



EUROPEAN CENTRE
FOR
MINORITY ISSUES

MINORITY IDENTITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Cluster for Culture & Diversity
Workshop convener: Dr Kyriaki Topidi

Call for expert contributions

Living in the digital age has given a new dimension to the diversity of cultural expressions on a global scale. This evolution in the quality and quantity of human expressions has also impacted individuals and groups belonging to minorities in analogous, yet understudied ways. From access to cultural expressions and creativity, to the regulation of cultural industries and civil society participation and all the way to hateful speech and the importance of the collection of cultural statistics, we are struggling to fully appreciate and understand the challenges of digitalization for minority identities.

On the one hand, our societies have gained enhanced and easier access to cultural goods, which has led to a creative explosion of public awareness and civil society participation towards the integration of minorities. On the other hand, however, the digital divide still strikes certain groups in disproportionate terms and threatens to maintain (if not enhance) socio-economic inequality and patterns of discrimination affecting minorities.

The aim of this network meeting is to explore and map from a variety of angles how local/national digital cultures are/can be connected to minority protection. Our basic hypothesis in this context posits that the digitalization of societies functions as an amplifier of existing trends, rather than as an *ipso facto* positive or negative causal link to the phenomena studied. It is the specific actions of states, private companies, civil society organizations and individuals that impact instead our cultural ecosystem, and by extension minority groups as well.

Connected to the broader pressing concerns of online accountability, the influence of social media and in some more extreme cases the risk for civil unrest, it is worth identifying the multifaceted aspects of how the internet and its uses are affecting minority communities. The salient issues of freedom of expression in a digital environment, the (evolving) media environment in itself, the requirements of pluralism and diversity as well as the issues of the relationship between media information technologies and conflict prevention have been identified as the main avenues of contemporary scholarly inquiry within this broad area, though not necessarily from a minority perspective.

The starting point of our deliberations will thus stem from the growing realization that information and communication, along with the technologies that enhance them, have

become essential considerations in democratic deliberations, participation in public affairs as well as integration of diverse societies. In addition, their transnational and international dimensions have to be also accounted for: in fact, these latter are of fundamental importance for national minorities who wish to maintain and develop further their social, political and cultural subsistence and relevance.

The role of digital media has therefore become essential in advancing social cohesion and allowing for inclusive deliberative spaces which remain pluralistic. The expectation from states is to safeguard these spaces for the benefit of all those who wish to express themselves within the limits of the law but also to protect sufficiently sustainable pluralistic media environments catering also for the cultural and linguistic specificities of national minorities.

The launching intensive workshop of this thematic cluster will be addressed to experts who will look at the patterns shaping minority identity in the digital era from the following (though not exclusive) angles:

- The use of minority languages and the internet
- Trends in ethnopolitics in the digital age
- Cultural indoctrination using online tools
- Hate speech and the regulation of online public spaces
- Minority mobilization and the internet
- Minority Media and media education through the internet
- The use of Big Data and ethnic statistics and the internet

Ultimately, the ambition is to illustrate how “people use different media for different purposes and in different ways. The fact that many individuals have multiple identities that may be asserted in different ways, times and contexts must be recognized when developing media-related policies for the digital age.”¹ In this respect, the emerging and already available hard law and soft law instruments will guide our reflection towards the protection of enhanced social interaction and diverse expressions.

¹ OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Lamberto Zannier, OSCE, *The Tallinn Guidelines on National Minorities and the Media in the Digital Age and Explanatory Note*, HCNM/OSCE, February 2019, at 11.