



Fantastic Digital Spaces and How to Create Them?

*How to Foster Meaningful Experiences while
Working with Groups in a Digital Space?*



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Impresum

Name of the publication: Fantastic Digital Spaces and How to Create Them? How to Foster Meaningful Experiences while Working with Groups in a Digital Space?

Authors: Sabina Belc, Fabio Costa, Petr Kantor, Katarína Klusová, Francisco J. Navas Adamuz

Editors: Giulia Degortes Caivano and Alexandro Jan Lai

Design and Graphics: Eva Gajšek

Images: Leonardo AI

Proofreading: Hanna Szentpeteri

Ljubljana, November 2023

Published by: Socialna akademija, representative: Matej Cepin

Disclaimer: Project Creative Digital Spaces and this handbook were co-funded by the European Union through the Erasmus+ program. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union, the European Commission, or the Slovenian National Agency for the Erasmus+ programme (MOVIT Institute for Development of Youth Mobility). Neither the European Union, the European Commission, or the Slovenian National Agency for the Erasmus+ programme (MOVIT Institute for Development of Youth Mobility) cannot be held responsible for the content of this publication.



Ayuntamiento de Cabra
ÁREA DE POLÍTICAS SOCIALES
DELEGACIÓN DE JUVENTUD



KATALOŽNI ZAPIS O PUBLIKACIJI (CIP) PRIPRAVILI V NARODNI IN UNIVERZITETNI
KNJIŽNICI V LJUBLJANI

[COBISS.SI-ID 178050307](#)

ISBN 978-961-96522-0-6 (PDF)

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Introduction

Creating this handbook on a topic that has been dramatically evolving over the past three years, from a niche domain with a few youth workers with a personal passion for nerdy digital and virtual environments, to today's mainstream approach to youth work in times of reduced mobility and crisis, has proven to be quite a challenge. If we exclude a few "futuristic" experiences such as that of the Finnish organization "Verke"¹ or a few geeky youth worker blogs such as Michele di Paola's blog,² or the brave and innovative experiences carried out by a few associations like the ones involved in this project, some dating back as far as 25 years), the approach to digital space for youth work became systemic and research-driven during the frantic search for solutions after the outbreak of the COVID 2020 pandemic. The same issue was faced by the cultural sector.

This lack of data and real life experiences, coupled with the paradoxical and exponential production of papers and intellectual outcomes on the topic over the last few

¹Verke (2023). [Digital Youth Work](#). Verke.

²Di Paola, M. (n.d.). [HandShaKing](#).

years, has made it difficult both to analyze data and use it in our own practices. Up until 3 years ago, the most relevant material on digital youth work had mostly been focusing on e-learning in all of its forms, which has made us look more to our direct experiences and at sharing practical tips and suggestions, in order to avoid editing yet another theoretical essay on the topic.

One practical consequence of our mostly inward look is a diversity in the chapters edited by some of the partners of this project, with a range of different styles that make this handbook accessible to a more diverse audience that will be able to jump to the specific chapters they require, depending on their aims and motivations. This doesn't imply that reading it all is a complex task, but it simply presents the possibility of ranging from a more theoretical approach to a self-help guide. It is meant for youth and cultural workers whose work relies strongly on youth groups. For easier readability, we will use the term youth worker, which refers to both professions and youth work, which relates to working with youth groups in youth and cultural work.

We invite you to read it all, from A to Z, but you may want to know, just in case, that the first chapter (edited by Fabio Costa of the Associazione Interculturale NUR) will offer a more theoretical overview of the main characteristics that a digital space for youth work initiatives should take into consideration in order to be effective and attractive to youth. We recommend reading it for understanding the context, the concepts, and the overall needs and approaches of youth work in a digital space.

The second chapter (edited by Sabina Belc and Petr Kantor of Socialna akademija and Petrkljic Help) gradually shifts toward a more practical understanding of the tools, methods, and competences needed to implement a functional and sustainable digital space. The chapter is de facto a link between the first and the third chapters, taking the readers from theoretical requirements and swiftly leading them to the exploration of specific examples, concrete experiences, and a toolbox of tips and recommendations on how to Do It Yourself!

The third and final chapter (edited by Katarína Klusová and Francisco Navas Adamuz of Petrkljic Help and the Delegacion de Juventud of the Ayuntamiento de Cabra), is the logical conclusion of this short path that we wanted to share with our peers and colleagues and is a step-by-step guide on how to offer very practical examples of online activities to populate your digital space and succeed in getting the participants, citizens, of a digital space for youth work involved, engaged, and included in it more than just occasionally. Follow our instructions and examples to enhance the possibilities of making your youth beneficiaries develop a sense of ownership and of belonging that make a digital space a real youth work experiential learning opportunity.



What Does a Fulfilling User Experience in Youth or Cultural Work Look Like?

Chapter 1

Youth work is designed for **the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young people** through their voluntary involvement, which is complementary to their formal, academic, or vocational education and training.³ It can be hard, sometimes, to understand if our preparation and delivery as youth workers can be considered appropriate and satisfying when operating in cultural work.

Are the participants feeling involved? Are they gaining as much as we wish them to from this experience? Are we helping our colleagues enough? Do they feel as fulfilled as we would like? This is even more true in the online environment. It's not easy to grasp the mood and the feelings in an online room since both positive and negative

³NYCI (2022). [What is Youth Work?](#) National Youth Council of Ireland.

vibes tend to get flattened out. To conquer this challenge, we are going to look through **the variables that contribute to making the user experience more fulfilling.**

Fun

We talk about a fun environment when **it provides pleasure, enjoyment, or entertainment.**⁴ Understanding when people are having fun can sometimes be tricky. While we will be talking about how to make things fun in the next chapter, we can try to understand what being successful at this task can look like. Usually, this can be measured by **how the participants react to the end of an activity.** After all, youth work is both educational AND enjoyable; both fulfilling and fun.⁵

Are the participants sad that they have no more time to dedicate to the activity? Do they feel fulfilled by having spent the time they wanted to in this process? Do they feel eager for more, or glad it's over?

If you propose the same activity to the same group in the future, you can check their reaction to get a good indication of how fun it is for the participants.

While it's difficult to grasp the concept of having fun, the above guidelines should provide us with enough awareness to understand the results of the process in our environment.



Connective

An environment is enabling connection when **the people in it feel joined together,**⁶ with a focus on the process in which the active and critical participation of young people is essential, the methods adopted and the programs and **activities engaged in by youth workers** and young people are very diverse, and **include intercultural and international awareness.**⁷

⁴Cambridge University Press (2022). **Fun.** Cambridge English Dictionary.

⁵NYCI (2022). **What is Youth Work?** National Youth Council of Ireland.

⁶Cambridge University Press (2022). **Connection.** Cambridge English Dictionary.

⁷NYCI (2022). **What is Youth Work?** National Youth Council of Ireland.

It is our task to provide this feeling of intercultural awareness. The issue of cultural diversity can be highly relevant for those communities seeking to respond to migration from across Europe and outside of it. In these circumstances, policymakers recognize the importance of fostering tolerance and **strong community harmony**.

The role of youth workers is key in shaping the opinion and outlooks of young people and helping young people understand, appreciate, and **embrace diversity** in order to improve and strengthen social cohesion.

Our projects should seek to engage young people and help them embrace their differences - whether between individuals or communities - while learning about other cultures.⁸ Whenever we notice participants actively discussing, understanding, and finally accepting the differences and similarities between their cultures, our environment can be considered to be connective.

Try to look out for any instance in which the participants are leaving the room with the intention to keep their discussion going!

While the importance of a connective environment from an international standpoint is clear, the same can be applied to any national or local digital environment as well. Not only can different cultures be found in the same area, but people from the same culture can (and will) engage with their differences and similarities, making all that has been said so far still relevant.

Encouraging

An environment can be encouraging when **someone in it feels confident and able to do something**.⁹ When they feel confident, young participants in a digital space will always **know what they are doing and why**.

Digital youth work is based on the idea that new technology must be utilized in youth work to make services and activities intended for young people better, more accessible, and **more meaningful**.¹⁰ A participant will especially need to feel encouraged while in a digital space.

⁸ Asociacion Cultural Integra, Dacorom Council for Voluntary Service, Pozitiva Doma, Vicolocorto and Zavod Voluntariat (2019). [Cultural Diversity as a Learning Tool in Youth Work](#). Dacorom CVS.

⁹ Cambridge University Press (2022). [Encourage](#). Cambridge English Dictionary.

¹⁰ Verke (2023). [Digital Youth Work](#). Verke.

It is also important to consider that the use of digital technologies in youth work could have **an impact on the participant's mental health**. From **digital fatigue**¹¹ caused by having to spend too much time online, to **feelings of inadequacy** because of a lack of digital competencies or digital technologies to fully engage in youth work, the emotional impact might be different for different people.¹²

As a result, when a participant is not in an encouraging space, they may feel lost, insecure, and not really sure of what to do. On the contrary, encouraged young people will look focused, secure, and adamant in their proactivity. Or at least, in the worst-case scenario, an encouraging environment will make failing a learning opportunity and an acceptable experience, rather than a traumatic one.

Let's not forget how all of what has been said so far applies to us as youth workers as well. We are not immune to the results of a fulfilling user experience in digital youth work!

Mindful

An environment can be considered mindful when **the people in it are deliberately aware of their bodies, minds, and feelings in the present moment, to create a feeling of calmness**.¹³

In a digital project, each participant is in a different physical location. In a mindful environment, every participant feels present in the same space as everybody else, regardless of their physical location. **Space in digital youth work might mean something different to youth workers than it does to young people**. The latter see digital places

as sources of constant connection to their peers, a way of validating who they are becoming and receiving emotional reassurance that they do belong.¹⁴

¹¹ "Digital fatigue" describes the state of exhaustion and disengagement that occurs among people who are required to use numerous digital tools and applications concurrently.

¹² Pawluczuk A., Șerban, A. M., Basarab T. (ed.), Pasic L. (ed.) (2022).

[Technology and the new power dynamics: limitations of digital youth work](#). EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership.

¹³ Cambridge University Press (2022). [Mindful](#). Cambridge English Dictionary

¹⁴ Pawluczuk A., Șerban, A. M., Basarab T. (ed.), Pasic L. (ed.) (2022). [Technology and the new power dynamics: limitations of digital youth work](#). EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership.



Ask yourself: Do the participants feel like they are all in the same boat? Does it seem like the participants are aware that the virtual location they are sharing can be considered a location nonetheless?

As youth workers, we need to ensure we have created a safe and enabling space for the group.¹⁵ When mindful, **the participants will not feel disturbed** by any circumstance happening outside (and even inside) the digital environment. They will be living immersed in the activity, engaged, empowered, active, and creative in the digital society.¹⁶ If the participants manage to perceive the digital space we created for them the same way they would recognise a physical space, we can consider the environment to be mindful.

User Friendly

A design can be considered user-friendly when it is **simple for people to use.**¹⁷ But what does simple even mean, in this field?

It can be noticed by observing who is having the experience, be it us or participants. **A design is considered simple when the person perceiving it does not feel overwhelmed by looking at it.**¹⁸ Is the participant finding every option easily? Do we feel comfortable when looking for what we need at any given moment? Does it feel like we have the correct amount of options available at our disposal? Do we make use of most of the potential features?

This needs to be true, whether we are on a computer, tablet, or other device. Users expect that any application will look good no matter what device they're using, and rightly so! A responsive application makes this possible.¹⁹ If we are connected to a computer and a participant is using a phone, we both should feel the application to be simple to use.

Finally, **an experience feels better when it's suited just for us.** Any participant (or even ourselves) may want to tweak and change what's in front of them, to make it more to their liking. It's hard to make one standard experience that satisfies everyone,

¹⁵The Mix (2021). [A Guide to Delivering Digital Youth Work](#). National Youth Agency.

¹⁶Verke (2019). [European Guidelines to Digital Youth Work](#). Verke.

¹⁷Cambridge University Press (2022). [User-friendly](#). Cambridge English Dictionary.

¹⁸FreshCodeIT (2019). [4 Marks of User-friendly Design](#). Medium.

¹⁹WebDev (2022). [Learn Responsive Design](#).



especially when dealing with a high number of participants at once.²⁰

The participants feel way more satisfied if they can, for example, adjust their media playing speed, or if we can integrate other existing tools into this one (such as automatic translation software). Thus, an experience can be interpreted as user-friendly when it comes to using elements with a simple interface, regardless of one's device, which can also be personalized.

This is the easiest and quickest field to test out. You can do it by yourself or with some colleagues. Don't be afraid to ask for help!

Lifelike

We talk about lifelike when we describe **something that appears real or seems to be alive**.²¹ As we were saying in the “Mindful” segment, we want **to blur the difference between physical and digital space**, making the latter feel as alive and as real as the former.

Youth work is about working with the holistic needs of young people. We should have the skills to facilitate a conversation between young people in the digital spaces they are in, just as if they were in the same physical space.

Youth workers should use digital tools, spaces, and places as an extension of the real world.²² When done properly, we will see **the participants feel like they are talking with other real people**, and realize they are living an experience analogous to what typical in person projects would offer.

²⁰ Microsoft (2022). [Let Users Personalize Visuals in a Report](#).

²¹ Cambridge University Press (2022). [Lifelike](#). Cambridge English Dictionary.

²² HUMAK University of Applied Science and Maynooth University (2019). [Youth Work in Digital World: Focus on Youth Workers](#). YouthWorkAndYou.org.

Analogous is an important keyword here. As much as we are comparing the digital and physical environments, we are NOT trying to make the digital space look like its physical counterpart!

We would like to see the participants being connected and willing to stay with each other, when they always have the possibility of disconnecting and getting back to their business. When communicating in lifelike virtual environments, **young people will express their ideas**, ask relevant questions, maintain respect, and build trust. **It is not the same as communicating in person, but it is just as important.**²³

Taking advantage of this experience, a young participant in a lifelike digital activity will NOT simulate the experience they had in the virtual world to the physical world experience. Still, a young participant will manage to apply the former to the non-formal education developed from the experience in the latter without issue.

Creative

A person can be considered creative when **producing or using original and unusual ideas.**²⁴

Creativity is often spontaneous and **cannot be pushed onto people**. We may notice, instead, a participant feeling inspired by the creativity of someone else. If such a participant feels like **they have the space to contribute**, the whole digital space would become more creative.

It has been said that creativity is spread out, for instance, in terms of educational environments, and resides **not exclusively in the individual participant but is dispersed among the group**, the trainers, the cultural prosthetics that augment creative and intellectual growth, and the larger community.²⁵ Inspiration can be contagious, especially in the online environment, where we have an infinite array of tools at our disposal. Even though we are not particularly used to this concept yet, it's rather important. A participant may feel that they have many different sources of creativity available, bringing them the inspiration they need.

²³ Staiou, E. (ed.), Atakan, P., Kalem, G., Kiper, B., Tsvetkova R., Kasamska, R., Karabová, D., Maška, M., Kaisari, A., Michalopoulou, N., Güvenir, C., Gündoğar, N. (2021). [DiGi YOUTH: Work Manual](#). DiGi YOUTH Partnership

²⁴ Cambridge University Press (2022). [Creative](#). Cambridge English Dictionary.

²⁵ European Commission Expert Group Report (2020). [Developing the Creative and Innovative Potential of Young People Through Non-Formal Learning in Ways that are Relevant to Employability](#). European Commission.

Let's not confuse the number of tools with the sources of creativity, though. While it's true that any online tool can be used in many ways, an environment with too many of them could feel overwhelming instead. When participants feel challenged by a very limited amount of tools at their disposal, for example, they will be forced to think in an unusual way.

This builds creative and innovative thinking and the ability to turn challenges into opportunities, while setting and achieving goals with limited resources.²⁶

Conclusion

All our previous experiences contribute to our goal of understanding **what a fulfilling user experience for youth in cultural work looks like**.

While there are surely way more categories we could have chosen to tackle, what matters is to keep an eye open and **understand if the participants (and ourselves) are enjoying the experience**, so that everyone gains something new and important from the experience we provided.

If we keep in mind at least some of the questions we talked about above, we can understand when the online environment feels fulfilling enough and when it does not.

Now that we possess the knowledge, how do we apply it? **How do we actually make our environment fulfilling?**

²⁶ European Commission - Directorate-General for Education and Culture (2015). [Unleashing Young People's Creativity and Innovation](#). Publication Office of the European Union.



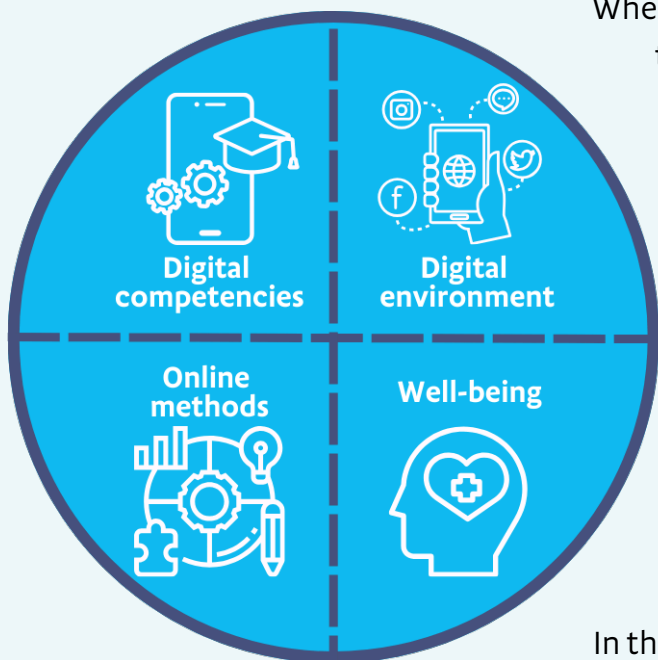
How to Set up a Digital Space: What are the Cornerstones?

Chapter 2

Do you believe that digital youth spaces have a future?

During the pandemic, we were forced to move online, but with the hope this phase will end soon and we will never need to go back. Therefore, our work often lacked the motivation to move from the culture of online events to working with groups, which are crucial for cultural and youth work.

How to establish spaces that will enable young people to build community and feel a sense of belonging?



When we design and deliver online youth work activities, we must pay attention to four dimensions: establishing a digital space, selecting suitable methods, strengthening the (digital) competence of youth workers and young people, and taking care of their well-being.

By paying attention to all four dimensions mentioned above, we can create a space for an inspiring experience that is connective, fun, encouraging (in the sense that it encourages creativity and initiative alike), and has a meaningful place in youth work.

In the chapter below, we will explore what exactly is hidden under these dimensions and what aspects we must remember.

Digital Space

Melvin²⁷ defines digital spaces as the digital “locales” where young people gather, with digital places giving meaning, memories, and feelings. In her article, we find that for many young people, digital spaces provide a constant connection to their peers, a way of validating who they are becoming and receiving emotional reassurance that they belong. With these characteristics, the web has enormous potential as a place for youth work.

Which Aspects Should be Taken into Account when Choosing Tools and Platforms?²⁸

Firstly, involving our young people in the decision is the most crucial aspect. If you include them in designing their digital space, they will have more ownership and feel more at home. With this, we increase the chance that young people will fill the digital space and make it their own.

Secondly, we should be careful not to submit our activities to tools but let the tools support us in enabling an inspiring experience for the young people we support.

²⁷ Melvin, J. (2018). [Digital Tools, Spaces and Places - Mediators of Youth Work Practice](#). Coyote, 26.

²⁸ Belc, S. (2022). Orodja v spletnem mladinskem delu // Tools for Online Youth Work. V M. Galun (ed.), [Izobraževalni \(pre\)skok na splet: pristne, sproščene in sodelovalne aktivnosti na spletu](#) (p. 213-223). Mladinski svet Slovenije.

Be aware that switching between tools causes stress for participants, so optimizing the number of tools we use is essential. During the activity, we should not use more than one platform and up to two digital tools.

Lastly, it is good to think about the following aspects in the process. Analyze and choose the most straightforward tool that covers most of your needs and, with this, optimize the use of digital tools. The participants' digital literacy (and ours) must influence the choice.

We should also check whether the selected tools enable the participation of our target groups to keep our activities as inclusive as possible. While hosting encounters online, we must also consider our participants' safety and their data and accessibility on various devices and operating systems. Ultimately, the price also plays an essential role in the decision. Subsidized or even free use tools are often available to non-profit organizations.

Tip: Avoid wasting valuable time by repeatedly learning new tools within one activity. We make an impression with the quality of the online experience, not with the knowledge of the tools.



How to choose a digital tool and platform which will answer my needs? Check our Toolbox!

In Which Processes Can They Support Us?²⁹

(Informal) Meeting in the Digital Space

Meetings can be held via classic video conferencing or avatar-based platforms. The first ones are great for keeping in touch and carrying out structured activities like workshops. The most famous is Zoom, but there are also programs like MS Teams, Webex, and Butter.

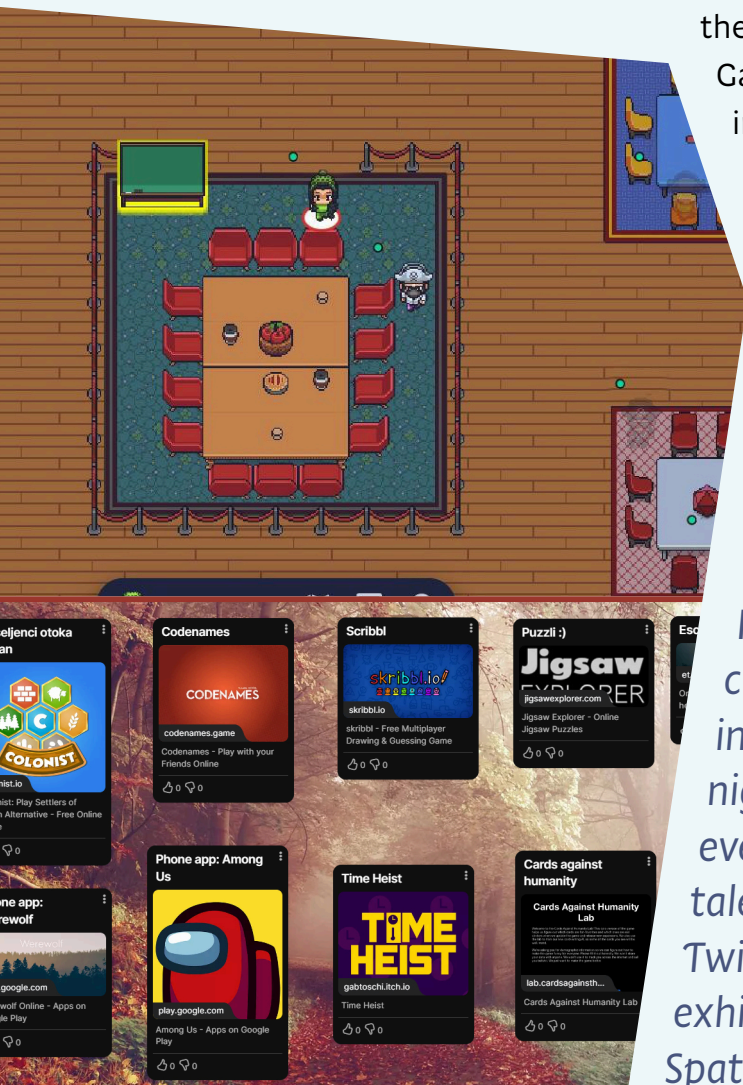
²⁹ Belc, S. (2022). Orodja v spletnem mladinskem delu // Tools for Online Youth Work. V M. Galun (ed.), [Izobraževalni \(pre\)skok na splet: pristne, sproščene in sodelovalne aktivnosti na spletu](#) (p. 213-223). Mladinski svet Slovenije.

Platforms are enriched with various functions, such as reactions, chat, filters, virtual breakout rooms, and polls. With a good knowledge of the functions, we can often avoid or reduce the use of external digital tools.

There are also platforms where you get your avatar, which allows you to move around the room and meet people (ex. Wonder and Gather). Such environments facilitate networking and informal gathering.

In the GatherTown, together with the young people, we can customize the digital space and create an online youth center with various rooms and activities, making it their own by meeting with their friends.

In these digital spaces, we can create a virtual shelf with games in Padlet and host board game nights. We can organize a gamer's evening, prepare a concert or talent battle and stream them via Twitch. We can also set up an online exhibition of participants' art (ex. in Spatial) and visit them as a group.



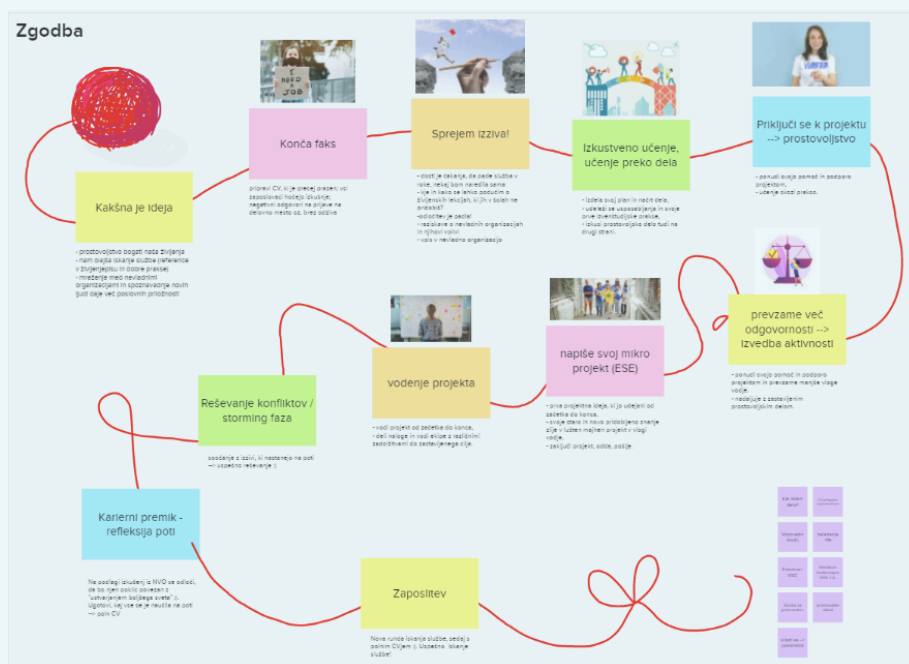
Providing Content and Sparking Meaningful Interaction

An essential aspect of web implementations is visual elements and presentations. Several web applications allow us to create simple graphic designs, infographics (ex. Canva), and animations (ex. PowToon). Some tools also offer more advanced forms of presentation, such as eMaze and Prezi. We have various digital tools at our disposal to check the atmosphere and opinions in the group.

We can use quizzes (ex. Kahoot and QuizWhizzer), interactive tasks (ex. WordWall) and surveys (ex. Zoom and Mentimeter). Mentimeter also allows us to rank results by importance, making it easier to set priorities.

Tools such as Jamboard and Padlet can be used for harvesting the results of conversations that can support each group in sharing with other groups.

Digital tools such as **Mural (left)** and Miro enable more complex visualization and can be helpful in longer online processes.



The tools contain a canvas on which we can stick post-it notes and place pictures or icons. They allow us to vote and offer a wide range of pre-prepared templates. We can use them as a content container (a place to store all relevant information) for the whole process.

Asynchronous Activities and Communication Between Meetings

Suppose we carry out blended activities or interweave synchronous and asynchronous activities. In that case, an online communication platform is needed where participants can interact and share the results of their work and additional content.

The most basic form is a social network group or chat (ex. Facebook and Instagram). If you need a more complex one, you can choose Google Classroom.



How to make the most of the chosen tool? Check our Toolbox!

Methods and Activities

Youth work and its methodology have been developing for decades (in some countries, even a century). Still, we were (mostly) only confronted with the fact that we needed to establish a variety of online methods only in 2020.

In the beginning, we introduced the dynamics of meetings and workshops through group work and digital tools, which we equated with a method. With tools, we focused too much on building digital skills instead of creating genuine contact between participants. Youth work is about creating spaces for young people to socialize, exchange ideas, and shape them into action for positive change.

We must establish a personal connection with each other. Connection before content. Without relatedness, no work can occur. Peter Block ³⁰

In the following years, the youth sector and other sectors based on working with youth groups are tasked to take a step forward in developing and implementing methods that will allow a similar feeling as when we meet in person.

How to Choose the Right Method?

For meaningful interaction, we need to hold a space where people can connect, feel accepted and have fun while being creative and bringing change to their lives and society.

Relationships and connectedness are the pre-conditions for change. Every meeting, every process, and every training program has to get people connected first. /.../ So small groups are an essential building block to any future you want to create. Peter Block ³¹

For learning and change to happen, we need to be able to hold the attention and engagement of every group member for long periods of time. We can do this by varying the dynamic of our interactions. Even though there is evidence against the existence of learning styles, we can keep hold participants' attention by engaging in a multisensory approach, bring **LEARNERS** to our online interactions. ³²

³⁰ Block, P. (2009). Community: The Structure of Belonging. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

³¹ Weisser, L. (2010). **A conversation with Peter Block**. The Canadian Learning Journal, 36 (fall).

³² Collins, S. (2020). **LEARNERS Mnemonic**. Stellar Labs [20.1.2023].

When working with youth groups in online settings that encourage active participation and group forming, we must focus on the stages of group development when designing the process.

While participants arrive, we can create a cozy atmosphere with music and small talk. At the kick-off of the encounter, we should start with check-in rounds so that all the voices are heard. Let's use icebreakers, getting to know each other and energy-raising activities. If the participants relax at the beginning, they will be less reluctant to leave their comfort zone. A group is slower to form because we lack methods to support group bonding involving touch and trust. So, we should wait a bit before introducing more "crazy" methods.

When starting to plan your online activities, you should first decide on the means of delivery which should be adapted to the type of activity you are hosting. When it comes to learning processes, we can combine the usage of asynchronous and synchronous types of activities.

Less interactive parts can transform into static e-learning lessons with video, text, and different assignments which support applying the knowledge to real-life situations. But an important part of an online process are activities which enable collaboration and creating connections between members. In synchronous encounters, we focus on using methods which enable the participants to exchange ideas, reflect on their experiences/knowledge, practice their skills, recall their knowledge and put it in a group member's own context via feedback.

Online, it is even more critical that the activities are not just role-play and hypothetical cases but that we solve tasks that are then realized. This way, we can maintain group members' motivation for an extended period. We enable them to find a role within the group by performing tasks. A project work-based approach can also take place online. We can use tools like Miro and Mural to visualize and record the progress.



Synchronous Learning



Asynchronous Learning

Which Methods Can We Use?

There are a variety of methods we can use even in the online space. It depends on the digital space we set up, as some of them depend on the features of the platform you are hosting your activity on. Also, for more complex ones, we usually engage some additional digital tools.

For getting to know each other and icebreakers, we can use adapted speed dating, human bingo, truths, and lies. For team building, we can use all sort of tasks, where we can combine online collaboration with interaction with the environment.

Creative exploration in the space can consist of different (improvisational) theater methods, collective drawing, creating memes, or comics. We can support collaboration with world cafes, open space, proactive cafes, and carousels. We can relax together with guided meditation and mindful exercises.

We should also not forget about supporting farewells. We can use an appreciation shower where we spotlight the person we show appreciation to, or hide “sugar cube” messages in envelopes we created in digital tools like Mural. For starting and finishing meetings use check-in and check-out circles.



Look at some examples on how to use photos to capture participants' environments!

How can I adapt or develop methods/activities to fit the online context?

The first step is to analyze your method through the prism of what kind of features you need to deliver it. Split it into steps, and think about how you can apply every one of them in digital space. Online space looks limited, but we can use all the elements at our disposal. We can play with the camera, turning it on/off for those entering the “stage.” moving right (yes) or left (no) based on agreement with the statement given, or using the spotlight feature for the aquarium method. In addition, you can use audio/sound for music-related activities like silent karaoke, lip reading, etc. We are not limited just to technical features, but we can also work with the body, stretching to keep focus and methods like group forming shapes. In the environment surrounding participants,

there can be many opportunities; they can bring objects which represent them, and we can prepare a scavenger hunt and send them out for a walk-and-talk method.

Even if the participants do not have a quiet private space, we can use this as an advantage within the activity. For example, we can give a particular participant who works a shared office the task of conducting a short survey among peers. To relax, the participant in the park can lead the visualization by describing the sights, sounds, and smells in their surroundings.

We can send them gifts such as slippers or a mug (to make their environment cozy and to ensure they have the same things) and materials that can be used for activities. We can encourage them to touch or smell something during an activity in order to engage their sensory senses. Alternatively, we can also encourage them to recall situation when they touched or smelled something. The sky's the limit, the only question is: How daring we are at trying something new?



For more methods you can use, scan the QR code and join our course.

Competencies of Youth Workers and Leaders

Before we look into the competencies needed to navigate digital space, it is important we feel comfortable with technology.

We must be updated with technological advances to incorporate newer technologies into our work. We must also understand the challenges of entering the digital space. The online world brings new dimensions and challenges to establishing safe(r) space, as it is easier to record conversations and share photos and materials. More in-depth knowledge of platforms, online methods, and digital tools will enable us to offer diverse activities that encourage participation and creativity.

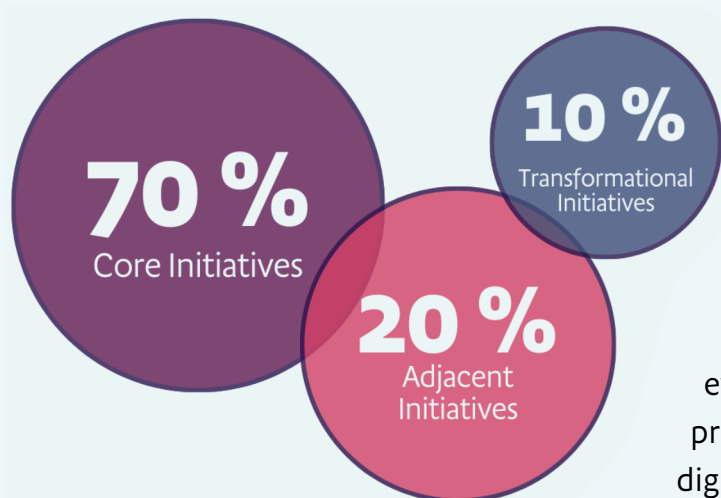
By mastering technology, we can focus more on the participants and establish a meaningful connection. If we are not tech savvy, we can involve an additional person who can take care of the technical aspects and let us do our magic regarding interpersonal connection and group spirit.

By providing a good flow and smooth experience online, we can become ambassadors of the potential of digital space. We should strive for perfection, but not be too harsh

on ourselves when something goes wrong. Letting people (and ourselves) make mistakes creates an environment where we are not afraid to leave our comfort zone and try something new.

If we are comfortable in the digital space, we can share and infect others with this excitement and contribute to positive feelings. We understand that learning to use new technologies involves vulnerability and requires courage. Hosting a conference online for the first time, for example, is scary but someone has to blaze the trail.

It takes a lot of curiosity and a willingness to learn and explore. But when innovating, you can be inspired by the "rule" of innovation, which is 70-20-10.³³



If we take it as a guideline, every activity should include something we know well (70%), something we are in the process of exploring and improving (20%) and something new (10%).

The core of growing as a confident and skilled facilitator of digital space is to include evaluations and reflections in integrating improvements and new learnings in the design of a digital experience. When in doubt, remember this:

“Whether you think you can or you think you can't – you're right.” Henry Ford II

When we are all set up the first question that pops up is: How do you keep the motivation of your remote group? A big challenge when working with remote groups is keeping spirits high and motivated in the long run. We lose some non-formal spontaneous moments when moving online, such as drinking coffee together, having a community lunch, a quick brainstorming session, and asking for help. How can we tackle this issue?

First, when working with the team it is essential to form a mutual agreement on understanding how to collaborate. We can use questions like:³⁴

³³ Eric Schmidt and Sergey Brin (Google) used the [70-20-10 principle](#) throughout their organization to bolster their innovation efforts. The company is investing 70% of resources and human capital in the core business, 20% in the new developments and 10% on new ideas that might seem crazy at first.

³⁴ Play4Business. [How To Successfully Lead A Blended Team.](#)

- What builds my trust? What is important to me?
- What could disrupt my workflow, and how can we overcome this?
- Where do I need additional support, and how will we provide this to each other?
- How will we notify each other that something is urgent and has a deadline?
- How will we work through conflict where we don't agree with a team member's approach or with their ideas?
- How will we motivate each other? What inspires me? And you?
- What can I do to keep my commitments?



For motivation and focus, we should use mission-oriented communication and keep team members in the loop. We must explore how to stay in touch when collaborating remotely. It can help us to establish group rituals. We can benefit from regular check-ins. Regular mutual feedback is critical because it helps align expectations and objectives and keep us on track.

We can propose **remote co-working**. Social ties are a powerful motivator. Building a peer rapport can boost creativity, collaboration, and work enjoyment. Some members find it easier to stay on task when surrounded by peers. You can also take coffee breaks together.

We can bring freshness by organizing virtual birthday parties (**some ideas**) or other **celebrations**. We can introduce some **virtual team-building activities**. We can send some care packages. Getting goodies in the mail brightens team members' days and inspires goodwill and commitment. If you have a common communication channel like Slack, you can encourage spotlights, which are public shout-outs for fantastic work done.³⁵

If you are curious about what remote leadership style suits you, you can **check them out here**.

³⁵ Robinson A. (2023). **19 Unique Ways to Motivate Remote Employees in 2023**. [10. 1. 2023]..

Concern for the Participants' Well-Being

Can we achieve a human touch and create a feeling of connection between participants? We believe we can. With a homely feeling and safe(r) environment, we can successfully hold a space of participation and creativity for all.

The first step is **establishing human touch**. Here are some tips on how to do this:

- **Speak with care.** Try to find similarities between participants and connect them with each other. Ask them how they are doing and what they are comfortable with. Deepen relationships by asking, "How are you?" and "Are you coping?"
- **Encourage participation.** Make sure everyone has an opportunity to speak and contribute to the conversation. Also, we should enable different ways/levels of participation from observing, typing, talking, and using a camera to personal sharing.
- **Bring fun to the table.** Use sensitive humor to lighten the mood and release tension.
- **See young people and enable them to be seen.** Establish (the feeling of) eye contact. Motivate participants to use cameras to see reactions and emotions. But do not force it, as some people feel uncomfortable sharing their personal space (room or home).
- **Plan informal moments.** Take regular breaks, get up and move around, and practice self-care. Encourage meeting up (playing board games, drinking coffee together, etc.) in a non-facilitated way to provide opportunities for spontaneous virtual social interactions.
- **Hold a safe(r) space.** Create an open environment where people feel comfortable expressing their thoughts, feelings, and ideas. When discussing an issue, encourage open dialogue, openness to different perspectives, curiosity and respect for other opinions. Use language that is inclusive and avoids marginalizing or excluding anyone.



Icebreakers: The start of a virtual or hybrid meeting can often involve an awkward silence – where the humble icebreaker comes in to get people talking and loosen them up. Check a few valuable suggestions here.



What are the golden rules for the involvement of youth participants during online meetings? Check it out!

The second step is to build a sense of community and team spirit. Creating a positive and productive group dynamic is vital, especially when working on a longer-term project.

Here are some ideas for **building team spirit and creating a sense of community** within your group:

- Develop shared goals and values: Work together to establish shared goals and values. They will support the group in forming a shared sense of purpose and direction.
- Create group rituals and traditions: Establish ones unique to your group, such as a weekly check-in or a unique way of starting or ending meetings. They can help to create a feeling of continuity and belonging.
- Use team symbols: Create symbols representing your group, such as a logo, a team name, or a shared filter or background, which facilitate a sense of identity and cohesion.



- Develop internal jokes and language: They can help spark a feeling of camaraderie and shared experience.
- Celebrate successes and milestones: The group should celebrate completing a major project or reaching an important goal. It will bring pride and a feeling of accomplishment.
- Foster connections between participants: Encourage participants to connect outside meetings, such as through social events or informal gatherings. This can help to build relationships and strengthen their sense of community.



Building a sense of community takes time and effort, but it is gratifying. One way we can catalyze connection is by **sharing vulnerability**. It is about opening up and revealing aspects of ourselves that we might normally keep hidden, such as our fears and creative ideas.

This act can be difficult, requiring us to be honest and open about things that might make us feel exposed or judged. However, sharing vulnerability can also be incredibly powerful and transformative for us and those around us.

Sharing creativity is also a form of vulnerability because it requires us to put ourselves and our ideas in the open. It can be scary, especially if we fear rejection or criticism. However, when we share our creativity, we open ourselves up to feedback, growth, and collaboration.

How do we introduce sharing vulnerability in meetings with young people? In an online youth encounter, we delivered an activity by choosing one fear and transforming it through a »Riddikulus« spell into a meme we shared.³⁶

³⁶ Activity design by Katarina Klusová.

Conclusion

While setting up the digital space, we aim to make it overgrow us as a person/organization but to be packed with young people who make it their own and share a sense of belonging.

To make it happen, we must involve young people in designing it and let them adapt it to their wishes. Initially, we need to organize diverse events to attract more young people and get them to know the space and us. We can arrange open hours when we are in the space, and young people can stop by. We can also bring a gamified experience to the digital space in order to motivate young people to use it. We can connect it with challenges and digital badges displayed on a digital board in our online "youth center."

We should also encourage young people to use it during their free time – to meet with friends or host meetings to develop their ideas. When people start spontaneously meeting in our digital space, user-generated content and activities fill the place.

We must dedicate much effort to setting up a well-working digital space. But if it is designed in a youth-friendly way and enables young people to fulfill their needs and personalize the experience, it has the potential to grow and develop.



Online Adventurers: Keeping Young People Engaged and Connected

Chapter 3

The rise of technology has revolutionized our interactions and connections, leading to the emergence of digital youth spaces. Similar to physical spaces, digital spaces also undergo distinct stages of development, providing inspiration for effective strategies in the online world. In this chapter, we will follow the stages of group development as they relate to creating captivating online activities for young people. We will do so by employing the concept of Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing (FSNP), which outlines the psychological progression teams experience while working on a project.

We will also focus on the activities, which compensate for a lack of time, preparation, dedication, or ability to meet continuously.

Online Motivational Group Development Based on FSNP³⁷

In approaching the process of developing and fostering group interaction online, the FSNP method holds value in online activities for multiple reasons. It enhances the facilitators' understanding of group dynamics and provides valuable insights.



Each stage offers opportunities to foster teamwork and collaboration. Moreover, the FSNP method aims to sustain engagement and motivation through clear structure and progression. Additionally, it addresses challenges and conflicts as a natural part of group development. By doing so, conflicts are transformed into opportunities for growth and learning, ensuring continuous progress for the group.

Let's explore the module through its specific components.

Stage 1: Forming

"The team is formed and everyone shows their best behavior. There is a positive and polite atmosphere. Strong guidance is needed by the facilitator as group tasks are not clearly defined yet."

During the forming stage, the focus is on establishing a digital space that can serve as a platform for online activities. This involves setting up a user-friendly and accessible online environment, which is not difficult to enter and use. To support the group in this stage, one proposed method could be to provide clear instructions and guidelines on how to navigate the meeting space, ensuring that everyone feels comfortable and included.

³⁷ Wageningen University and Research. [Tuckman \(forming, norming, storming, performing\)](#) [12. 1. 2023] based on Tuckman, B. W. (1965). [Developmental sequence in small groups](#). Psychological Bulletin, 63(6), 384-399.

Stage 2: Storming

“Emerging boundaries become contested and conflicts occur. Frustration with the lack of progress is also common. Guidance is needed by the facilitator.”

In the storming stage, the focus shifts to selecting suitable methods for online activities. It's important to choose methods which are engaging, interactive, and aligned with the interests of young people. To support the group in this stage, one proposed method could be to involve the young people in the decision-making process, allowing them to have a say in selecting the activities they find most appealing.

Stage 3: Norming

“Team members start to resolve their differences, appreciate colleagues’ strengths, and respect the leader’s authority. Behavior from the storming and norming phases can overlap for some time when new tasks come up.”

During the norming stage, the emphasis is on strengthening the communication competence of young people. Establishing norms and guidelines for online behavior and etiquette can foster a sense of community and belonging.

Stage 4: Performing

“Hard work goes hand in hand with satisfaction about the team’s progress. Team confidence makes team roles more fluid and more tasks can be delegated by the facilitator. Problems are prevented or solved as they pop up.”

The performing stage is characterized by a cohesive and productive group dynamic, where participants are actively engaged in online activities and feel a sense of ownership and initiative. To support the group in this stage, one proposed method could be to implement regular check-ins and feedback moments to ensure that everyone's needs are being met and to address any concerns or issues that may arise.



Stage 5: Adjourning (Mourning)

“When all tasks are completed, it’s important to celebrate the team’s positive achievements. Letting go of the group structure after long periods of intensive teamwork can also generate uncertainty for individual team members.”

The adjourning stage marks the end of the group's collaboration and the completion of all tasks. It is important to acknowledge and celebrate the team's positive achievements during this stage. This can be done by organizing a virtual closing ceremony or event to recognize the efforts and contributions of each team member. Sharing success stories, highlighting key accomplishments, and expressing gratitude for everyone's dedication can help foster a sense of accomplishment and closure.

By acknowledging the team's achievements, fostering a sense of closure, and supporting individuals in their transition, the adjourning stage can serve as a positive ending to the collaborative experience, leaving participants with a sense of fulfillment and growth.

Creative and User Friendly Online Activities Without Any Tools

A user friendly and inclusive online environment might sometimes mean that we will avoid using new tools and platforms as much as possible, to soften the pressure on the participants' virtual literacy.

Online activities that don't require any tools or equipment, **also known as "tool-less" activities**, can be a great way to keep young people engaged and connected.

These activities can include:

- **virtual storytelling**, where participants can share and listen to each other's stories;
- **virtual role-playing**, where participants can act out different characters and scenarios;
- **virtual debates**, where participants can engage in discussions and share their opinions on various topics.

One of the main benefits of tool-less activities is that they are simple and easy to participate in. They do not require any special equipment or software, making them accessible to a wide range of participants. This means that anyone with an internet connection can participate, regardless of their physical location or mobility limitations.

Another benefit of tool-less activities is that they promote connection and engagement. Virtual storytelling and role-playing activities provide an opportunity for participants to share their thoughts and feelings, while virtual debates provide an opportunity for participants to share their opinions and perspectives. This can foster a sense of community and belonging among participants, even if they are physically separated.

However, while tool-less activities can be a great way to keep young people engaged, it's important **to consider the balance between tool-less and tool-based activities when planning for group engagement.**

Activity Example: Speed Dating

Speed dating is an exciting online activity for young people that enable meeting new people in a fun and fast-paced way.

In this activity, participants can be divided into breakout rooms on a virtual meeting platform, allowing them to engage in short, one-on-one conversations with different individuals. These breakout rooms create a virtual space where participants can con-



nect, get to know each other, and share experiences or interests within a limited time frame.

Examples of Speed Dating Questions:

- How do your friends describe you in one word?
- Do you like to call or text?
- What is your fantasy place to visit?
- Do you prefer indoors or outdoors?
- What famous person would you most like to have dinner with?
- Which is your favorite country?

More ideas you can find [here](#).

Fun One-Time Online Activities

One-time online activities, **also known as one-off activities**, are a great way to keep young people engaged and provide a sense of accomplishment. These activities can include virtual scavenger hunts, virtual treasure hunts, or virtual challenges. These activities are designed to be completed within a certain time frame and do not require the group members to meet again.

The benefit of one-time online activities is that they provide a sense of excitement and novelty. Participants can come together for a specific event or challenge and bond over the shared experience. This can create a sense of community and camaraderie among participants, even if they are physically separated.

One-time online activities can also be used as a way to introduce new members to a group or organization. They provide a low-pressure, fun way for new members to get to know each other and start to feel part of the community.

Additionally, one-time online activities can be used as a way to bring attention to a cause or event. For example, **a virtual scavenger hunt** could be used to raise awareness about environmental issues or **a virtual treasure hunt** could be used to raise funds for a charity.

However, one-time online activities also have their downsides. They do not provide the opportunity for long-term engagement or the development of deeper relation-

ships. They also may not be as engaging as activities that are continual and have a long-term focus.

They also may not be as interactive or immersive as activities that use tools or equipment. It's important to consider the balance between one-time and long-term activities when planning engagement for a group.

Activity Example: The Werewolf of Millers Hollow

The Werewolf of Millers Hollow is a popular game that can be played in a group setting, either in person or virtually. It is a classic party game that simulates a village where some of the villagers are werewolves, and the others are villagers trying to find out who the werewolves are before they get eaten.

As an online group activity it allows players to engage in a fun and interactive experience, fosters socialization, and helps players develop skills such as critical thinking and teamwork. Some of the cons of the game are that it can be time-consuming, and it may require a high level of commitment. How to Play: [Werewolves of Millers Hollow](#)

Activity Example: A Virtual Scavenger Hunt

Virtual scavenger hunt is an online activity where participants are given a list of items or tasks to find or complete within a certain time frame. The items or tasks are typically related to a specific theme or topic, and can be found online or in the real world. Participants can work alone or in teams, and the goal is to find or complete all the items on the list before the time is up.

How to Play: Break your call participants up into teams. Create a list of items for people to locate in and around their homes. Give your teams a set amount of time to scour their homes for the correct items. At the conclusion of the time, the team with the most correct items is awarded the winner. If you need more help, check this page.



Accessibility in Virtual Space

Accessibility are key considerations in online activities, as they ensure inclusivity and engagement for a diverse range of participants, regardless of any physical limitations. By implementing measures such as closed captions, subtitles, sign language interpretation, and alternative text, online activity facilitators can ensure that everyone can actively participate and benefit from the activity.

It is important to note that the significance of accessibility in online activities extends beyond equal participation. It also opens up new opportunities for young people to broaden their experiences and knowledge. Virtual tours, workshops, and classes offer a unique platform for learning and exploration, granting access to cultural, historical, and geographical experiences that may otherwise be challenging to access in person.

By embracing online activities that prioritize accessibility, young people can engage in immersive experiences without the need for physical travel. This is particularly important as it eliminates barriers such as financial constraints or limited availability of time, enabling individuals to expand their horizons and gain exposure to diverse cultures, historical sites, and landmarks from around the world from the comfort of their home or office.

In summary, incorporating accessibility and mobility considerations into online activities not only ensures inclusivity but also provides a gateway to new opportunities for young people to learn, explore, and break free from the limitations of their physical circumstances.



Activity Example: Virtual City Tour

This activity can be done using video conferencing platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet.

Instructions:

Gather a group of participants and schedule a meeting time on a video conferencing platform.

Assign a leader or guide for the tour who will present a chosen city's history, culture, and landmarks using visual aids such as images, videos, virtual maps, or streaming their own movement through the chosen place.

To make the tour more interactive, the guide can ask participants to share their experiences, ask questions, or even plan a virtual scavenger hunt.

Activity Example: NASA Experience

Guide participants through the [NASA flight log experience](#). They'll choose a flight, receive a boarding pass, and join the pilot digitally. You'll help them navigate the virtual logbook, earn endorsements, and unlock new activities and mission patches. Extend this opportunity to classrooms, inspiring students to consider careers in aeronautics. Parental consent is required for those under 13.



Lifelike Online Activities Engaging Participants with Their Physical Space

Engaging participants with their physical space can provide a fresh perspective on their lives. Online activities offer a unique opportunity to explore, understand, and share feelings and ideas about their surroundings in new and exciting ways. Participants of online gatherings can challenge each other in a more rewarding cleaning experience, or give each other tips for personalized recycling or renovating projects. They can also discuss how their space creates limitations for them and give each other tips and tricks on how to overcome those limitations. In addition, we can also encourage them to explore their surroundings with the use of digital platforms and GPS, like geocaching, and share experience with the rest of the group.

Activity Example: Space Makeover Exchange



Each participant takes turns presenting a specific area or challenge in their physical space that they would like suggestions for improvement for. They can provide a brief description or share pictures/videos of the space.

The other participants listen attentively and offer their suggestions and ideas to address the presented challenge. They can provide detailed instructions, recommend specific products or resources, or share personal experiences of how they tackled a similar issue in their own spaces.

The participant seeking suggestions can ask clarifying questions, provide additional context, or discuss any concerns related to the suggestions given.

Participants can engage in a back-and-forth discussion, allowing for further brainstorming and refinement of ideas.

The process continues with other participants taking turns presenting their space challenges and receiving suggestions from the group.

Throughout the activity, participants can take notes of the suggestions they find most helpful and discuss any potential obstacles or limitations they may encounter in implementing the suggestions.

To wrap up the activity, participants can share their plans for implementing the suggested improvements and commit to following up on their progress in future sessions or through an online platform.

For ideas to redesign old furniture, [check this page](#).

Activity Example: Geocaching and Geohashing

Geocaching and Geohashing are exciting activities that promote physical activity, teamwork, and socialization. They offer unique opportunities for adventure, exploration, and socialization.

Instructions to Geocaching:

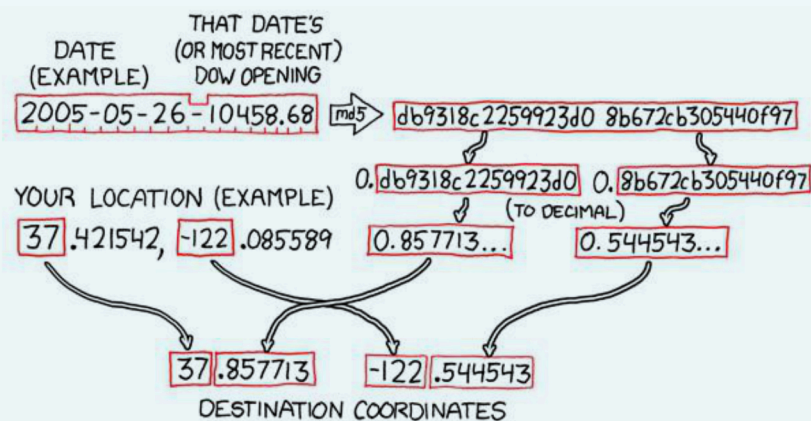
Visit [the geocaching website](#) or use a geocaching mobile app to search for nearby caches. Search for caches based on your preferences, such as size, distance, and difficulty. Use GPS-enabled devices to navigate to the cache locations.

If possible, work with your team to solve clues and find the hidden geocaches. But you can also do it by yourself. Celebrate your success by signing the logbook and exchanging small trinkets if the cache allows it.

Reflect on your experience and share your adventures with others online or in person.

Instructions to Geohashing:

Join [the geohashing community](#), which gathers every Saturday at 4 p.m. to explore random coordinates.



Learn more about geohashing and upcoming events through information provided on their site.

Engage in spontaneous adventures to unlock achievements. Meet fellow geohashers and engage in games and social activities during the gatherings.

Share your expedition stories and document your experiences on the community platform. Embrace the opportunity to connect with people of all ages and make new friends along the way.

Connecting: Community Building Online Activities and Activities Requiring Repeated Group Meetings

Community building online activities are designed to bring people together and foster connections, even if they are physically separated. The goal of these activities is to create a sense of community and camaraderie among participants, and to provide opportunities for people to connect and bond over shared interests or experiences.

Online activities that promote community building can also be used to introduce new members to a group or organization. They provide a low-pressure, fun way for new members to get to know others and start to feel a part of the community. They can also be used to keep members engaged and connected even when face-to-face meetings are not possible.

Activity Examples:

As there are as many people on the planet as there are interests, it is important to realize what kind of hobby or activity you have that you would like to share with others. If you decide to create your own club or assist an existing club in successful continuation, you can focus on the following steps:

- **Define the Purpose:** Clearly establish the purpose and objectives of the virtual club. Determine what the club aims to achieve and what activities will be involved.
- **Set Meeting Schedule:** Decide on a regular meeting schedule that works for the majority of participants. Consider different time zones and availability when selecting a suitable time.

- **Choose a Communication Platform:** Select a reliable and user-friendly online platform for club communications, such as video conferencing tools or dedicated club forums.
- **Promote the Club:** Advertise the club through various channels, such as social media, online communities, or word-of-mouth, to attract interested participants.
- **Establish Club Guidelines:** Create clear and inclusive guidelines that outline expected behavior, respect for others, and guidelines for participation during club activities.
- **Provide Pre-Reading/Materials:** For book clubs or other similar clubs, share reading materials or resources in advance to allow participants time to prepare and engage in discussions.
- **Facilitate Engaging Discussions:** As the facilitator, initiate and moderate discussions, encouraging all participants to share their thoughts, opinions, and questions. Ensure everyone has an opportunity to contribute.
- **Encourage Active Participation:** Create interactive activities or discussion prompts to engage participants actively. Ask open-ended questions, spark debates, or assign roles within the club activities to encourage involvement.
- **Foster a Respectful Environment:** Emphasize the importance of respect, inclusivity, and open-mindedness within the club. Encourage participants to listen to each other's perspectives and provide constructive feedback.
- **Introduce Icebreaker Activities:** Begin each session with icebreaker activities to foster connections and help participants feel more comfortable interacting with each other.



- **Offer Variety in Activities:** Incorporate a mix of activities within the club to keep participants engaged. For example, in book clubs, you can have author Q&A sessions, virtual book swaps, or guest speaker events.
- **Share Resources and Recommendations:** Encourage participants to share relevant resources, book recommendations, game suggestions, cooking recipes, workout routines, art techniques, or virtual volunteering opportunities.
- **Seek Participant Feedback:** Regularly seek feedback from participants in order to understand their experiences, suggestions, and any areas of improvement. Adapt the club's activities and format based on their input.
- **Foster Relationships:** Facilitate opportunities for participants to connect outside of club meetings, such as through online social groups or networking events, to strengthen relationships and create a sense of community.
- **Celebrate Achievements:** Acknowledge and celebrate milestones, accomplishments, or personal growth within the club. This can be done through virtual certificates, awards, or the recognition of participants' contributions.

Examples of the Most Common Clubs

Virtual Book Clubs

Usually focus on discussing a chosen book with other members, sharing their thoughts and opinions on the book, and participating in online discussions.

Virtual Game Nights

Participants can join a virtual game night where they can play online games with other members, such as board games, card games, or video games. This can be a great way to connect and bond with others while having fun.



Virtual Cooking Classes

Participants can join a virtual cooking class where they can learn how to cook new recipes and share their cooking tips, tricks and achievements with other members.

Virtual Workout Classes

Participants can join a virtual workout class where they can exercise and stay active together with other members.

Virtual Volunteer Activities

Participants can join a virtual volunteer group, where they can engage in virtual volunteer activities such as digital storytelling, digital art, translation, or even mentoring young people.

These examples of online activities that promote community building are a great way to connect and bond with others, learn new skills, and have fun while doing it. They also allow for flexibility and accessibility, as they can be done from the comfort of one's own home and can be accessed by people with different physical limitations.

Cultural activities

Cultural participation has significant social benefits and can take active or passive forms. Active forms can include playing a musical instrument, painting, or performing in a play, while passive forms can include listening to music or reading a book. In EU countries, cultural participation is higher among people with greater education and income levels, making it essential for social inclusion.³⁸

In the period of Corona restrictions, cultural activities were hit hard. The question of how to continue meeting up, practicing, and sharing the outcomes of our work posed a challenge, but it turned out to be possible. Good practices emerged and showed others that we could spark creativity and continue working with groups online, while making our activities more accessible for young people with fewer opportunities.

Activity Example: Virtual Theatre Classes

Participants can participate in a virtual theater class where they can, through different activities, warm up, explore creativity and develop ideas for a theater play. You can check ideas on how to do this online while using [Theatre of the Oppressed methods](#).

³⁸ OECD (2022), [The Culture Fix: Creative People, Places and Industries, Local Economic and Employment Development \(LEED\)](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.

Activity Example: Virtual Art Classes

Participants can join a virtual art class where they can learn how to draw, paint, or create artwork, share their art, and get feedback from others.

Activity Example: Virtual Music Instructions

Participants can attend online music lessons with mentors and sharpen their skills. By moving things online, many young people can get access to exclusive fields like music. During the pandemic, a good practice of free virtual education programs emerged.

[Check out this one.](#)

Activity Example: Digital Art Exhibition

We can work with youth to create (digital) art and use the content to create virtual exhibitions. Once we gather or produce enough material, a few free web-based tools exist to create virtual galleries. Here are a few popular options: ArtSteps, Omeka or the most famous - Instagram.

Activity Example: Concerts, Theatre Plays, and Other Shows

With young artists, you could stream concerts and to a broader audience via platforms like Twitch or YouTube. It is possible to have a more closed-circle activity and host a Zoom event for a limited number of people.

Activity Example: Virtual Museum Visits

Several European and world museums offer free visits in a virtual environment ([The British Museum](#), the [Louvre](#), the [MoMA](#), and more). In the same way as with the real museums, we can prepare a treasure hunt activity within virtual ones.

Explore some more ideas!



Conclusion

We explored the importance of keeping young people entertained and connected through online activities. By utilizing the Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing (FSNP) model, facilitators can effectively guide young people through the stages of group development and create engaging online experiences.

The chapter highlighted the value of tool-less activities, which are simple and accessible to a wide range of participants. These activities, such as virtual storytelling, role-playing, and debates, foster connection and engagement among young people. Additionally, one-time online activities provide a sense of accomplishment and can be used to introduce new members to a group or raise awareness about causes or events.

The chapter emphasized the significance of accessibility in virtual spaces from different perspectives – through tools supporting accessibility to overcoming the space limits of a physical world through virtual adventures.

Sometimes, even engaging participants with their surrounding physical space can bring a fresh perspective to their lives. And we shouldn't forget that even culture is not immune to opportunities offered by digital space. We found many good examples of how to bring culture online and thus make it accessible to all.

Lastly, community-building online activities play a vital role in fostering connections and creating a sense of community among young people. By incorporating these strategies and approaches, facilitators can create captivating online experiences that keep young people entertained, connected, and motivated.



Final Conclusion

The use of technology and social media has become an integral part of the lives of young people, providing them with a platform to express themselves, connect with others, and participate in the wider world. A process that has accelerated tremendously in the last 3 years, when the restrictions to personal mobility and in-person socialization have struck so hard among the youngsters, keeping them away even from their local schools and friends, not to mention from the possibilities of meeting their peers from other countries.

The path to a greater digitalisation has been especially fast and innovative in the youth work field, where the needs of young people are more quickly listened to than in other formal settings. However, the often informal approach to new competences in our field, can lead to a lack in the crucial skills needed to plan the digital spaces in the most efficient, safe, engaging and inclusive ways. So it becomes crucial to ensure that these

digital spaces are used in a safe and responsible manner, and that young people have access to the right opportunities for personal and social development.

We hope that by now it will be also evident that when we refer to a digital space we are not only referring to an online environment. A digital space in our understanding is something that can also “happen” offline, as the digital dimension fills our environment in so many aspects of our life that even when not connected, it’s always with us. Think of digital photography and how pervasive it has become, for instance.

One of the key challenges facing organizations working with young people in the digital age is the need to create environments that are both engaging and relevant to their interests and needs. To be effective, online environments for young people must not only be appealing and fun, but also provide meaningful opportunities for interaction, learning, and participation. The work we have undertaken in order to edit this handbook (as part of the project Creative Digital Spaces) involved a review of the scarce existing literature on youth engagement and participation in online environments, as well as the collection and analysis of practical experiences from a variety of sources, but first of all from our partnership members.

The information collected was used to identify successful practices and to develop a set of recommendations for the design and management of online environments for young people. The results of our work suggest that online environments managed by youth and cultural workers and organisations have the potential to be highly relevant and effective in engaging and attracting young people. This is due in part to the capacity of these organizations to design and manage online spaces that are both engaging and meaningful. However, the handbook also identified a number of challenges and barriers that need to be addressed in order to ensure that these online spaces are effective and sustainable. We hope that the information contained in our handbook has been useful to you, your work with young people, and to your organization.

We would value very much any feedback you may want to share with us.

Thanks for reading!

Contact us!



Check our work!



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