?
- Was your organisation successful in achieving its goal (if yes How/why, if not why)?
- Did social media play any part in the producing the outcome (positive or negative)?
- How have your organisation used social media to organise and mobilise support and participation during your political activity?
- What were the differences with previous political activity you engaged in? Have social media been significant to the success of organisations in the past, if yes, How/why?
- Have you experienced government officials using social media to control political events in the past, if yes, How?
- In your experience, have social media been critical to the success of organising political events and contentious activities in the past? If yes, (How/ why or, why not)?
- Did you gain access to the media (both traditional mainstream and new media?) if yes, what media? How/ what was the medium used to archive?
- If not,
- What factors constrained you from accessing the media?

- Did the media grant coverage of, broadcast or provide information about the political event you participate in or organised? If yes,
- How did the media present and portray your and/or your organisation before local and international spectators (what sort of image/perception)?
- Did your and/or your organisation gain access to use the media to mobilise participants, support and publicise their activities? If yes, (why)
- What role did social media play in the process (if any)?
- If not, how were you able to bypass this limitation?
- What were social media used for, during the political events you participated in?
- Were you and/or your organization able to link-up or connect with other movements (local and international) if yes (how)?
- What role did ICTs, the Internet and other media play in the process?
- Did the challenger gain access to and use the media to reach voters?
- What did the state use the media for during this political event?
- What discourse on social media did traditional media use during the elections? If yes, (How/what for) if not, (why not?)
- Can social media be blamed for rapid acceleration of political event mobilisation of activities? (Resistance/dissent/protests/conflict/ advocacy) If yes, Why? If not,
- Considering the level of internet and ICT diffusion, did the regime deploy social media for propaganda during this political event?
- If yes, how?
- Considering claims of the state shutting down of Internet service in particular regions
- Are there regulations in place that currently limit internet access and affected communication and mobilizations during the political event you and/or your political organization participated in?
- Lastly, did you experience incivility, trolling, hate speech, or encountered disinformation material during this period of political engagement?

Appendix C Indicative images from net-nography

Estonia: LGBTQ youth activism in the streets of Tallinn (Image 1) and example of BLM social media activism on Twitter (Image 2), image from BLM protest on Instagram (Image 3), an Insta Story share of BLM support post (Image 4)

Image 1



Image 2



Image 3



Image 4



Greece: Metoo (Image 5), child holding homemade cardboard ‘Parks are for me to play not to hear I am in pain’ (Image 6), and demo against police violence with sign ‘I am in Pain’ (Image 7)

Image 5



Image 6

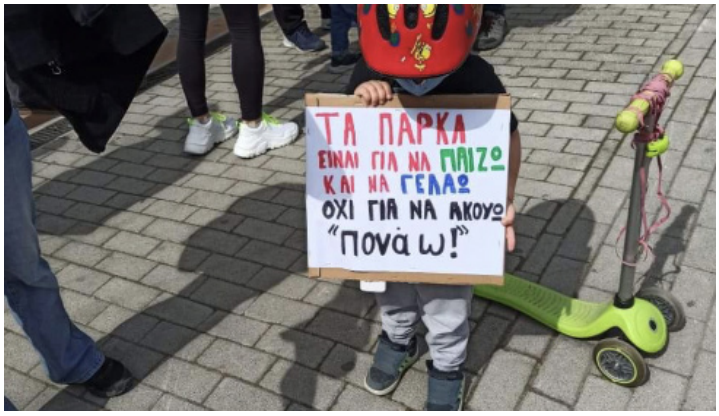


Image 7



UK: Several examples of BLM in the UK on Facebook (Collage Image 8)

Image 8



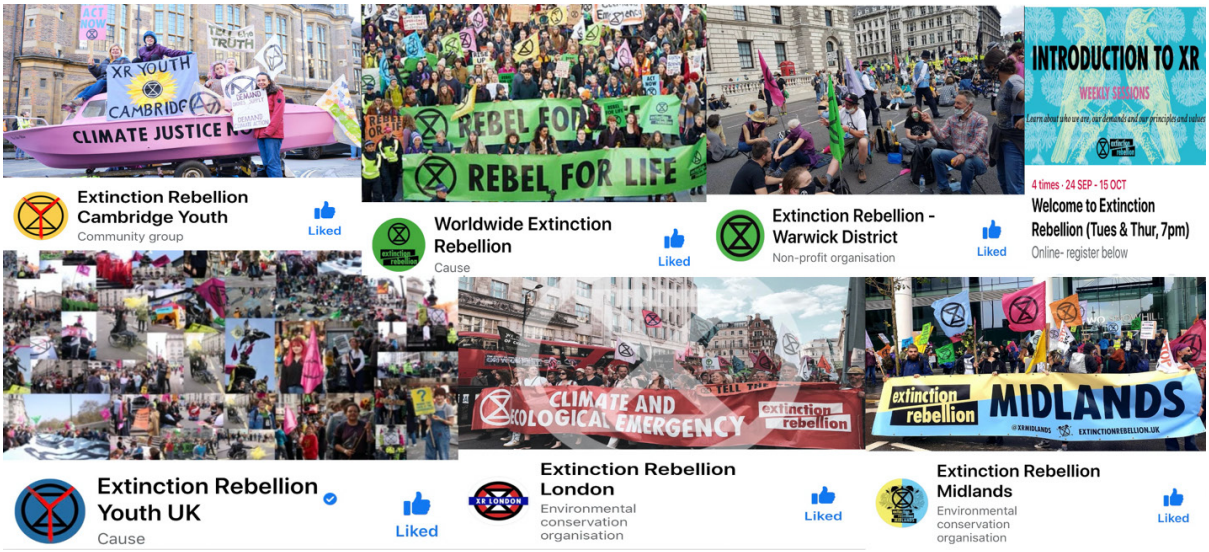
BLM Leicester protest (Image 9)

Image 9



Several examples of XR and XR Youth on Facebook (Collage Image 10)

Image 10



XR Livestreaming (Collage Image 11)

Image 11



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