EU TACSO 3 Meeting Notes

People-to-People Programme Event/Regional Event

"Digital Transition for Civil Society Organisations" on the 31st of October and the 1st of November 2023, Live and online, at the Holiday Inn Hotel, Skopje, MK

Introduction

Purpose

The objective of this event was to enable participating CSOs to develop clear strategies and approaches for overcoming the challenges and taking advantage of the opportunities presented by the digital transition. It aimed to address three fundamental themes: a. understanding the digital landscape, b. mitigating risks, and c. enhancing digital skills and resources. Participants engaged in interactive sessions, leveraging collective expertise to navigate challenges and devise strategies. Each thematic session facilitated discussions, presentations, and group discussions to explore solutions and approaches to addressing digitalization's impacts on civil society organisations.

The event's design encouraged connections, knowledge-sharing, and collaboration among participants, emphasizing the significance of fostering a supportive network to navigate digital challenges collectively. The setting encouraged the participants to bridge expertise, share insights, and strategize to empower CSOs and fortify digital resilience in a rapidly evolving landscape.

Overall, the Digital Transition for Civil Society Organisations event encapsulated the complex nature of digitalization, recognizing its vast potential while acknowledging the imperative of collaborative efforts to overcome associated challenges faced by civil society organisations (CSOs). It gathered thirty-four in-person participants, seventeen women and seventeen men, and eighteen online participants, two men, and sixteen women.

Background

The ongoing digital revolution has emerged as a transformative force reshaping the operational landscape of CSOs. This wave of digital development has significantly impacted their adaptability, service delivery mechanisms, and engagement patterns. Named "the departure of the digital train" from its main station, this transition presents many opportunities and prerequisites for CSOs to embark on a journey characterized by continuous learning and adaptation.

Within the potential opportunities lie also countless challenges confronting CSOs both internally and in terms of their activities and services. Internally, CSOs grapple with limited digital literacy among their staff and volunteers, necessitating the acquisition of IT expertise that often comes at a premium cost. Moreover, donors face the challenge of aligning grant applications with the escalating need to integrate IT and digital service costs. Additionally, while artificial intelligence (AI) applications promise heightened efficiency in CSOs' work, they entail complexities and resource demands.

Concerning CSOs' services and activities, the digital divide materializes large, exacerbating disparities as affluent, educated individuals actively engage online, leaving behind marginalized groups lacking digital access. While the Western Balkans and Türkiye Governments are increasing their online operations, it further sidelines vulnerable communities from direct service provision, limiting their access to entitlements and policy consultations. Furthermore, advancements in AI and digital surveillance pose a significant threat to societal well-being and rights, including gender equality.

The EU TACSO 3 recognized the critical need for collaboration and knowledge-sharing in navigating these challenges posed by the digital transition. Building upon prior consultative meetings held in the summer of 2023, EU TACSO 3 organised the People-to-People Programme (P2P) Event in Skopje, North Macedonia, on October 31st and November 1st, 2023. This event aimed to offer additional support, skills, and knowledge to empower CSOs in efficient digital transition. It sought to operationalize key recommendations from previous consultations, focusing on leveraging AI in CSOs' operations, advocating for conducive legal and policy frameworks for AI use, and developing strategies to enhance CSOs' digital competencies for maximizing the benefits of digital technologies and spaces.

Relations to the EU TACSO 3 Project's Result Areas

The "Digital Agenda Consultative Meetings are in relation to the Project's Result Area 6: "The People to People (P2P) programme and other events are effectively designed and implemented in a participatory manner."

Agenda

31st of October 2023, Tuesday	
08:30 – 09:00	**Registration of participants (live and online)**
09:00 – 09:10	**Welcome and Introduction**
09:10 – 09:45	- **Ms. Irena Ivanova -** EU Delegation, Skopje, MK. What is the role of the EU in WBT in supporting digital transition, and how the EU sees the role of civil society in the digital transition? The current state of play, EU priorities.
	- **Ms. Valentina Velichkovska -** National Resource Centre Representative MK – challenges and opportunities for CSOs in MK faced with the digital transition.
	- **Mr. Richard Allen -** EU TACSO 3 Team Leader - current state of play – findings from the assessment, and findings from consultative meetings, rationale for this event, objectives.
	Moderator: Mr. Dino Mujanović - People-to-People Programme Manager
09:45 – 10:15	**Participant introductions**
	Moderator: Mr. Dino Mujanović - People-to-People Programme Manager
10:15 – 11:15	**Panel Discussion I - Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Digital Tools in CSOs' Operations** – Real-world examples of digital integration in CSOs
	Panellists:
	- **Ms. Jelena Spasović -** Connect International
	- **Mr. Milan Tanceski** – Centre for Social Innovations Blink 42-21
	- **Mr. Miloš Janković** - Catalyst Balkans
	Guiding questions:
	- What are we talking about when we talk about digital tools and AI?
	- What tools are available that people are using?
	- What seems most useful for CSOs?

	- How do we get people in civil society to be able to use them? - How can civil society encourage governments to use digital tools for improved public services/engagement? Moderator: Ms. Marija Armenski - Country Coordinator MK
11:15 – 11:45	**Refreshment Break and Networking**
11:45 – 12:45	**Group Discussions** I (world café - 60 minutes) Indicative topics include: - What AI/digital tools seem most useful? - How can we best use them in CSO work? - How can we keep up with the latest developments?
12:45 – 13:00	Feedback from group work
13:00 – 14:30	**Lunch Break and Networking**
14:30 – 15:15	**Panel Discussion II - Advocacy for Responsible AI and Digital Use** Panellists: - **Ms. Teuta Sahatqija,** Women in Tech: bias and women's rights in AI tools and applications (online) - **Ms. Sanela Pajazitović Bubanja** – NGO 35mm – use of social media, safeguards, and online risks - **Mr. Bojan Kordalov** – Digital Media and Communications Expert Moderator: Ms. Afërdita Pustina - Country Coordinator XK
15:15 – 16:30	**(Refreshments available, going into group work)** **Group Discussions II – Advocacy for Responsible use of digital tools and AI** Group discussions on developing strategies for responsible AI use in CSOs (World Café format). Indicative questions include: - what are the key advocacy topics for legislation and public safeguards on the use of digital technologies and AI? Towards which institutions do we advocate? What networks/partners are needed to amplify advocacy? - how do we as CSOs ensure respect for ethical considerations in using digital tools and AI in our work? - how do we promote transparency and accountability in the use of digital and AI applications within civil society?
16:30 – 17:00	Groups reporting in the plenary – Conclusions of Day One Moderator: Mr. Dino Mujanović - People-to-People Programme Manager
1st of November 2023, Wednesday	

09:00 - 10:00	**Panel Discussion III - Empowering CSOs with Digital Skills** - presentation and discussion on strategies for CSOs to access and build digital competencies, harness digital tools effectively, and access tools, technology, and funding. Panellists: - **Ms. Mila Josifovska Danilovska** – Metamorphosis Foundation - **Mr. Armin Šestić –** Zora, Association for Social, Cultural and Creative Development - **Ms. Snežana Nikčević –** NGO 35mm, Montenegro Guiding questions: - How did you identify and adopt digital tools for your work? - How did you develop/find the digital skills needed? - What recommendations do you have for other organisations? Adoption of tools, development of digital skills, etc. Moderator: Mr. Dino Mujanović - People-to-People Programme Manager
10:00– 10:45	**Refreshment Break and Networking/Check out**
10:45 - 11:45	**Group discussions: Empowering CSOs with Digital Skills** Group discussions on empowering CSOs with digital skills (World Café format): - How do we encourage our staff to keep up to date with digital and AI tools? - How can we take advantage of IT experts through volunteering? - What services and tools are available for CSOs that are affordable and sustainable? Use of open-source technologies and resources. Specialists for CSOs. - What open-source training is there for our staff and volunteers? Including local language resources.
11:45 – 12:30	Group reporting in the plenary Event Conclusion and Key Takeaways Recap of key insights, outcomes, and next steps Moderator: Mr. Richard Allen - Team Leader (EU TACSO 3)
12:30 – 14:00	**Lunch, Networking, and Departure according to individual schedules**

Meeting Notes

Welcome and Introduction Session provided inputs from three panellists – Ms. Irena Ivanova, from the EU Delegation to North Macedonia, Ms. Valentina Velichkovska from the Civil Society Resource Centre (also National Resource Centre for MK), and Mr. Richard Allen, from the EU TACSO 3 Project.

Ms. Irena Ivanova set the stage, emphasizing the significance of the digital shift for civil society's perspective. She highlighted the pivotal role of digital tools in overcoming challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, citing an example of a group of women adapting to selling products online. This exemplified how digitalization became integral to their livelihoods.

Ms. Ivanova underscored that digitalization extends far beyond being a technical tool. It redefines societal sectors' functions and meanings. It amplifies economic, social, and environmental dimensions while advocating for a balance creation between innovation and safeguarding fundamental rights. Furthermore, she stressed the significance of digitalization in enhancing judicial services, improving transparency, and contributing to the region's democratization, especially in the Western Balkans' enlargement process.

Ms. Valentina Velichkovska emphasized the opportunities and challenges faced by civil society organisations (CSOs) in embracing digitalization. She highlighted the expansive reach of the Internet, enabling CSOs to engage a wider audience, share their missions, and mobilize support efficiently. Moreover, Valentina shed light on the role of digital platforms in fostering collaboration, networking, and transparent accountability among CSOs, although acknowledging the challenges of the digital divide, low digital literacy, and cybersecurity threats.

Mr. Richard Allen emphasized the EU TACSO 3 project's core objectives: monitoring the enabling environment, facilitating governmental ties with civil society, enhancing CSO capacities, and bridging connections between the European Union and civil society in the Western Balkans and Türkiye through the People-to-People Programme and its events. He stressed the juxtaposition of an optimistic digital future with the challenges of misinformation, cyber threats, and the vulnerable positions of CSOs. He advocated for collaborative efforts to navigate these complexities.

Mr. Dino Mujanović, People-to-People Programme Manager of the EU TACSO 3 reflected on the main points[1] from the previous consultative meetings held in the summer of 2023 that led to the creation of this event, led through the event agenda, and facilitated participants' introductions.

Panel Discussion I - Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Digital Tools in CSOs' Operations

The presentations collectively highlighted the need for digital literacy, the challenges in transitioning to digital tools, and the importance of leveraging AI for a greater impact. Panellists and participants discussed and talked about the role of CSOs in spearheading digital transformation and addressing societal issues. Ms. Marija Armenski, the country coordinator for North Macedonia, moderated this session.

Ms. Jelena Spasović, the General Manager of Connect International, introduced her organisation as a Europe-wide network with thirty-two full members and around eighteen stakeholder members, comprising NGOs and various stakeholders such as companies, regions, faculties, etc. Connect International focuses on the digital agenda and digital rights, emphasizing the importance of both rights related to digitalization and empowering people during this transition.

Ms. Spasović highlighted the recent integration of AI into digital tools and discussed how AI influences young people, particularly in job applications where AI screens CVs and job applications. The definition of digital tools is vast and ever-expanding, making it a challenge for governments and CSOs to control, but they aim to support citizens, especially youth, in adapting to these changes.

She referred to research conducted by Connect International on digital transformation in youth organisations. They surveyed one hundred organisations across Europe, focusing on how these organisations transitioned their work to digital tools in three aspects: a. office work, b. non-formal education, and c. networking. The research revealed that 90% of these organisations utilised digital tools at an intermediate to advanced level, with remote work being the most significant advantage. However, there was a disconnect between the organisations' digital proficiency and their members' basic digital skills. The research also indicated that organisations lacked adequate training in using digital tools. Financial constraints represented a significant challenge, impacting access to

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[1] Available on EU TACSO 3 Website or upon request from Dino Mujanovic at p2p@tacso.eu

professional-level tools, infrastructure, and training. Additionally, a lack of comprehensive guides for selecting appropriate tools and the inability of tools to replace real-life experiences posed challenges.

Ms. Spasović advocated for empowering digital citizenship, focusing on digital literacy, safety, quality, and participation standards. Connect International aims to push for local governments to lead digitalization efforts, emphasizing the need to bridge the gap between digital tools and citizens' capabilities.

Mr. Miloš Janković from Catalyst Balkans presented the critical need for digital transformation in the civil society sector, highlighting that it is a question of the sector's survival. He emphasized the sector's delay behind the curve in adopting AI and digital transformation. He mentioned the research by Catalyst Balkans indicating that many organisations in the sector lack basic equipment and fail to utilise available opportunities for free tools and software.

He addressed the responsibility of donors in structuring budgets to support nonprofit tech needs and stressed the importance of integrating technology to improve the civil sector's impact. Miloš shared examples of how Catalyst Balkans is incorporating AI into its work, such as using predictive analysis in crowdfunding platforms to recommend campaigns to donors and automating data collection and analysis processes.

Mr. Janković highlighted the need for a culture shift in CSOs to adapt to digital transformation, stressing the importance of exploring ways to leverage existing technology for a greater impact.

Mr. Milan Tanceski, from the Centre for Social Innovations Blink 42-21, presented and discussed his organisation's project on developing software using machine learning to detect elements that might lead to corruption in public procurement documents. He emphasized that AI could predict corruption by identifying patterns within procurement procedures. The software aims to red flag elements prone to corruption, providing municipalities with insights to make informed decisions.

Mr. Tanceski highlighted the importance of civil society organisations in creating the data needed for AI algorithms and emphasized the potential for technology, such as mobile apps, in collecting data for predictive analysis. There are challenges in engaging lower levels of administration in utilising digital tools and the emphasized need for collaboration with governmental institutions to drive digital transformation.

In the discussion following the presentations, participants noted that the transformative power of digitalization significantly impacts CSOs, highlighting two crucial non-digital issues: a. sustainability and b. capacity building. The need to adopt business-oriented models for better operational efficiency remains dominant. Discussing the implementation of such models and necessary processes is crucial for developing CSOs' work methods.

Concerns about data quality within the CSO sector, especially regarding methodologies behind research and biases in AI training, are pertinent. Training AI systems using CSOs' collected data prompts the need for a quality assurance or standardization system.

"Is there a way to ensure uniformity and improve the quality of data fed into AI models used by CSOs?" was one of the questions opened for discussion.

The answer to this is to understand how to introduce AI and automation in existing processes, and what business concepts should civil society adopt. The starting point should be a preparation of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and/or systematized processes within individual CSOs to ensure value delivery to beneficiaries. Most of the participants attending the event reported they had SOPs within their organisations when this comment was made during discussions. The comment itself emphasizes the importance of having established processes and SOPs within CSOs before incorporating AI and automation. Having these procedures in place allows for more efficient workflows and precise impact measurement, enabling smarter work practices. While acknowledging

the potential of AI, it stresses the need for human oversight and involvement due to data quality concerns and biases inherent in AI.

The significance of data quality is highlighted and co-creation of data with relevant stakeholders can enhance data accuracy, using diverse expertise to enrich information. Additionally, the discussion shifted towards CSOs' involvement in shaping AI-related standards and regulations to prevent biases and ensure ethical AI use. It emphasized the need for active participation in policy debates in WBT to influence the direction of AI regulations beneficial for CSOs and citizens.

Overall, the comments stressed the necessity of established processes, human involvement alongside AI, and active participation in shaping AI-related policies, to ensure ethical use, and address data quality issues within CSOs.

In further discussions, there were multiple discussions and questions surrounding challenges and concerns related to AI development and implementation in civil society organisations (CSOs). The primary questions revolve around potential challenges arising from AI tools, especially concerning data privacy, security, accountability, and biases within AI algorithms.

Regarding data sovereignty, there are complexities in managing data across different legal entities (i.e. entities within the public administration), impacting how those who are responsible for data, store and secure them. Examples highlight instances where low digital literacy led to involuntary exposure of personal documents, emphasizing the need for more robust safeguards.

One question touched on the availability of AI software for monitoring public procurement at the municipal level, focusing on its potential usage and accessibility for CSOs. Mr. Tanceski responded that the software is still in development, envisioned as a tool for municipalities and state audit offices.

The discussion expanded to ethical considerations, including accountability and ethical responsibilities concerning AI results, especially when it comes to decision-making and potential consequences. There was a concern about the age and ethics of AI developers and potential biases, such as gender or language, within AI algorithms.

Participants stressed the importance of continued involvement in ethical debates surrounding AI, emphasizing that biases can stem from a range of factors beyond age or gender, dictating broader engagement, even among those with no technical expertise.

This panel discussion acknowledged the complex landscape of AI challenges and emphasized the need for continued discussions, ethical considerations, and the involvement of diverse stakeholders, especially in addressing biases and ensuring accountability in AI usage within CSOs.

Panel Discussion II - Advocacy for Responsible AI and Digital Use

Presentations within this panel emphasized the multifaceted nature of AI's impact, calling for a balanced approach that encompasses technical development, social awareness, regulatory measures, widespread education, and usage of AI tools for the benefit of society. They also urged for a focus on critical thinking, ethical responsibility, and accountability among individuals and institutions while navigating the complex landscape of AI-integrated social media. They underscored the importance of being cautious, adaptive, and proactive in dealing with the evolving landscape of AI, technology, and its potential impact on various aspects of society. This panel discussion was moderated by Ms. Aferdita Pustina, Country Coordinator for Kosovo*[2]

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[2] *This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.*

Ms. Teuta Sahatqija, Ambassador, Women in Tech, in her presentation, highlighted several key points regarding the evolution and impact of artificial intelligence (AI). Here's a summary:

1. Evolution of Attitudes Towards AI: Initially, there was concern about blocking the use of AI tools like ChatGPT in educational settings due to fears about its impact on exams and job security. However, the narrative has shifted, acknowledging that AI, including ChatGPT, is becoming integrated into various aspects of life and work.
2. Transformation of Work and Mindset: There's recognition that AI isn't about replacing jobs entirely but rather transforming how people work. The emphasis is on learning and adapting to AI tools to enhance and advance existing jobs or prepare for new ones in the AI era.
3. Three Paths of Approach to AI:
a. Technical Development: Involves working on neural networks[3], software design, and the technical aspects of AI, primarily for software developers and leaders in the field.
b. Social Impact: Focuses on understanding and managing the impact of AI on various aspects of society, including government, civil society, education, media, and more.
c. Everyday Use of AI Tools: Advocates for widespread adoption and use of AI tools like ChatGPT, emphasizing that not everyone needs to be a programmer but should understand their function and implications.
4. Addressing Bias and Diversity: Encourages awareness among programmers, software developers, and companies about biases in AI systems. Emphasizes the importance of diversity in the development process to ensure inclusivity in the outcomes.
5. Regulation of AI: Highlights the necessity of proper regulation in the AI field, comparing it to the regulation of cars for safety and ethical considerations. Points out the need for updated regulations to ensure AI's use benefits humanity.
6. Engagement of Civil Society: Calls for the active involvement of civil society in regulating AI, raising awareness about its social impacts, and using AI tools effectively for societal benefit.
7. Advocacy for AI Education and Training: Stresses the importance of campaigns and collaborative efforts to spread knowledge, train people in using AI tools effectively, and prepare for advancements in this technology.

"In discussing AI and digital tools, a prevalent misconception is using AI without grasping it as a tool, not a replacement for critical thinking, knowledge, or expertise. Working closely with grassroots organisations, I notice the enthusiasm for AI tools like ChatGPT without understanding their functioning. Critical thinking is vital, not only in digital and media literacy but in broader 21st-century literacy. CSOs must advocate for non-digital skills alongside digital ones, as these tools complement rather than replace our expertise. Especially in less developed CSOs, there's a tendency to see these tools as shortcuts rather than aids that require effort." Ms. Teuta Sahatqija, Ambassador, Women in Tech

The three crucial challenges were highlighted:

1. Strategic Use of AI: Emphasizes that AI is a tool, not magic, and stresses the need for clear strategies and objectives. AI can only be effective when aligned with organised, goal-oriented processes.

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[3] *Neural networks are a class of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning models inspired by the structure and functioning of the human brain. They are a subset of AI techniques that have gained significant popularity due to their ability to learn and make decisions from data.*

2. Investment in Knowledge and Skills: Calls for investment in people, knowledge, and skills regarding AI. Urges preparation for potential ethical concerns while focusing on positive examples.
3. Benefits of AI Implementation: Discusses the potential for AI to enhance equality, inclusiveness, efficiency, transparency, and fairness if used responsibly and ethically. Warns against unethical use, such as data misuse or political profiling.

The advocacy for a proactive approach to AI implementation, emphasizing responsible use, adaptation, and proactive engagement to leverage its benefits for society, while mitigating potential risks, is paramount.

Ms. Sanela Pajazitović-Bubanja from NGO 35 MM focused on the impact of AI on social media and the associated challenges. A summary of her points is below:

1. Scope of Social Media: social media is a vast and multifaceted realm that deserves deeper consideration, especially concerning AI ethics and media literacy.
2. Social Networks and Civil Society: Social networks serve as crucial platforms for community mobilization and civil society advocacy, but they face several problems due to AI's presence.
3. Challenges Due to AI on Social Media:
a. Misinformation, lack of information, and the prevalence of fake news due to the absence of ethical guidelines.
b. Limited media and digital literacy among the population, along with few organisations addressing these issues seriously.
4. AI's Influence on Information Production: AI enables the rapid generation of vast amounts of content (text, video, photo, and voice) that appears realistic, making it hard for consumers to discern truth from falsehood, worsened by clickbait tactics.
5. Role of Human Factors: Sanela underscores the human factor's importance, highlighting that despite AI's sophistication, it lacks essential elements like empathy. Platforms like "Instinomer[4]" in Serbia, "Raskrinkavanje[5]" in Montenegro, and "Vistinomer[6]" in North Macedonia are examples of initiatives tackling fake news.
6. Need for Critical Thinking: Encourages the development of critical thinking skills among the public and emphasizes the moral obligation of professionals in digitalization to promote critical questioning of online information.
7. Social Media as a Platform for Values: Acknowledges social media as a space to promote societal values and activities but stresses the interconnectedness of online and offline issues.
8. Regulation and Accountability: Emphasizes the need for applicable regulations and laws in the online space and the accountability of all stakeholders, including institutions and individuals, for their actions.

Mr. Bojan Kordalov, Digital Media and Communications Expert, discussed the challenges related to AI, emphasizing concerns about its impact on various sectors:

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[4] Istinomer English

[5] Raskrinkavanje / CDT

[6] Truthmeter – Holds you accountable! (vistinomer.mk)

1. AI and Crime: Discusses the intersection of AI and criminology, highlighting concerns regarding black hacking, white hacking[7], and criminal activities in cyberspace. Questions arise about the prioritization of managing AI issues or addressing human-related problems.

2. Future Challenges: Expresses concern about the future implications of AI, emphasizing the need for constant updates and adaptation in governmental, academic, and technological spheres. Highlights potential issues arising from AI advancements, such as border control, academic publications using AI-generated content, and the reliability of AI-generated work.

3. Adoption of Technology: Cautions against overreliance and dependence on AI technology and emphasizes the need for continuous vigilance and readiness to adapt to technological advancements. Emphasizes the importance of data protection and security, especially with the increasing reliance on online tools due to factors like COVID-19 and the potential future impact of neurotechnology[8].

The group discussion that followed this session highlighted various key points regarding legislation, transparency, accountability, inclusion, and ethical considerations in the use of digital tools and AI within civil society organisations (CSOs):

- Legislation and Public Safeguards: Lack of clear regulations for CSOs in the use of digital technologies and AI. Suggestions to engage cooperation councils between civil society and the government to disseminate advocacy information. Uncertainty about the specific entities to advocate due to the unclear legislative landscape.

- Ethical Considerations: Emphasis on respecting personal data privacy codes and author rights when using digital tools and AI.

- Promoting Transparency and Accountability: Using social media for increased visibility and understanding through graphs and reports, implementing clear guidelines within CSOs, encouraging feedback from beneficiaries for continuous improvements, and prioritizing fact-checking to avoid working based on false information.

- Inclusion of Marginalized Groups: Highlighted the importance of training programmes ensuring inclusion and equality. Recognizing that marginalized groups often lack digital access and need alternative approaches beyond online communication, such as physical outreach and capacity building.

- Ensuring Marginalized Groups Don't Fall Behind: Recommendations focused on continuous education, digital literacy, and support centres for communities lacking basic technological resources. Advocacy for optimizing services for mobile phones, addressing infrastructure issues in rural areas, and creating engaging educational programmes in local languages.

- Respecting Ethical Considerations in Digital Tools and AI: Suggestions included following existing international standards (ISO 2001, 2023, IIA, ISO 27001, 2022), implementing a Code of Ethics, and encouraging creativity in the Code of Conduct for diverse ideas and collaborations.

The discussion after the panel emphasized the need for clear guidelines, continuous education, advocacy for legislative frameworks, and ensuring inclusivity and ethical practices in leveraging digital tools and AI within CSOs.

Panel Discussion III - Empowering CSOs with Digital Skills

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[7] White hat (computer security) - Wikipedia

[8] Neurotechnology - Wikipedia

Three presenters within this panel emphasized the practical aspects of integrating digital tools into an organisation's activities, focusing on strategic planning, user feedback, scalability, continuous learning, and fostering a digital culture. They also emphasized the "butterfly effect" of capacity building, as empowered CSOs will continue spreading knowledge. The limitations faced by smaller organisations, especially at the grassroots level, in dealing with specialized digital topics due to resource constraints, were pointed out. In summary, the discussion underscored the need for adaptive learning, prioritization, and continuous efforts to bridge digital literacy gaps within civil society. The challenges are the dynamic nature of the digital landscape and the ongoing need for strategic approaches to stay informed and relevant. Mr. Dino Mujanović, People-to-People Programme Manager with EU TACSO 3, moderated this session.

In her presentation, Ms. Mila Josifovska Danilovska from the Metamorphosis Foundation, CSO for Internet and E-Society in North Macedonia highlighted the organisation's efforts in promoting civic engagement, digital literacy, and online security. The organisation has been actively involved in building a community of informed and active citizens over the past two decades, leveraging technology to elevate educational outcomes and empower citizens.

The focus of her presentation was on the TechSoup[9] software donation programme, which has been running since 2014, providing software support to civil society organisations (CSOs), public libraries, and grassroots initiatives in North Macedonia, Albania, and Kosovo. Ms. Josifovska Danilovska emphasized the importance of using licensed software to ensure the safety and security of online activities, especially during the pandemic when the programme also distributed tools like Zoom to support local CSOs. She introduced a recent initiative developed in collaboration with TechSoup called TechSoup Global, focusing on combating fake news and disinformation. The Hive Mind[10] platform, a free and open platform available in multiple languages, was highlighted as a tool to increase digital and media literacy, connecting users to trainers, and facilitating the development of educational programmes.

During the early stages of the pandemic, Metamorphosis conducted online trainings and webinars on digital security topics, reaching both CSOs and the public in general. The organisation also localized and adapted the digital first aid kit to assist tech-savvy activists and digital rights advocates. The presentation extended to Metamorphosis' involvement in the EU initiative "Increasing Civic Engagement in the Digital Agenda" (ICEDA). The organisation, together with partners from the Western Balkans, created a network of over 50 CSOs and media organisations working on e-government and digital policies. This network, empowered through capacity-building efforts, led to the establishment of e-governments and support centres, benefiting over 31,000 citizens in MK only.

Metamorphosis also conducted webinars, trainings, and dialogues to increase citizens' capacities on various digital topics and worked on demystifying concepts like AI and 5G. A successful, EU-funded public educational campaign, focused on increasing capacities for the protection of personal data within CSO organisations and their stakeholders, emphasizing the importance of privacy policies tailored to specific target groups and needs.

In his presentation, Mr. Armin Šestić, the founder of Zora, an association for social, cultural, and creative development in Bosnia and Herzegovina, discussed the organisation's approach to incorporating digital tools in its activities. Zora is engaged in organising cultural events and festivals,

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[9] TechSoup North Macedonia | Technology for Global Good

[10] Meet HiveMind - Your AI Assistant | Hive

believing that culture and arts can unite people and different social groups through various creative activities. Mr. Šestić acknowledged that while Zora might not be as tech-savvy as some other organisations. He described Zora as a "user" rather than a "creator" of digital solutions. He highlighted several key points regarding the adaptation and use of digital tools within their organisation.

1. The importance of needs assessment at the start of any project involving digital tools. This includes researching and benchmarking existing tools and experiences of other CSOs to understand their effectiveness.
2. "Trial" and "Error", feedback from team members, and addressing any challenges or limitations in using a digital tool, were emphasized. Scalability was considered crucial to accommodate the organisation's growth without being limited by the chosen digital tool.
3. Continuous learning was highlighted as an essential aspect and emphasized the importance of acquiring new digital skills and fostering a culture of peer learning within the organisation.

Mr. Šestić provided recommendations for organisations looking to adopt digital tools and skills, suggesting a gradual approach, starting small, and focusing on specific areas. He emphasized the importance of investing in cyber security, training, and staying abreast of the latest trends. He also encouraged fostering a digital culture within the team, collaborating with organisations, and seeking funding for relevant initiatives.

Ms. Snežana Nikčević from 35 MM opened the floor for the discussion on the challenges faced by civil society organisations (CSOs) in adapting to digital tools and emphasized the importance of addressing organisational issues during the digital transition. She began by "demystifying" the name of the organisation "35 MM", reminding that it was the film tape used for filming data before digitalization became prevalent. She drew from her experience working with CSOs, highlighting that the digital transformation revealed organisational issues within the organisations themselves. Those could be a lack of alignment among team members and a digital divide where some individuals were more tech-savvy than others.

Ms. Nikčević stressed the need for CSOs to practice what they preach, urging them to align their organisational goals with their use of digital tools. She emphasized the significance of needs assessment in understanding the digital skills required for effective advocacy. While acknowledging the everyday use of digital skills, she pointed out the necessity of acquiring additional skills, including social media strategy, marketing techniques, and business skills. She underlined the varying needs for digital tools based on an organisation's size, target audience, and advocacy goals. Ms. Nikčević suggested that CSOs focus on practical and essential tools rather than adopting numerous tools for the sake of staying in trend. She shared a real-time example of how an online community on LinkedIn influenced Zoom's internal policy changes regarding data privacy, illustrating the evolving strategies in the digital space.

She touched upon the digital literacy challenges faced by CSOs. For instance, struggling with collaborative documents uploaded to the Cloud spaces, or basic technological issues like fixing a copier machine jam. Ms. Nikčević stressed the importance of building a digital culture within the team and organisation. She reiterated that not everything needs to be digitalized, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach. She concluded by highlighting the impact of digital transition on CSO organisational development and sustainability, noting that smaller organisations are limited in dealing with specialized digital topics due to a lack of resources – equipment, out-of-date software, and lack of knowledge and skills. Ms. Nikčević also emphasized the need for serious attention to effectively

utilise digital tools, emphasizing that success is often more related to organisational development than solely digital skills.

In the discussion following the panel, the main dilemma revolves around the intersection of digital literacy and innovation, particularly within the context of working with organisations to adopt artificial intelligence (AI) CRM software. This represents a challenge because some of the people working in CSOs lack basic skills in digital literacy (i.e. understanding the difference between "reply to" and "reply to all").

One of the questions posed to the panellists was: "Whether organisations can effectively balance efforts in both digital literacy and innovation, and how these two aspects can be connected or bridged?"

Ms. Nikčević highlighted the difficulty of transferring knowledge when individuals within an organisation have varying levels of digital literacy. She emphasizes that while it might be possible for large organisations to handle both digital literacy and innovation, smaller organisations may find it challenging. Ms. Nikčević noted that cooperation among organisations is crucial, emphasizing the need to empower each other rather than viewing one another as competitors.

Mr. Šestić suggested that organisations lacking expertise in innovation should consider hiring experts or partnering with organisations possessing such skills. He recognized the importance of digital literacy but believes that innovation, particularly in areas like programming AI, requires specialized expertise.

Ms. Josifovska-Danilovska underscored the unceasing nature of digital literacy, as something that needs constant improvements, learning, and investment. She provided an example of how teachers were simultaneously taught digital literacy and introduced to small innovations during the pandemic. There was a sudden need that came up to become innovative and go from classroom-type to online teaching and interacting with their students remotely.

Overall, the consensus was that while organisations may attempt to balance digital literacy and innovation, there are practical challenges. The level of expertise required for innovation might necessitate collaboration with experts or other organisations. The need for ongoing education, combating misinformation, and fostering cooperation among organisations are recurring themes in the discussion.

In further discussion was confirmed that it is very challenging to keep up with everything in the fast-paced digital environment and that it is important to think of funding. It is important to prioritize specific areas or niches to focus on, given the vast amount of information. The role of education, both formal and informal is to produce well-informed citizens who can filter and interpret information effectively.

Major Findings, Recommendations, and Ideas for Additional P2P Events and Capacity Building Events in 2024

The findings of discussions underlined the need for ongoing education, ethical guidelines, transparent practices, and collaboration between Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), governments, and donors to ensure a responsible and inclusive digital transition within CSOs. These initiatives aim to harness technology's potential while mitigating its potential risks, especially for marginalized groups.

The participants explored and discussed the integration of digital tools, Artificial intelligence (AI), and the broader digital transition within CSOs. Their deliberations highlighted several crucial findings:

Group Discussions I: AI and Digital Tools in CSOs' Operations

- Relevant Tools: Identified several beneficial tools such as ChatGPT, BARD, COPY.AI, ASANA, and Grammarly, among others, for project management, content creation, and data analysis.
- Keeping Up with Developments: Emphasized continuous learning, workshops, people-to-people exchanges, and networking as vital to staying abreast of the latest advancements.
- Support from Donors: Stressed the need for a dedicated budget line for digital infrastructure, cross-sectoral collaborations, and capacity building (staff and/or experts). Advocated for donors to prioritize impact over mere delivery.

Group Discussions II: Advocacy for Responsible Use of Digital Tools and AI

- Advocacy Topics: Highlighted the need for legislation concerning data protection, cybercrime, and the rights of vulnerable groups. Advocated for engagement with legislative bodies, ombudsman offices, and educational institutions.
- Ethical Considerations: Emphasized adherence to existing international standards (e.g., ISO 42001, ISO 270001) and the formulation of a Code of Ethics to guide CSOs' responsible use of technology.
- Transparency and Accountability: Advocated for transparent algorithms, General Data protection Regulation's compliance, regular newsletters, and feedback mechanisms to ensure accountability.

Group Discussions III: Empowering CSOs with Digital Skills

- Staff Training: Emphasized the importance of continuous training, creating a culture of accountable AI usage, and establishing basic operational procedures for CSOs' digital transition.
- Utilising IT Experts: Discussed avenues like hackathons, volunteering, and partnerships with IT professionals, students, and open-source communities to harness IT expertise.
- Affordable Tools and Training: Explored accessible and sustainable tools like CiviCRM, Google Forms, and RTools, and also highlighted numerous training platforms such as Coursera, Udemy, and YouTube tutorials.

Cross-Cutting Themes

1. Inclusivity and Accessibility: Advocated for strategies to prevent already marginalised groups from falling behind, emphasizing infrastructure development, inclusive platforms, and tailored support.
2. Advocacy for Legislation: Stressed the need to advocate for legislative changes to house digital transformations in public services.

II - Recommendations

A. Embracing Digital Tools

As CSOs highlighted various useful tools like ChatGPT, COPY.AI, and ASANA, emphasizing their roles in project management, content creation, and data analysis, it would be crucial to dig deeper into practical demonstrations at P2P events, to showcase how these tools can be effectively integrated into different CSO operations.

B. Continuous Learning and Capacity Building

Prioritizing continuous education, workshops, peer-to-peer exchanges, and people-to-people (P2P) events will assist CSOs in adapting to rising digital landscapes.

Future Capacity-Buidling events could focus on hosting training sessions or webinars on specific tools and technologies, inviting experts for detailed insights.

C. Funding and Support

CSOs' representatives at the event stressed the importance of dedicated budget allocation and cross-sector collaborations for successful digital transitions. Further P2P events should involve representatives from donor agencies and IT/Digital experts. This would help them to understand how to effectively allocate available funding for digital initiatives improving CSOs' transition and keeping up with the need for constant changes and improvement of operations.

D. Ethical Use and Transparency

The discussion underscored the significance of adhering to ethical standards and maintaining transparency in AI and digital tool usage. Additional P2P Events could involve expert panels discussing ethical frameworks and establishing guidelines for responsible technology use within CSOs.

III - Ideas for Additional P2P Events and Capacity Building Events in 2024

By expanding on the identified findings and planning targeted additional meetings, CSOs can develop a comprehensive roadmap for embracing digital transformation responsibly, fostering collaboration, and ensuring inclusivity within their operations. Here are some examples of potential events:

1. Expert Panels on Ethical AI Use: Host discussions with ethicists, legal experts, and industry professionals to develop a code of ethics specifically tailored for CSOs' digital operations.
2. Tool Demonstrations and Case Studies: Organise sessions where CSOs can share their successful implementations of digital tools, demonstrating their impact on various projects.
3. Government and Donor Engagement: Arrange meetings inviting government representatives and donor agencies to understand their perspectives and align digital initiatives with their objectives.
4. Inclusive Technology Solutions: Create specialised sessions addressing strategies for making technology more accessible for marginalised groups, involving community leaders and activists.
5. Cybersecurity and Data Privacy Workshops: Invite cybersecurity experts to conduct workshops on safeguarding data and ensuring privacy compliance in CSOs' digital operations.
6. Hackathons and Collaboration Events: Plan collaborative events where CSOs, tech experts, and volunteers work together to develop tech solutions addressing specific CSO challenges.
7. Policy Advocacy Roundtables: Engage in focused discussions on drafting policy proposals advocating for better legislative frameworks supporting digital integration in civil society.
8. Training Workshops on Open Source Tools: Offer hands-on training sessions or webinars focusing on utilising open-source software effectively within CSOs.
9. Measuring Impact and Evaluation: Organise sessions to discuss metrics and methodologies for evaluating the impact of digital transitions within CSOs, facilitating shared learning.
10. Community of Practice Building: Establish regular meetups or online forums where CSOs can share experiences, best practices, and challenges faced during their digital transformation journeys.