DEEP-linking YOUTH

THE DIGITAL DASHBOARD LAUNCH EVENT

An E-Platform for Understanding Young People

22 MARCH 2017 | BRUSSELS

- REPORT -

PROGRAMME

9.15 – 9.30   Registration

9.30 – 10.15   Panel 1: Benefits and Challenges of Listening to Young People's Opinions Online: Why do we need a Digital Dashboard?

- Elisa Lironi, Digital Democracy Manager, European Citizen Action Service (ECAS)
- Rhion Jones, Director, The Consultation Institute (tCI)
- Martina Horvat, Project Manager, GONG
- Petko Georgiev, President, ProInfo

10:15 – 10:45 Brainstorming session – (30 min for all groups to reflect on a few questions proposed)

10.45-11.00   Reporting

11:00 – 11:15 Coffee break

11:15 – 12:00 Panel 2: Building the Digital Dashboard: Technicalities, Ethics and Categorization Methods

- Robert Bjarnason, CEO, Citizens Foundation
- Remmert Keijzer and Fraser Henderson, The Consultation Institute (tCI)
- Safi Sabuni, President, Erasmus Student Network
- Lucia Csabai, Project Officer, Civil College Foundation

12:00 – 12.45 Testing out the Digital Dashboard: Thoughts and Feedback for Improvement

3 Parallel Focus Groups:
- 1. Technical issues
- 2. Ethics issues
- 3. Categorization issues

12.45-13.00   Reporting

13:00 – 14:00   Lunch

1st PANEL: BENEFIT AND CHALLENGES OF LISTENING YOUNG PEOPLE'S OPINIONS ONLINE: WHY DO WE NEED A DIGITAL DASHBOARD?

On 22 March 2017, ECAS held a conference in Brussels aimed at presenting a new E-Platform created as part of the DEEP -linking Youth Project with the purpose of listening to young people's voice online: the Digital Dashboard. The conference included two panel discussions and two brainstorming sessions aimed at collecting feedback and ideas from the participants.

The first panel addressed the issue of youth engagement and disengagement in policy-making and tried to explore if and how both organisations and policy-makers usually take into consideration young people's ideas and opinions in the formulation of new policies at EU level.

Before starting the debate and introducing the speakers, **Elisa Lironi**, Digital Democracy Manager at ECAS and moderator of the panel, gave a general presentation of the DEEP-linking Youth Project by explaining briefly its purpose and providing an overview of the activities and tools through which the Project has been implemented until today.

At the end of these introductory remarks, **Rhion Jones**, Director of the Consultation Institute (tCI), explained his point of view on how young people can influence decision-makers, focusing in particular on the definition of consultation, which is a process widely employed in UK.

In particular, he highlighted that the purpose of a consultation is to hold a process of dialogue as well as an exchange of views which helps policy-makers understand not only what people think about an issue but also and especially why.

According to Mr. Jones, citizens' views can influence decision-makers as much as media, the stock market and the banks can do. However, only a very small percentage of the population uses digital tools in order to both express opinions on policy issues and to engage with public bodies.

As a conclusion of his speech, Mr. Jones listed some challenges that represent an obstacle to the engagement of young people in the decision-making process. Some on them consist in the fact that:

- Young people behave very differently across a range of issues;
- They tend not to understand how political structures and democracy works;
- They tend to listen only to views they agree with (on the basis of what is defined a "selective listening");
- Different views and opinion are expressed on different Platform (both online and offline).

The second speaker, **Martina Horvat**, Project Manager of GONG, focused her speech on the civic and political participation of youth in Croatia and at EU level.

According to Ms. Horvart, many young people in Croatia have the feeling that their voice is not heard from the decision-makers and such a perception has a negative impact on the participation rate of youth in the EU decision-making process.

She described the two boot camps organised in Croatia and Hungary in 2016, within the DEEP-linking Youth Project, which focus was on finding different ways of communication aimed at encouraging the participation of young people at EU level.In particular, the participants were asked to create a digital content through which they could express their opinion about youth mobility and Erasmus+ programme and influence the EU policy-making processes. From such experiment, different challenges and obstacles concerning the Erasmus+ programme emerged.

Finally, Ms. Horvart concluded her speech by stating that we should listen more to young people in order to contrast the negative trend of disengagement we are witnessing today. This goal can be reached not only with the employment of both new offline and online tools, but also and in particular by working close to the educational system.

The third speaker, **Petko Georgiev**, President of ProInfo, analysed how communication processes work in the digital age and how is it possible to reach out to young people through the new ICTs. In particular, Mr. Georgiev identified the following challenges:

- The difference between the concept of "listening" and "hearing";
- The high level of noise online;
- The discrepancy between bad quality digital contents with weak messages (which are widely shared) and good quality digital contents with strong messages (which are most of the time invisible online).

It is important to combine the use of attractive online tools with the creation of interesting content in order to formulate strong messages that policy-makers could take into consideration.

BRAINSTORMING SESSION TO REFLECT ON A FEW QUESTIONS PROPOSED

After the first round of discussion, a Brainstorming session followed and the participants were asked to answer the following questions:

1. In your daily life, are you listening to young people? (*Question for organization or policy-makers*)

2. If your answer at the previous question is yes, how do you actually listen to young people?

3. What are your expectations when you voice your concerns to policy-makers? (*Question for young people*)

4. How do you want to be listened to and through which channel?

The representatives of youth organisations as well as EU stakeholders expressed their concerns about the difficulties in communicating to young people the complicated issues through ICT and that at this stage they still have to figure out how to deal with this issue.

Others participants highlighted the fact that it is important to take into consideration not only the opinions of the Erasmus students but the views of all the young people in general. Among the latter, indeed, not everyone has the possibility to attend university but nevertheless their opinions are important for policy-makers as well.
Even among youth organisations, the risk is to listen to the voice of the so-called "elite" who had the chance to continue their studies at university, while the voice of the rest of young people remains unheard.

Finally, another participants stated that in order to foster youth engagement at the EU level it is important to redesign the education system and suggested teaching civic education to children since the first years of the primary school.

2ND PANEL: BUILDING THE DIGITAL DASHBOARD: TECHNICALITIES, ETHICS AND CATEGORIZATION METHODS

The second panel focused on the Digital Dashboard, which has been designed in order to monitor what young people are saying in the digital space specifically on youth mobility and if the information collected through such a monitoring platform could be useful for policy-makers in order to redesign the Erasmus+ programme in 2020.

Robert Bjarnason, CEO of Citizens Foundation, presented technical aspects of the Digital Dashboard and provided a detailed explanation about its functioning and the process through which such an "artificial brain" has been trained to identify online content related to youth learning mobility programmes.

In particular, Mr. Bjarnason explained how all the different social media messages concerning the Erasmus+ programme and youth mobility have been classified by the partners of the DEEP-linking Youth Project under four categories (namely finance, housing, university and other) as well as on the basis of the relevance of their content (low, medium and high).

The Dashboard represents an informal mechanism thanks to which policy-makers can listen to the voice and the opinion of young people but the real value of the Digital Dashboard, according to Mr. Bjarnason, is the livestream which can tell policy-makers what youngsters are currently saying online.

Remmert Keijzer, Policy & Communications Manager of The Consultation Institute (tCI) and Ethics Officer of the project, focused his speech on the "social listening (or monitoring) process" that is used generally to identifying and assessing what is being said about a company, individual, product or brand on the Internet.

In the case of the DEEP-linking Youth Project, such a process has been used in order to gather data about the youth mobility programme in the EU on the basis of some key metrics:

- Demographics;
- Geographies, spaces and timelines;
- Topics, language and ferocity;
- Use of the language and descriptors.

Mr. Keijzer explained how the entire process of collecting and storing data has been carried out according to the project's Code of Conduct (eg. the results are all public and anonymous) as well as under the supervision of an appointed Ethics Officer for the project.
Providing personal information online is part of our daily life but we must be careful about the data and the sensitive information we share on social media.

He moved than to talk about the limits of the social listening process in gathering information, due for instance to:

- The natural language processing;
- The representativeness of the social media profile;
- The discrepancy between the people's behavior online and in the real life;
- The inaccuracy of profiles which could lead to inaccurate information and findings;
- Technical restrictions;
- The "Dark Social".

Finally, Mr. Keijzer concluded his speech by showing the data collected so far through the Digital Dashboard for the purpose of the DEEP-linking Youth Project about the youth mobility in EU. Most of the messages about the Erasmus+ program have been published in English, French, Italian and Spanish and comes from Spain, Italy, France and UK. The online sources mostly visible are Twitter, followed by Instagram and Facebook.

Safi Sabuni, President of Erasmus Student Network (ESN), provided a more in-depth analysis of the categorization process behind the Digital Dashboard functioning.
In particular, the DEEP-linking Youth partners decided to introduce the categories *housing, finance* and *university* because according to ESN's research and experience, such categories represent the main fields where Erasmus students generally face several challenges during their exchange abroad.
The online messages filtered on the basis of these categories can show policy-makers what are the main difficulties Erasmus students are facing today and what changes should be implemented in the Erasmus+ programme in order to improve the youth mobility in the future.
Ms. Sabuni concluded her speech by saying that the current version of the Digital Dashboard can be further improved by adding other categories or subcategories which can allow us to hear the voice of young people in other different fields.

Ms. Lucia Csabai, Project Officer of Civil College Foundation, gave a brief presentation of Civil College Foundation and its youth activities at the local level in Hungary.
She then continued the discussion on the categorization process, focusing on the limits of the latter.
In particular, she talked about the translation process which allows policy-makers to have all the messages and online contents displayed on the Digital Dashboard automatically translated in English from other languages. However, not always the translation is accurate and in these cases it can be very

difficult to understand the meaning of the digital content that has to be categorized.

Furthermore, according to Ms. Csabai the categorization process should be carried out not only by one person but preferably by more people. In this way, the training process of the Digital Dashboard will not be influenced by the subjective opinion of one person but will include different points of view.

Despite these limits, the Digital Dashboard is an useful tool for listening to the voice of young people and Ms. Csabai encouraged to use it not only passively (by reading the digital contents) but also actively (by testing the platform and categorizing the online contents).

After the conclusion of the second round of discussion, a series of intervention from the participants followed. The main discussions were about:

1. The classification process which filters out the relevant messages from irrelevant ones on the Digital Dashboard;
2. The average and the geographical distribution of messages and digital contents that are processed daily by the Dashboard and the geographical distribution;
3. The analysis and the application process of the data gathered through the Digital Dashboard;
4. The limitations of the Digital Dashboard.

FOCUS GROUPS ON TECHNICAL ISSUES, ETHICS ISSUES AND CATEGORIZATION ISSUES

The participants were asked to form small groups in order to identify and discuss the technical, ethics and categorization issues of the Digital Dashboard and come up with some feedback, ideas and recommendations.

Technical issues
- Difficulties in taking out swear words while preserving relevant data;
- Recognition of digital contents produced by humans and by robots;
- Making sure the Digital Dashboard does not capture private interests;
- Using the Digital Dashboard for future consultations.

Ethics issues
- The Digital Dashboard cannot be considered a participatory tool. Listening to young people's voice is not equal to engaging and involving them in the EU decision-making process;
- The authors of the public digital contents gathered through the Digital Dashboard are not aware of this process. It's important to clarify through clear guidelines on the Dashboard how the data is used.

Categorization issues
- Need for more categories and subcategories on the basis of the output that is intended to gather through the Digital Dashboard;
- Need for a "search" tab in the Digital Dashboard to narrow down the voices even more into specific issues.