**THE THESSALONIKI STATEMENT OF INTERCITY YOUTH:**

**”Managing digital youth work[[1]](#footnote-2)”** 5th Oct. 2018

Young people are at the front of digitalization - media use, in particular. Daily Internet use among young people in Europe has nearly become saturated (90-100%). In USA 95% of young people have a mobile phone and 45% of them use it ”almost constantly” (Pew, May 2018). In Europe young people use Internet much more often and more frequently than the average population (Eurostat 2017). Even if these figures might appear bewildering or even frightening to the adults, they are experienced by most young people as normal life.

The front runners consist of those young people with higher education and those living in North and Western Europe. We recognize both the opportunities and positive uses of the media, but also the fact that there is a digital divide, many young people have negative experience of social media (typically bullying), lack media literacy and develop unhealthy dependency on it. However, we emphasize that mobile phones, Internet and the social media are only one part of the digitalized technological world around us.

Policy makers and the youth field must support young people to become innovative, critical, reflective, equal and safe users of the new technology. Youth work has the educational capacity to work together with the young people and empower their active e-citizenships. In this context, we are deeply worried about increasing digital surveillance of authoritarian regimes of their citizens.

In Europe, there is a very strong political support for youth work to apply digitalization in youth work and to upgrade the skills and competences of the youth workers and their managers. Managers should allow their personnel flexible ways of developing digital competencies. However, youth workers do not have to be technological experts – it is often enough ”to be open-minded, curious and willing to try out new forms of media, and be interested in listening to young people and always open to discussions” (Anu Pöyskö, WienXtra – mediezentrum). In the rapidly digitalizing world it is the responsibility of the managers of youth work organizations to keep youth work at the heart of this development.

Youth work needs to be *agile* and *proactive* in supporting innovative ways of the young people and youth workers to work together using the new technology. We recognize that to varying degrees digital youth work is still to come and that many youth workers, also managers and politicians feel reserved, critical or even negative. The managers of youth work are crucial in organizing and running a process through which youth work organizations and their key stakeholders find a common ground and agree on steps to be taken. We emphasize the importance of interactive dialogue between the staff and the managers. As this can develop into a process of cultural change and as it can question some of our old ways of doing youth work, it is vital that, from the very start, the management becomes a visible leader of this transformation.

We emphasize that digital youth work is not something that only digitally minded youth workers do, it is a working approach for the entire staff. It is important for the whole youth work organization to engage in a shared elaboration of the meaning and tasks of digital youth work. This collaborative reflection should arrive at shared objectives, a plan or a strategy for the implementation of digital youth work. Youth work organizations have different emphasis, they work with divergent youth groups and operate in differing social, cultural and economic contexts. Digital youth work and its strategy should be modified to these individual contexts. The young people must be seen as the driving force of the whole process. They must be provided with the means and the legitimacy to act. To add, the managers must engage in permanent dialogue with the young people on digitalization.

The management must encourage youth workers together with the young people to continuously explore new ways of using new technology, Internet and the social media for young people to enjoy youth work and to become active social agents. We further urge the managers to engage in peer learning; to provide opportunities for youth workers to learn from each others ideas and experiences in using digital media and new technology in youth work.

The transformation to digital youth work puts emphasis on people, improving the digital skills of youth workers and developing a culture of exploring and innovating, finding new partners to network with, becoming more user-centered and focusing on continuous development rather than on a pedantic implementation of a long-term plan.

InterCity Youth will establish a working group for those who are managing digital youth work to share their experiences and learn from each other across Europe, and report back to the next InterCity Youth Conference.

1. Digital Youth Work refers to proactively using and/or addressing media and technology in youth work, it applies to any youth work settings, is an integral part of other forms of youth work and can be used in face-to-face situations as well as in digital environments. Digital youth work is a complementary, integrated element to any type of youth work. It is underpinned by the same ethics, values and principles as the youth work that we know. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)