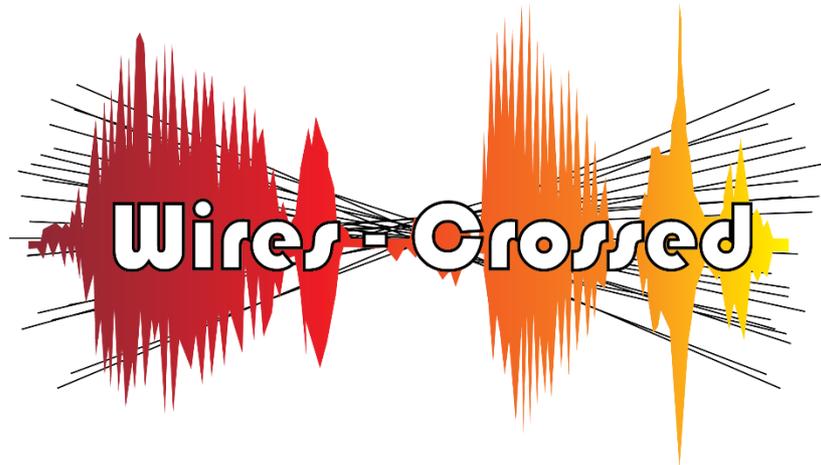




Summary Report Consortium Community Audit Findings



**Developing Community Media to Mitigate
the Impact of Fake News**



WIRES-CROSSED: Developing Community Media to Mitigate the Impact of Fake News

IO1 – Community Audit Toolkit & Report

Summary Audit Report

Developed by Clare Willis at The Rural Hub in collaboration with all partners

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Introduction

WIRES-CROSSED is an Erasmus+ KA2 project, led by community initiative which aims to build a community media framework that equips local communities with all the knowledge, skills and competences required to develop, manage and maintain a comprehensive media service to local residents. In 2018, the European Commission launched the 'Action Plan Against Disinformation' as a mean of empowering European stakeholders and communities to tackle 'fake news'. The Action Plan outlines four pillars where the capabilities of EU Members States to deal with the spread of 'fake news' can be built. These include improved detection; coordinated response; online platforms and industry; and raising awareness and empowering citizens (Action Plan Against Disinformation, 2018). The WIRES-Crossed Project responds to the fourth pillar of this Plan. It aims to empower communities across Europe by promoting media literacy and supporting the production of reliable community media content, and in doing so, negating the impact that disinformation has on a community. The WIRES-Crossed project aims to harness the potential of available digital and social media platforms, provide a platform to local communities and to promote community cohesion.

WIRES-Crossed is being piloted in the following seven European communities:

- Dresden, Saxony, Germany
- Ballyjamesduff, Cavan, Ireland
- Nicosia, Cyprus
- Rome, Italy
- Rzeszów, Podkarpackie Voivoceship, Poland
- Rijeka, Croatia
- Opava, Czech Republic

The project pursues an asset-based community development approach in order to harness the assets within said local communities. The first step in achieving this was the design and implementation of a comprehensive community audit schematic which drew on the most appropriate elements of asset-based community development approaches. The results of which highlight the digital competence, educational assets and deficits present within the local communities. The present paper is a collation of executive summarized national reports of the findings from the research conducted between January and March 2020 by the following consortium of organisations:

- JUGEND-& KULTURPROJEKT EV, Germany

- The Rural Hub, Ireland
- CENTRE FOR ADVANCEMENT OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY, Cyprus
- SPEHA FRESIA, Italy
- Acumen Training, Poland
- Ustanova za obrazovanje odraslih Dante, Croatia
- ALIANCE LEKTORU a KONZULTANTU, Czech Republic

Each organisation surveyed 100 members of their community to assess their behaviour and attitudes regarding accessing information and media content and the digital competence and educational assets within each respective community.

Methodology and Data Collection

Following the development and design of the comprehensive schematic, initial steps to engage the community were taken. This began with the formation of the Local Media Action Groups in each respective country. These groups comprised 10 key local stakeholders who would be tasked with supporting the audit. Each group was mixed in terms of age and gender. Once formed, they were presented with an Induction Programme to introduce members to the audit process as well as familiarize them with the questionnaires they would be completing with local residents. The questionnaires were designed and reviewed collectively by the project consortium with permitted localization in each partner country. In all cases there was a positive response and each member community succeeded in forming a Local Media Action Group that was willing to proceed with the audit and to actively participate in the project.

“I really like the project, because I think it tackles a really abstract problem, which is Fake News on a local level, which I think is a very good way to solve this problem.”

- Culture Manager, Germany

“It will be a great way to enable people to identify fake news and therefore target the source and prevent the spread.”

- Community Volunteer, Ireland

The Local Media Action Groups were enlisted to conduct research as a form of participatory action research, this was done in order to conduct research which would lead to a plan being devised by the local community to resolve any issues or needs within their community, in a way that involved all members of the community. To exemplify the ethics of WIRES-Crossed

and the principles of asset-based community development, the audit was approached and conducted from a positive perspective. The audit teams were instructed to look at the things that were working in their community and, through conversation with others, build upon them. The aim was to focus on positives to foster unique strengths within the community and work toward genuine success. It was emphasised to the local media action groups that a positive energy approach to the community audit would help build on the local strengths and assets identified in a community in order to define the learning needs and discover how best to achieve them. It was decided by the consortium that these questionnaires would be completed by way of interviews with local members of the community completing the surveys, both face-to-face and online. An appreciative inquiry method was permitted as consortium members noted it was possible not all individuals interviewed would recognise assets available. Due to restrictions implemented across Europe to protect public health in the mist of the COVID-19 outbreak, many of the questionnaires were completed online and over the telephone. The questionnaires were designed and reviewed collectively by the project consortium with room for localization in each partner country.

The questionnaires were composed of questions to attain both quantitative and qualitative data and had a mix of open-ended and close-ended questions. Quantitative data collection is a method of empirical social research and provides answers to questions such as who, when, where, what and how many. The Community Audit Questionnaire was designed with this category in mind and so consisted of many close-ended questions that supported the numerical data collection that was statistically processed to gain new insights (Qualtrics, n.d.). Qualitative data collection was incorporated to obtain detailed, subjective, and individual knowledge on various topics, and so for many questions, respondents were prompted to explain their answers.

Each organisation was responsible for the collection and processing of their local data. All questionnaire responses were entered into Google Forms or Excel which provided an overview and secure platform to analyse data.

Data Analysis and Results

Qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods were used, and in every country the findings were discussed and analysed with the support of the Local Media Action Groups. The methods used regarding the qualitative research were (Research Methodology, n.d):

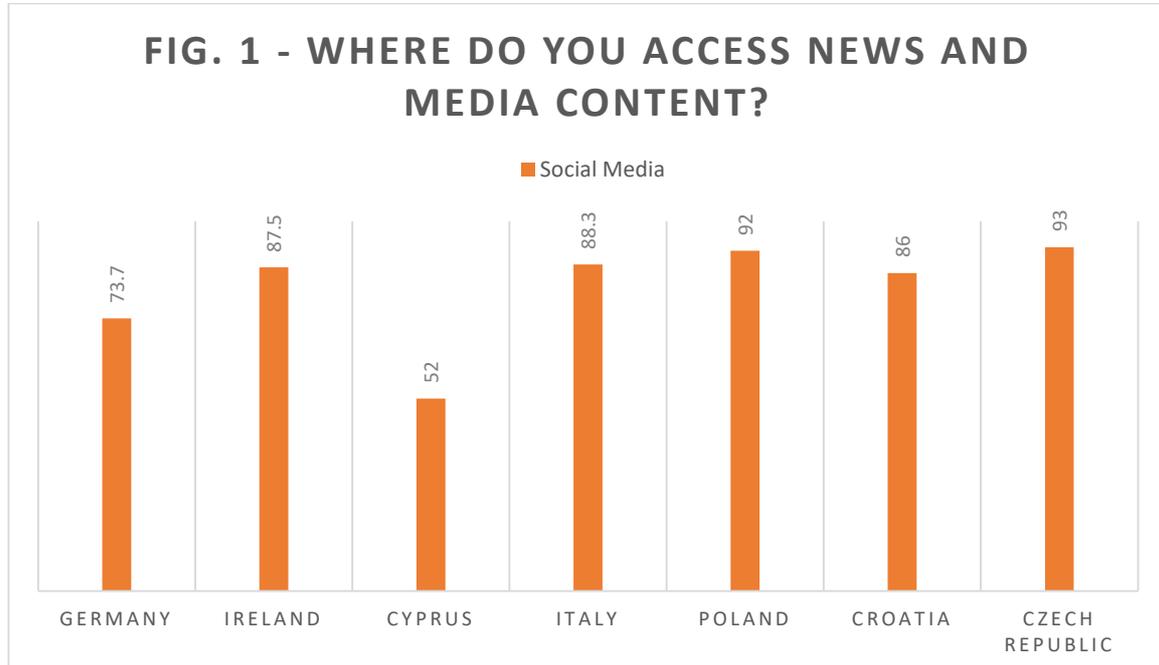
- Content analysis: this refers to the process of categorising verbal or behavioural data to classify, summarise and tabulate the data.

- Discourse analysis: a method of analysis of naturally occurring talk and all types of written text.

Critical thinking and analytical thinking were practiced respectively to identify patterns and relationships within each country's 100 responses.

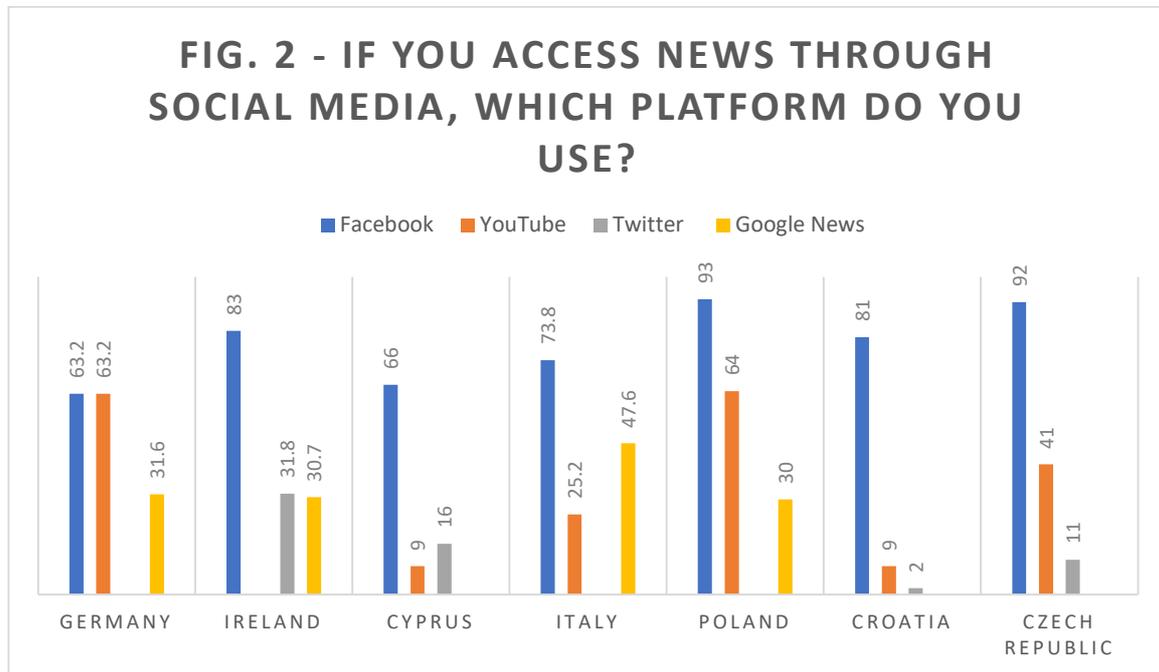
Analysing qualitative data required a process of correlation and identifying patterns and themes within each country's 100 responses. Each participating organisation was permitted to strategize this process individually, however, each had the same goal which was to create a method of open review and discussion with members of the Local Media Action Group, during which recurring themes could be identified through critical and analytical thinking. Google Forms' automated response summaries, graphical representation of the responses and the use of Excel were the main tools used for data processing.

The data obtained regarding where participants access news and media content was exceptionally consistent, with every country reporting that social media was their main source of news and media content.



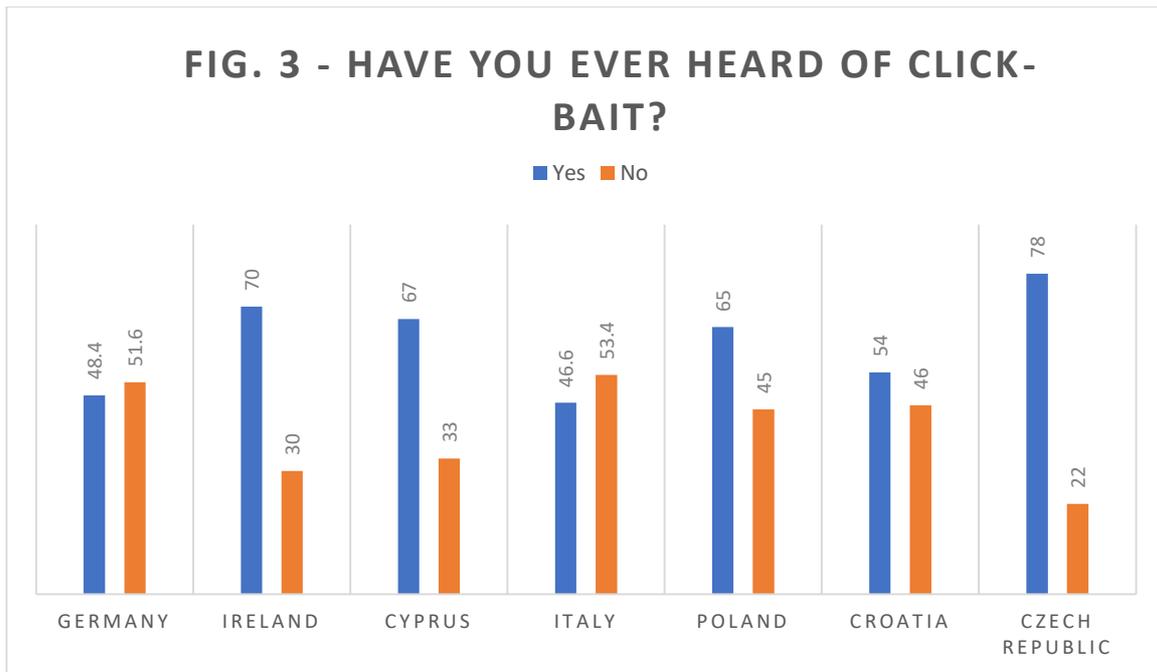
Interestingly, the consistency continued to platform preferences for social media news intake, with Facebook as the evident preference. The spectrum of Facebook as a most used social

media platform for news and media intake was highest in Czech Republic at 93% and lowest in Germany at 63.2%.



It is worth noting that in no participating country less than 50% of respondents used social platforms to access news and media content, in other words even on the lowest end of the scale, at least one in two people across this cohort is using social media as their principle source of news intake; with Facebook being the most used platform for this purpose.

A study published in the journal, 'Nature: Human Behaviour in March 2020' found that Facebook is the worst perpetrator in aiding the spread of disinformation. A team of researchers tracked the use of over 3,000 Americans in the lead up to the 2016 Presidential Election and found Facebook to be the referrer site for untrustworthy news sources over 15% of the time. In contrast, Facebook referred users to authoritative news sites only 6% of the time (A. Guess, B. Nyhan & J. Reifler).



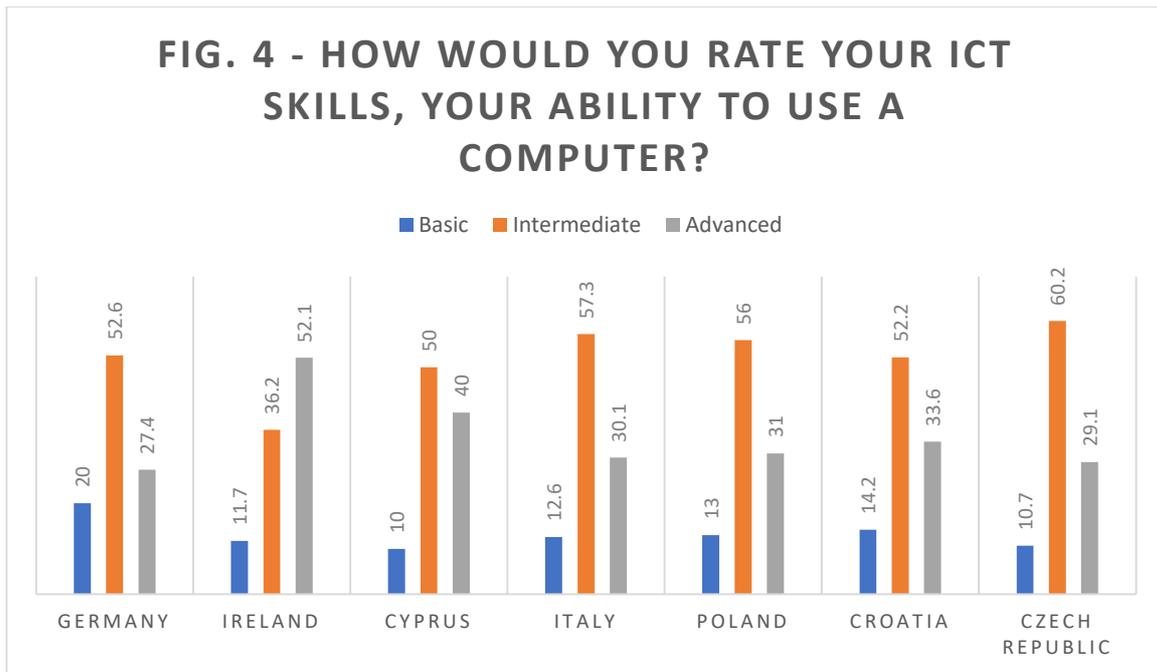
In Germany, approximately half of the respondents are unfamiliar with the term “click-bait”, and yet almost 60% of them believe that they have never fallen for it. Comparatively, in Croatia it was noted that while just over half, at 54%, of respondents were familiar with the term “click-bait”, a majority of respondents, at 68%, stated that they had fallen for “click-bait” strategies. In Italy, the majority at 53.4% were unaware of “click-bait” practices, with some reporting material damage, such as unconscious activation of paid subscriptions, or by resetting data on their computer. In Ireland, 70% of respondents indicated an awareness of ‘click-bait’, which was noted as a wide majority but still deemed problematic as it leaves a gap between this figure and the 87.5% of Irish participants who use social media as a main news channel. In Poland, it was found that 65% of participants were familiar with “click-bait”, with 36% still falling for it. Similarly, in Cyprus, 67% of respondents noted that they were aware of the term “click-bait”, however, 74.1% still self-identified as falling for it. In Czech Republic, results showed a similar result with 78% of respondents familiar with the term “click-bait” and yet 39% still falling prey to it. In every country it was reported that this type of practice is found on Facebook and email providers.

In Germany, 52.6% of the respondents rate their ICT skills and their ability to use a computer as intermediate, while 27.4% of them are rated as being advanced users of ICT. Nearly half of the interviewees in Germany stated that they are media literate, meaning they identify as having ‘the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create media in a variety of forms (Centre for Media Literacy). In Ireland, almost half of participants self-identified as having ‘advanced’

ICT skills at 52.1% of respondents, and a mere 11.7% stated that they had low capacities to use a computer, this was the highest ranking self-assessed group. Just under half of Irish participants indicated a basic ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create media in a variety of forms. A further 28.1% of respondents claimed they had an advanced ability to do so.

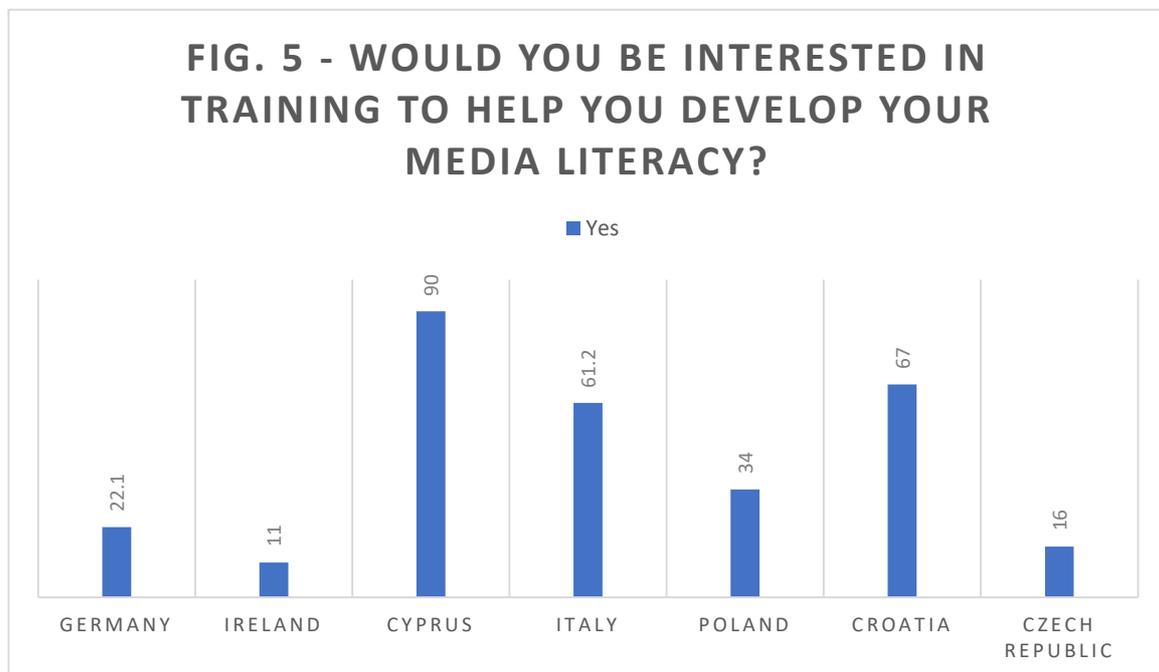
In Cyprus, 82% of the participants described their media literacy as intermediary or advanced. In Poland respondents also reported a rather high level of ICT skills; 14% basic, 56% intermediate and 31% advanced; and their level of media literacy was similar at 18% basic, 57% intermediate and 26% advanced. A similar pattern was found in Croatia, which reported a moderately high level of ICT skills at 14% basic, 52.2% intermediate and 33.6% advanced, so too were the level of media literacy at 19.5% basic, 57.9% intermediate and 22.6% advanced. Participants in Czech Republic also reported moderately high level of ICT skill at 10.7 basic, 60.2% intermediate and 29.1% advanced.

A systematic review in Communications and Information Literacy from the University of the Punjab reviewed 53 English language studies that assessed and compared peoples self-reported and demonstrated information literacy skills. The objective was to collect evidence on the existence of the 'Dunning-Kruger Effect' in information literacy. The 'Dunning-Kruger Effect' is a cognitive bias in which people with low ability at a task over-estimate their ability. The findings clearly show that this theory is applicable in this area. The review concluded that there is unsubstantial calibration in people's perceived and actual information literacy skills; in most cases low performers over-estimate their skills in self-assessment (M. Khalid, 2016). It is very possible that this effect is age inclusive and effects even the younger "digitally native" generations. In 2006, international evidence suggests that young people are likely to over-estimate their competence: 79% of twelve to eighteen year olds consider they are informed on how the internet works, but only 52% are able to evaluate the information they retrieve (S. Aslanidou & A Ikonou, 2006).



As a result of the ‘Dunning-Kruger Effect’ it is important to compare the self-assessment of ICT skills with the data obtained regarding recipients of media-related training. For example, in Germany although participants declared that they are competent in media literacy, nearly 80% of them have never attended any media-related training. Almost 75% of German respondents reported as having no experience in working in a media-related role. In Ireland, 77% of respondents stated they had not completed media training. In Italy, 17.5% of respondents had already carried out some specific media training and 25.2% had previous formal involvement and experience in this field. Poland reported 89% of participants as having never completed any media-related training, and only 12% had reported a degree in the field of social media and some free online courses about internet safety. Responses from Poland also showed that 15% of respondents had work experience in media, such as running websites, product marketing and sales and marketing. In Croatia, most of the respondents had not participated in media-related training, with a small number stating that they had searched YouTube on the topic of fake news. Only 7% of Croatian respondents stated that they worked for a local newspaper or radio station in the past. In Czech Republic, 77% of respondents have not participated in media-related training; and 26% stated that they had participated in some form of media training. Two types of training reported were as a part of their university studies and as a part of lifelong learning in their teaching profession. 17% of respondents in Czech Republic had work experience in the media sector. There were some professionals working for TV and marketing companies, some of the participants work externally for newspaper or radio, and some for internet platforms.

When asked about the likelihood of engaging with training that would enhance their ICT skills, results were mixed. In Germany, 22.1% of respondents stated yes and 34.7% stated no, that they would not participate in this training. In Ireland, a low level of interest in media training was also established with just over 10% indicating they would be interested. In Cyprus, 90% of the respondents expressed an interest in media training. In Italy, 61.2% would be interested in training courses to improve their competence in media. Results were similar in Croatia with 67% of respondents stating yes and 21% unsure. In Poland, the willingness to participate in training was 34% yes and 38% no. In Czech Republic, 16% of respondents were willing to attend media training and 56% reported they were unsure.



In Germany, 72.6% of respondents had never considered beginning an online video blog or written blog. It was assessed that the reasons for this are a lack of necessity, data protection and privacy issues. In Ireland, it was difficult to deduct from the data how many participants had seriously considered starting a vlog or how many had stopped themselves from considering starting a blog as they had already decided it would be unsuccessful. Only 5% of respondents indicated they would have positive feelings or confidence and ability to engage with such an activity. The commentary of the reasoning for the 95% of participants that were against this venture was starkly consistent and self-deprecating.

- *“People can be quite judgemental so I wouldn’t put myself out there for people to grill how I look and how I am.”*
- *“I don’t think I’d be very good.”*
- *“I don’t think I would be able to handle the pressure.”*

In Italy, 35% of respondents had considered starting their own blog. In Poland, 73% of participants would not consider starting a blog or YouTube Channel.

- *“I don’t think that everyday activities are interesting enough to share.”*

The majority of Croatian respondents identified as having never considered starting a blog, listing lack of free time, adequate knowledge or creative ideas as the reasons. In Czech Republic, 28% respondents considered starting a blog or YouTube Channel but most of them reject the idea of blogging about daily activities because of privacy reasons. Despite data supporting a high level of engagement with social media, across this cohort, it is a small minority that show an inclination to curate, develop or share content in this realm.

In Germany, 50% of respondents were interested in developing a community newsletter, or a blog, covering topics such as news, local politics, environmental issues, art, music and culture, youth news and alternative perspectives. Despite this, 70% of German respondents had no interest in being part of a local media action team. In Ireland, the indicators towards readiness and likelihood of participating in a local media team that would produce community media content for the area was also mixed; 43% of respondents said no explicitly. However, among the remaining 57% there was a lack of clear indicators; most doubted their usefulness or capacity. In Cyprus, an overwhelming majority of the respondents expressed its willingness to support community media in their local area, with 64% of the participants responding ‘yes’ and an additional 32% ‘maybe’ to a relevant question. Moreover, in a follow-up question, they listed local news, cultural affairs, youth and environment as the issues they would like to be covered by a potential local community media. Cypriot respondents also conveyed their interest to participate in such an endeavour with just 11% of them responding negatively to a question exploring that prospect.

In Italy, 68% of respondents reported interest in contributing to a newsletter, blog or online channel for their community. Suggested themes which mirrored that of Germany and Cyprus, included: political, social, economic development, quality of life, sport participation, education, work, urban and waste management, environment, culture, collective memory, democracy,

and citizenship. Italy noted that above all there as an interest in local news to give value to the talents of the communities, often ignored by the residents themselves. 56.3% of Italian respondents were interested in participating in the Local Media Action Team. In Poland, 57% would support the production of a community newsletter, online channel or blog, with 24% claiming to be interested in participating in a local media team. Moreover, in a follow-up question, Poland also listed social topics, related to the development of the culture of the community and the infrastructure of the locality, abortion, homosexuality, sex, contraception, social initiatives, daily issues concerning the immediate environment, information on available opportunities to support development, training, benefits for the inhabitants of the region, etc. as topics that they would like to cover in their community media project. Croatia found a surprisingly high volume of participants that would support the production of a community newsletter or an online channel with 81% indicating that they would support such an endeavour. Also in Croatia, 64% claimed to be interested in the Local Media Action team with Croatian respondents expressing interest in topics related to boosting local tourism, sport, art and music. Czech Republic reported a high level of interest also with 73% of respondents supporting the production of a community newsletter.

Results and Reflections

The conclusion deduced from this comprehensive schematic and Local Media Action Group review is that there is undoubtedly potential for the WIREs-Crossed project in all participating countries. The results show that in most cases there is a substantial level of self-assessed media literacy. Taking into consideration the lack of formal media training and the 'Dunning-Kruger Effect', it would be unwise to take the credibility and accuracy of this self-assessment for granted. However, it does indicate a certain level of basic and practical ICT ability and suggests a likelihood or capability for local media development. The challenge may lie in providing the necessary training to the number of participants that so far identify as unwilling to participate. In any case, the data on social media and 'click-bait' undeniably suggest there would be a value to implementing this training. Across the cohort of respondents, participants were more interested in supporting a community-led initiative, such as a local newsletter, over an autonomous and self-directed blog. The causation of this can only be speculated but concepts such as teamwork or community pride may be positive influences and should be investigated.

It was noted in Germany that based on the results, the biggest challenge will be to engage members of Dresden's local community in the project's activities and in forming the local media

team. The volunteering mindset appears to be not so popular in Dresden. Croatia found a similar pattern in their data and noted a major inconsistency related to the willingness of community members to participate in WIRES-CROSSED project activities – while the majority claimed they would support a new community initiative, their answers related to their past experiences reveal that they might be easily discouraged by a number of barriers (lack of time due to other obligations, low self-confidence, perceived difficulty, etc.).

In Ireland, the key recommendation was to consider the disposition of the community mindset and attitude towards any ‘spot-light’ or individualism. It was decided that residents are unlikely modest about their ability; but that they are genuinely insecure. They may be willing to get involved but they will appear apprehensive, therefore a welcoming and friendly atmosphere is crucial. In Czech Republic, there was much consideration towards the respondents that “did not know” if they would be interested in media training or if they would like to engage in the development of content. It was concluded that this is a big group which could potentially take part but would need motivation. In Cyprus, we can deduce that there is a fertile ground in Nicosia for the project to effectively undertake its planned actions and fulfil its set objectives. In doing so though, it should invest time and effort to identify and inform people about facilities and equipment they can utilize if they wish to proceed with the development of community media at a local level. In Italy, there was a high value placed on inclusion and it was urged to consider those who may lack ability to engage with the technical elements of media production but would be beneficial in the way of content from various perspectives, such as; migrants.

It is evident that across this cohort of communities, maintaining the philosophy of participatory action will be essential to the livelihood of the project. There must be a focus on the positive and a real effort made to not just engage the communities but to support and validate them. A dedicated team of familiar faces partaking in consistent involvement and engagement with the Local Media Action Group is vital and so too is a means of acknowledging and validating all efforts made by the community.

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