ABSTRACT

Recently, the field of social innovation (SI) is making rapid progress and this development is being supported by unprecedented opportunities for digital technology. However, digital social innovation (DSI) should be seen as part of a youth work practice where alternative solutions can be found to improve the living conditions of communities and young people. DSI encourages young people to explore how innovative technology can be used to address societal challenges. To date, no studies have been conducted to support youth workers in the areas of digitalization and SI. This book chapter, therefore, explores the relevance of DSI to youth work practices. This chapter gives an overview of the meaning of SI, DSI, and a renewed focus on DSI and related concepts in youth work practice. It concludes with a framework for DSI in the field of youth work and the implications of indicators.

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INTRODUCTION

Our current society is often referred to as a post-modern society or a knowledge society to distinguish it from previous structures. For a long time, one of the variables that influenced the formation of communities was the geographical location: communities could not be created between people who live far apart (as they were unable to come into close contact with each other). This geographical restriction has been lifted through ICT, allowing human interactions and emotions to be articulated through space and time. In the wake of technological revolutions based on steam engines, electricity, and the Internet age, this digital transition has often signaled the fourth industrial revolution. The Internet of Things (IoT), Industry 4.0, Big Data and Cyber-Physical Systems have started to emerge, affecting conventional industry jobs, but also introducing new markets and business models (Pereira, Barreto, & Amaral, 2017).

Society is faced with the growing influence of digital technologies on basic human functioning; these innovations have contributed to organizational and social change. Digital technologies enable new approaches to societal challenges by identifying and delivering new services that improve individual quality, identifying and developing new strategies for labor market integration, new knowledge and skills, new opportunities and new forms of participation (Murray, Caulier-Grice and Mulgan, 2010). Evolving technology has exposed younger generations to rapid technological and social changes in the environment, requiring new skills and innovations in learning, knowledge sharing and knowledge development, including access to information systems and therefore networking (Sharma et al., 2016).

Today’s youth is called a digital generation or a networked generation (Buckingham & Willett, 2006). Most of them have internet access and use it intensively. It has become clear that this generation varies from other generations in many respects. The advent of digital technologies in recent years has transformed the way young people view their professional and personal knowledge of their lives (Garner & O’Sullivan, 2010; Giffords, 2009). Youth as users of new technologies is very much in line with the speed at which innovation is accepted. Previous studies have shown that significant technology adoptions are occurring among young people (Rauschnabel, Brem, & Ivens, 2015). According to Petrau and Daskalopoulou (2013), young people are major participants in the development and use of open innovations, which influences the transformation of the customer-oriented perspective into the community-oriented ones “which include community social capital”.

While high-quality youth work that meets the needs of young people must include technological considerations in this modern era. DSI has recently been the focus of debate on the future of youth work. DSI as part of youth work, where youth workers can find alternatives or approaches to improving the living conditions and
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