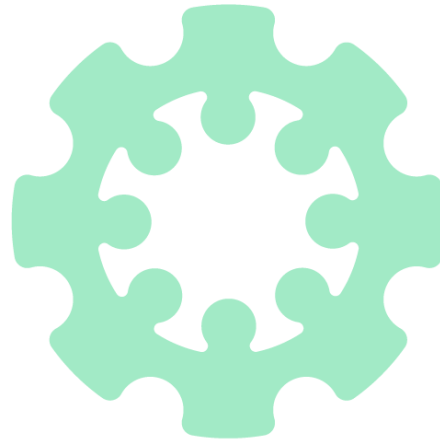


DIGITAL ACTION AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AS A CATALYST FOR
SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE COVID-19 CRISIS



HEIDI

**Drivers and barriers of Higher
Education engagement in Digital
Action: case studies from Cyprus,
France, Greece, Malta and UK**

Synthesis Report

Drivers and barriers of Higher Education engagement in Digital Action

This synthesis report construes an analysis of the content ensuing from the discussions held across fifteen roundtable events and two webinars, and considers the functionality of digital action in terms of opportunities and hurdles that were encountered by the participants. The academic partners of the HEIDI project held a series of fifteen roundtable events consisting of five groups of higher education stakeholders - students, academic and research staff, decision makers, library staff and technical staff. During the roundtables, participants were asked to consider examples of digital action and identify drivers and barriers to digital action. The non-academic partners held two webinars in Greece and Cyprus, highlighting relevant examples of digital action, followed with Q&As from the panel and guests.

Key findings

Each group mentioned communication as an important factor for successful performance of digital action and thus, we need to investigate how higher education institutions and the community communicate. Promoting the importance of research and data collection within younger students was suggested as a method of building better relationships for civic participation. This may help people understand how higher education institutions operate, and this could improve community participation in the future as people who occupy space outside of higher education institutions will have a working knowledge of why research is conducted. Therefore, better communication would indeed raise awareness of digital action.

Digital action can only be effective if there is digital equality. Thus, more work needs to be done to understand the impact of local digital action on global communities. Local governments are required to lessen the burden on higher education institutions by helping the wider communities to narrow the digital divide. However, these skills and benefits are only useful if they can be translated into a language that is understood by the wider community, and thus higher education institutions should be the mediators between policy makers and civil society.



Drivers to higher education engagement in digital action are:

- Increased social entrepreneurship;
- Potential for civic engagement;
- Access to funding; and
- Better use of space in higher education institutions premises.

Barriers to higher education engagement in digital action are:

- Trust issues between higher education institutions and the community;
- Deficiency in communication;
- Digital inequality; and
- The digital divide.

Country-specific commonalities and differences

- UCL and UP participants referred to global incidents and examples of digital action; and
- UM participants discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic introvertedly.

Recommendations

- Achieving digital action effectiveness by fostering trust between higher education institutions and the community to encourage appropriate participation and dissemination;
- Striving for more inclusivity through upskilling those without digital skills as well as seeing the relationship between stakeholders as a global working relationship;
- Appreciating people's realities and expectations of social change by understanding the needs and aspirations of individuals who will be directly impacted and the long-term effects of digital action that can help develop better methods of project organisation; and
- Understanding the social needs of different groups, and how information should be produced for a global audience but have the flexibility to be translated into a way that can be understood locally.