



netWorked Youth Research for Empowerment in the Digital society

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## WYRED Final Independent Ethical Review

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**Final Independent Ethical Review**

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# 1. Introduction

## The Structure of the Report

The report is set out in the following manner. The introduction introduces the purpose of the review. It also introduces the WYRED project for readers who are less familiar with its aims and scope. The second main section, 'Evaluation of Ethical Aspects' addresses the issues relevant to WYRED in terms of ethics. These include, for example, the processes of participant information, child protection, participation, GDPR, Data use, informed consent, young people's involvement in research. There is also a summary which overviews the project from some pertinent contemporary viewpoints on ethical practice in participatory research.

## The Purpose of an Independent Ethical Review

This report is an independent ethical review at the end of the H2020 project WYRED. The ethical assessment allows for an examination of the ethical aspects of the project and does not seek to make judgements about the findings or the efficacy or value of the project outside of an ethical concern. However, since the bulk of the inputs and process and outputs of WYRED were in many ways connected to an ethical commitment to the rights of young people to have a say in digital matters that affect them, there is some overlap between an evaluation of the ethical aspects and the sense of the worthiness of the research. The report follows an earlier interim report. In that previous report, some ethical issues were highlighted, and recommendations were made to help ensure the continued success of the project. This report now looks back at the completed project, reviewing its ethical aspects.

## Background - Introduction to WYRED

The WYRED project (García-Peñalvo, 2016, 2017; García-Peñalvo & Kearney, 2016) (full title: WYRED - netWorked Youth Research for Empowerment in the Digital society) is funded under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant

Agreement No 727066). Its aim was to provide a framework for research in which children and young people can express and explore their perspectives and interests in relation to digital society (Griffiths et al., 2017). As such it follows the ethical approach outlined in the Concordat for Engaging the Public in Research which states that researchers should participate in public engagement activities. But the inverse is also the case in WYRED, young people from the public participated and led research projects. To achieve this, WYRED created a platform from which young people could communicate their perspectives to other stakeholders. It successfully implemented three generative research cycles involving networking, dialogue, participatory research and interpretation phases. These were driven by children and young people. A diverse range of outputs have been created by academics and by young people in the dissemination phase which is now still ongoing at time of writing. The project has created critical perspectives and other insights which will likely have impacts through informing policy and decision-making in relation to children and young people's needs in the digital age.

The project was informed by the recognition that young people of all ages have the right to participation and engagement in research. It had a strong focus on inclusion, diversity and the empowerment of the marginalised. The aim was to replace the disempowering scrutiny of conventional research processes with the empowerment of young people themselves through social intergenerational dialogue and participatory research. This impetus led to some particular ethical challenges which have been ably addressed and are discussed below.

## Objectives of the project

The overall aim of WYRED is the empowerment of children and young people. The WYRED project had several sub-objectives:

1. To provide a framework for research in which children and young people can express and explore their perspectives and interests in relation to digital society.
2. To provide a platform from which children and young people can communicate their perspectives to other stakeholders effectively through innovative engagement processes.
3. To engage children and young people in a generative research cycle involving.
4. Networking, dialogue, participatory research and interpretation.
5. To generate a diverse range of outputs, critical perspectives and other insights that can inform policy and decision-making in relation to children and young people's needs in relation to digital society.
6. To make this process continuous and sustainable.

These objectives involved a series of empirical, technical and other challenges – many of these had ethical dimensions in the early stages. Firstly, the project wished to involve children and young people by taking up some of their free time which is regarded as precious. There was a concern that engagement in WYRED of children and young people might involve competition for attention with existing activities or might infringe on their right to free time. Another early concern was that research might appear as a dry activity divorced from everyday realities of children's own lives. There was also a worry that young people might need a lot of help to communicate their issues and concerns to those who take decisions about them. There is a sense in which WYRED therefore went on to function as a bridge to decision makers but they wondered if they risked engaging young people but not linking them to the adult world.

Technical issues also conspired to create their own challenges but were also required to meet ethical standards. The team set about creating and configuring a safe space for the activity in WYRED that was both sufficiently attractive to children and young people and

compliant with the necessary ethical requirements (García-Holgado & García-Peñalvo, 2018; García-Peñalvo & Durán-Escudero, 2017; García-Peñalvo & García-Holgado, 2019; García-Peñalvo, García-Holgado, Vázquez-Ingelmo, & Seoane-Pardo, 2018; García-Peñalvo, Vázquez-Ingelmo, & García-Holgado, 2019; García-Peñalvo, Vázquez-Ingelmo, García-Holgado, & Seoane-Pardo, 2019). This was no small challenge. To do this in a way that was attractive to young people within budget was part of this challenge. In involving young people, WYRED sought to be inclusive and diverse in its reach. They set out to include a wide variety of ages, cultures, religious orientations, and those from different class backgrounds and minority groups. Whilst EU funding assured WYRED of a starting point, the hope was that it would be self-sustaining after the project is complete; and there is good evidence of a plan to that effect. Lastly, and most importantly, the goal of facilitating the empowerment of young people and their agency was an ethical question which was a concern. Would there be a handover of power and opportunities for youth-led experiences and initiatives? The ethical aspects of many of these challenges and other more mainstream concerns around ethically involving young people in research are addressed in this review.

Before addressing these in section 2, the review offers a summary introduction to WYRED for readers who are less familiar with the project.

### Structure of the WYRED project

The project work plan involved 10 work packages (WPs). The first three of these focused on the definition of the different processes involved, the preparation and implementation throughout the project of the inclusion strategy, and the development of the WYRED platform, which was used throughout the project as the safe space in which the activities and interaction took place.

These first three preparatory WPs were followed by five other WPs. In WP4, the children and young people engaged in network building and participated in the research cycle. Through this package, the principal themes that represent their concerns were identified. WP5

focused on social dialogue building on these themes and key research questions were generated relating to the digital society that concern children and young people. In the subsequent work package (6), these children and young people, supported by the partners, designed and implemented research activities to explore their questions and issues in a range of ways. WP7 focused on the interpretation and evaluation of the process and its resulted in the production of different publications, performances, and other formats and artefacts that presented the results. These were principally insights and recommendations to different target groups at policy level and in the wider society. The final phase of the cycle in WP8 focused on the dissemination and exploitation of these results.

WP1 WYRED PROCESSES DEFINITION BOUNDARIES

WP2 INCLUSION - MOVES

WP3 WYRED PLATFORM DEVELOPMENT - USAL

WP4 BUILDING THE WYRED NETWORK - YEU

WP5 SOCIAL DIALOGUE PHASE - EARLY YEARS

WP6 PARTICIPANT RESEARCH PHASE - DOGA SCHOOLS

WP7 EVALUATION AND INTERPRETATION PHASE - PYE GLOBAL

WP8 VALORISATION - OXFAM

WP9 PROJECT MANAGEMENT - USAL

WP10 QUALITY MANAGEMENT - BOUNDARIES

## Project consortium

The consortium of partners was very diverse, with organisations from academic to those whose principal focus was youth work. The partners are listed below:

- 1 UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA (USAL)
- 2 OXFAM ITALIA ONLUS (OXFAM)
- 3 PYE GLOBAL (PYE)
- 4 ASİST ÖĞRETİM KURUMLARI A.S. (DOĞA SCHOOLS)
- 5 EARLY YEARS – THE ORGANISATION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN LBG (EARLY YEARS)
- 6 YOUTH FOR EXCHANGE AND UNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL AISBL (YEU)
- 7 MOVES (MOVES)
- 8 THE BOUNDARIES OBSERVATORY C.I.C. (BOUNDARIES)
- 9 TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY (TAU)

In terms of ethics, the diversity of partners involved added value. The different strengths of the organisations involved meant that technical aspects could be addressed, minority groups could be involved, there was reach internationally and cross culturally, and younger participants could be included.

## Approach and Evidence for the Ethics Review

A systematic review of the available project documents was undertaken as well as interviews with key project personnel. The review examined the project outputs — especially all available project documents and the online platform. The ethical aspects of these outputs were reviewed using the perspectives of best ethical practice in the fields of informal learning, youth engagement, co-created research, and citizen science.

## 2. Evaluation of Ethical Aspects

### Overview

The overarching objective of WYRED was to an exploration of digital society from the perspectives of young people. To achieve this, the project aimed to empower young people themselves to determine the scope of various aspects of the work by eliciting and supporting their decisions on the project themes, the key research questions, and the approaches through which they will try to answer them. The end goal of the smaller research projects led by young people was to choose how they present their findings to wider society, and in particular, to policy makers.

There were a number of particular earlier ethical issues that were noted by a previous reviewer for the WYRED project. These were: the changing data protection regulations across countries, the issue of age and youth engagement, and the degree to which participant-led (and co-created) research was possible. At this point we take a summary overview of the ethical practices of WYRED. There are many ethical issues that were relevant to WYRED which would be relevant to any research project involving young people especially in relation to online research and research about digital practices. We take the following in turn: the issue of children's participation and protection, data protection and GDPR, Data collection and use, interaction between young and old and with researchers, informed consent, the role of young people in research processes (for example in the cycles and in use of the toolkit). Overall, the participatory nature of the project lends itself to a wider review applying the internationally relevant principles and practices of children and young people's participation.

## Issues of Participation and Protection – Researching the Digital World

Commentators, such as (Hokke et al., 2018), have provided summaries of the main issues in relation to conducting research that is about the online environment or is conducted online. Across many sources in this area, we can cite the following as key areas as relevant:

- Distinction between public and private.
- Concerns for children and other vulnerable groups.
- Responsibility to inform and obtain consent.
- Responsibility for confidentiality and anonymity.
- Sharing of data.

Firstly, it was my sense that the research participants' rights in WYRED were adequately anchored in fundamental human rights and the fundamental ethical principles that govern all scientific research. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child were of course relevant to this study and applied to practices I encountered.

In practice, and across documentation, there were adequate details of the processes of recruitment, inclusion and exclusion and informed consent procedures. Similarly, there was every effort made to gain consent from the guardian/legal representative as well as the agreement of the children involved. Young people appeared to be well informed and have a full understanding of the implications of participation. This was made possible ahead of, and through the participatory research processes too. There were adequate procedures for the steps to be taken to ensure the welfare of the child participants. The rationale for their overall involvement was warranted by the research focus and this warrant is bolstered by the findings and insights gained.

There was plenty of evidence that researchers also showed respect for the values and opinions of a diverse range of research participants. These included those whose values and

cultural orientations differed from each other and from mainstream. This was the case with respect to young people from different countries and from diverse religious groups, ethnic minorities, and social movements / youth groups.

## Data Protection & GDPR

As the research concerned the digital age, a dedicated Participant Protection Policy was created to enable the WYRED project to focus on giving freedom to young people to interact and explore, while also ensuring that all issues of security, privacy, and participant protection were responsibly addressed. This was an admirable aim and a very sound ethical approach. The policy went beyond merely protecting the data of the participants. The overall participatory nature of the inquiry positioned young people as the experts in understanding their current and their future lives in a digital society. Hence, ethically, WYRED stands up as a distinct and innovative participatory youth-led research project.

As noted in the interim report, coinciding with the project timeline was the unveiling and implementation of the new European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This new regulation is the most significant change to data privacy for decades, and consequently, any project concerned with digital society — especially one with young people as its participants — needed to ensure that it is in compliance with the new regulations. In this final ethical review, we too found the WYRED processes and platform exhibited many best practice responses to the new law which requires organisations to be fully transparent about how they are using and safeguarding personal data. In interviews, researchers were able to demonstrate accountability for their data processing activities. WYRED has ensured that the project was an example of responsible complicity with GDPR.

In WYRED, a clear Participant Protection Policy was created at the outset which addressed many of the issues above. Many of the above issues were also addressed through the creation of a private digital platform which was not publicly accessible. The public-private distinction was handled in a creative and sensitive manner in WYRED. Within the digital

platform, for example, ages of participants and genders were hidden from view and avatars were used rather than photographs. This afforded a sense of freedom and empowerment for participants.

Some WYRED videos and other dissemination outputs are available online. The publicly accessible information was not sensitive, but we would want young people to be able to ask for these to be taken offline at a future stage should they wish. Offline, the information from individual participants is not traceable due to the standard approaches to anonymity used. WYRED researchers found it easier to comply with the children's need for protection by collecting minimal information with the aid of established methods rather than online in many respects (outside of the customized private online platform).

## Data Collection and Data Use

In general, there is ample evidence WYRED complied with macro ethical principles and applicable international, EU and national laws ensuring there was little or no chance of negative impact on the young people participating. Data was wherever possible processed in anonymised or pseudonymised form, for example. Young people also have the option on deleting their data even after the project closes from a H2020 perspective.

As the WYRED research involved children and young people, it raised significant ethical issues. Because children may not be aware of the risks and consequences of their participation or the use of their personal data, efforts were made to ensure they understood and consented in different ways and in an on-going way. The project addressed this aspect by following EC Guidance on informed consent, including obtaining adult / guardian consent and in all cases the assent of the child. The principle of minimising the collection and processing of data was notable in that the platform closed off these data sources in a private sphere. The GDPR safeguards for children in relation to 'information society services', a broad term covering all internet service providers, including social media platforms, includes a requirement for verified parental consent in respect of information society services offered

directly to children aged under 16. Some participating Individual Member States provide for this threshold to be lowered to 13. These rules were adhered to in WYRED.

Particular attention was paid to vulnerable categories of individuals such as children, patients, people subject to discrimination, minorities, people unable to give consent, people of dissenting opinion, immigrant or minority communities, sex workers, etc. As the research involved some children who may have been unable to make decisions for themselves, an active relationship with their legal guardians and/or carers and their teachers was maintained. Mostly, adults in caring roles would not have wished to monitor the research in an on-going way, but there were clear avenues for contacting and staying in touch with research leaders.

Collecting personal data (e.g. on religion, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, etc.) proved sensitive on two fronts: firstly, for younger participants and secondly in different socio-cultural settings. In response, the templates for collecting evidence of who participated were adapted to allow for younger participants to provide only the necessary or minimum required for the research. Sexual orientation was left off forms for younger respondents, for example.

## Interaction with Researchers

In interactions with researchers online and in face-to-face contexts, high standards of behavior and ethical practices were apparent. Because at times, young people did disclose sensitive issues about their online lives, due care was taken to handle these sensitively and in appropriate ways. In instances where a disclosure event took place, there was evidence from the Work package leaders of having handled these well. For example, when a young person divulged about their efforts to engage in hacking online, they took time to investigate further and take appropriate action. In subsequent research processes, the issue was addressed and the young person was supported as they explored the issues around this and took up a new response position to the rights of others online.

## Informed Consent

Leaders of work packages in WYRED appear to have been acutely aware of the need for informed consent such that children were participating voluntarily. Efforts were made to ensure the context of the work at times happened outside of school for example so that children could clearly volunteer. Similarly, I heard from WP leaders about how they clearly documented participants' informed consent in advance and continued to be aware of children's need to have an option of withdrawal. For younger participants, consent was explained orally and with written consent being in a language and in terms they could fully understand. As the WYRED process involved the children themselves in research processes, it was clear that participants would be informed of their own and many other participant groups' findings. Across WYRED, age-appropriate information and communication processes were in place.

Full informed consent with younger participants is known to be difficult but within the general principle of maximizing benefits and minimizing harm, I was content they too adequately understood the information and did not feel pressured or coerced into giving consent. For these younger children, the approaches taken to informed consent included consent from the legally authorised representative / parent / carer too. In addition to that, the assent of the

children themselves was also obtained in these cases. As all young people were involved in research processes, this element meant they were inducted into the idea of gaining consent in their own projects which would also have assured them of greater than normal understanding of their own informed consent. Researchers monitored young people's assent by considering any verbal or non-verbal clues which could indicate they wished to stop participating, for example.

For school-based participants, and pre-school aged participants too, care was taken to address how informed consent and on-going consent was gained and assured. The on-going presence / absence of teachers was felt to be a factor here and researchers reported on how they handled this. As schools had rigid timetables, periods of examination pressure, and cultures of compliance, the approaches taken and the inclusion of activities in contexts outside of schools was laudable. Accessing young people via schools also proved difficult in many countries so an after-school / out-of-school approach was taken which proved viable and appropriate ethically too.

In terms of informed consent, therefore, across the processes and contexts of WYRED, the approaches taken were sensitive to age, culture, context and legal aspects. The structures and procedures were viable and there were acceptable levels of ethically sound decision making and data management.

## Young People as Researchers – Ethical aspects

Phases of the research process ↓	← Dimension of decision-making power or control →				Who is involved and who is excluded?
	Children are not involved	Children are consulted	Children collaborate with adult researchers	Children direct and decide for themselves	
<b>Deciding on the research question</b>		Children asked about problems that concern them.	Children and adults jointly define research question.	Children choose their own research question.	Who has a say in the research question?
<b>Designing the research and choosing methods</b>		Children consulted on what research methodology to use.	Children and adults deliberate and jointly decide on the methodology to use.	Children decide what methodology they want to use.	Who is invited to get involved in the research design?
<b>Preparing research instruments</b>		Children consulted on (and perhaps test) research instruments before use.	Children and adults work together on design of research instruments.	Children create their own research instruments.	Who gets to work on the research instruments?
<b>Identifying and recruiting participants</b>		Children asked to advise on recruiting participants.	Children and adults jointly identify and recruit participants.	Children identify and recruit research participants.	Who has a say in choosing participants?
<b>Collecting data</b>		Research involves adults interviewing children or surveying their opinions.	Children and adults collaborate on data-gathering activity.	Children organise and carry out data collection activities.	Who gets involved in data collection?
<b>Analysing the data and drawing conclusions</b>		Adults show preliminary findings to children and ask for feedback.	Children and adults work together to analyse data and determine conclusions.	Children analyse data and draw their own conclusions.	Who has a say in what the conclusions are?
<b>Producing a report</b>		Adults consult children on aspects of the final report.	Children and adults work together to produce a report.	Children produce their own report in their own words.	Who gets credit for the report?
<b>Dissemination of the report and its findings</b>		Adults consult children on how to disseminate findings.	Children and adults collaborate on dissemination and awareness-raising activities.	Children undertake activities to disseminate their findings.	Who is actively involved in dissemination?
<b>Advocacy and mobilisation to achieve policy impact</b>		Adults consult children about possible advocacy actions.	Children and adults work together on plans for advocacy and mobilisation.	Children develop and implement an action plan for advocacy and mobilisation.	Who is active in follow-up campaigning and advocacy?

The WYRED project took as a premise that young people of all ages have the right to participation and engagement in research processes. In research project participation, there was a strong focus on inclusion, diversity and the empowerment of diverse and marginalized sub-groups in this aspect.

Shier (2019) provides a tool for considering the role of young people in research which can be applied here in review (see fig above). Across the research projects, it would appear that children mostly worked with adults in all of the phases identified by Shier and, in many cases, led in these actions. Across the social dialogue and participatory research, young people themselves certainly engaged in full cycles of research processes from research question setting through to data collection, analysis and dissemination. As WYRED closes out, we would hope they would have opportunities to do more in the category, 'Advocacy and mobilisation to achieve policy impact'. The Shier's tool could also be used in review within any existing research projects in WYRED or in review groups who now wish to look back at children's degrees of involvement in the work.

The WYRED project demonstrated its strong ethical standpoint in this area by issuing regular inclusion reports during the project. This provided an explicit focus on inclusion by taking into account the key indicators of diversity across cultures and countries.

The Processes Handbook proved to be a cornerstone of the research cycle, and there was a clear focus on an inclusion strategy. There was also an "Inclusion Questionnaire" provided when participants first join the WYRED online platform. Repeating the whole research cycle twice during the project lifetime meant that there was sufficient social dialogue around the chosen research themes. The approaches taken ensure voice was aired at an early stage. The Delphi study too made sure there was time to identify young people's attitudes and expectations regarding digital society.

The WYRED online platform proved to be the critical space for the project participants to interact. It continues to serve as the repository for artefacts from the research process and accounts of many events.

Ahead of the cycles, there were clear consultation phases which meant the topics derived and focused on in the research also came from young people. Whilst the remit of the H2020 programme meant there was a need to refocus these at a later stage, the efforts made to engage ethically with young people's views was also clear. This work also involved younger participants. Because the engagement of youth in authentic research processes was on-going throughout the WYRED project, this meant there was a need to address this aspect in an open-ended and youth-responsive way. There was evidence of working with diverse youth groups from different sectors in different ways.

The ethic of affording autonomy to young people was evidenced throughout. This included the choice of topic, the methodologies employed, the way data were analysed and how findings were disseminated. Young people had considerable ownership across these research processes. There was as an adult advisory group for WYRED. However, as noted elsewhere in this report, there might also have been scope for a young person's advisory group to oversee the entire project. That said, the opportunities for young people to air views, and for real dialogues to take place on and offline, meant there was a novel and significant opportunity for intergenerational communications across many projects. The numbers of young people involved across many countries speaks for itself as a bona fide warrant for young people's ethical involvement in research process.

## Example of Ethical Participatory Practice - Research Toolkit

Doğa were in charge of the work package that dealt with the Activity Toolkit (WP6) which offered a variety of suitable research methodologies in age-appropriate ways with illustrations and examples. The toolkit highlighted specific aspects and potential difficulties, and explained which methodology would be suitable for which kind of project.

Evidence for this review from the Doğa group explained the process:

*“We applied the toolkit ourselves in the research activities carried out with volunteer students from our schools, as well as from state schools in Istanbul. Participants were invited to our premises after school hours. Our typical approach was to start the research work with an ideation workshop, where participants were guided through the process from generating ideas on how to tackle issues relevant to them, to creating an actual prototype to address those issues. The work was carried out independently in teams, with educators very much taking a backstage role (as a ‘guide on the side’ to call on if needed). The issues identified by participants were actual problems connected to their lives in a metropolis (e.g. water management, renewable energy to reduce air pollution, etc.). Participants were then asked to create a basic business plan for the commercialisation of their prototypes.*

*The prototypes presented were not all viable solutions, but they were all creative and original approaches, a result of their passion and engagement. The participants showed great commitment and enjoyed working in groups, on topics that were important to them, suggesting solutions that fitted with their view of the world. The ideation workshops gave them the theoretical background and the practical experience to bring an idea to life. Equipped with this new knowledge, they subsequently carried out a variety of WYRED research activities.”*

## Principles for Ethical Participation in Research

As we have seen, across the processes and contexts of WYRED, the treatment of data about and from young people, the sensitivity of the information they provided, the care taken over the vulnerability of these young participants and their interactions with adults all formed the basis of viable and acceptable levels of ethically sound practice. Next we look in an overarching way at participatory principles and practices in WYRED.

The research on frameworks of participation by Mannion (2012) identified the **overarching principles** and **operational practice** needed for a framework to work effectively. Based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, we can take the following ethical principles as coming to bear on the WYRED processes of engaging with young people in research:

### **Participation should involve:**

- Equal opportunities for inclusive, voluntary participation.
- Respect for children and young people's rights and differences.
- Transparency and accountability in decision making.
- Intergenerational power sharing.
- Relevance of content, purpose and outcome.

### **Participation - inclusive and respectful**

As a human right, the participation of young people in decision-making within the research in WYRED was clearly more than a reward or a privilege. All children and young people – including those with disabilities, minority groups, and those in need of support for learning – were afforded both the right to be protected and the right to have a say in shaping the research.

### **Participation - transparent and involved power sharing**

In WYRED research processes, participation was more than adults merely listening to young people. There were many forms of intergenerational dialogue which required adults, children, and young people to engage in communications which were two-way, voluntary, and sustained. These dialogues also dealt with real concerns, and were based on warranted degrees of mutual respect. Through this form of rights-based participation, researchers, young people, and other community members planned and acted together.

Interestingly, the opinions of adult stakeholders regarding what counted as the most important issues were not always in agreement with young people: the stakeholders attributed much higher importance than young people to the issue of media literacy, namely the reliability of information on the internet and in social media. This been confirmed by some of the initial face-to-face social dialogues with young people. It evidences a real and tangible dialogue on a contemporary concern.

### **Participation - relevant, authentic and consequential**

For participation to be relevant and authentic, participatory dialogues must be influential and consequential rather than tokenistic. Effective participation should lead to new practices, relations and meanings. The processes and outcomes of these actions should be monitored in ways that include young people.

The results from the Social Dialogues for each partner provides a sense of the scope of relevant and consequential actions. Delphi Report Results:

206 young people and 69 stakeholders from different countries took part in the 1st round, while 260 young people and 89 stakeholders participated in the 2nd round.

Citizen science can be considered as a form of research that is contributed to (and, ideally, led) by non-professionals. By supporting young people in fair and responsible ways, there was clear evidence too that WYRED has helped shape the growing field of “citizen science”.

## Summary - Ethical Practice in WYRED

Across the work packages within WYRED, practices evidenced:

- Safe and child-friendly approaches.
- Training and capacity building for adults and children and young people.
- Involvement of children and young people in most of the relevant governance practices.

From an examination of WYRED deliverables and outputs, including documents and the online platform, it is clear that the WYRED project has adhered to ethical guidelines and gone beyond many of these to generate new ethical practices. We can be confident that in the efforts outlined above you have likely ensured the well-being, protection, and safety of participants. It is also clear that the respect and rights of the young people involved in the project have been given due consideration.

A central conundrum in a project like WYRED that focuses on facilitating the empowerment of young people and their agency was the question “when is the right moment to let go” (of the balloon). This is an ethical question. But my assessment is that it was not a critical question or a question that is answerable. From the perspective of Shier’s framework (2019) when applied here, we can see there is not a simple point at which we can simply say young people ‘went solo’ or the project was completely youth-led. Indeed, whilst within a project, it can feel like young people are in charge, across WYRED, the adults are also leading on the structures that allowed it to happen and provided funding for that too. What one person

might feel is full engagement of the young and their meaningful participation, another might find lacking in some respect. Also, experts note, that degrees of tokenism are inexorable (Lundy, 2018; Mannion, 2007, 2009).

Other experts have attempted to summarise best practice in participation with young people. A useful list of 'General characteristics' or principles of effective participation (Day et al., 2015) are listed below. In WYRED, there were many stories and examples of how these principles were indeed taken into account on the ground and in final reporting in other documentation. Many of these points below (1-18) are addressed above.

In sum, since we can say to varying degrees, these broad principles were adhered to, we can say the ethical dimensions of participation of young people in and through WYRED processes was strong and in many cases, exemplary. Some of the points afford opportunity for question and reflection (see below).

1. All children having an opportunity to actively participate.
2. Participation being voluntary, informed and transparent.
3. Children's contributions are valued, respected and taken seriously.
4. Children having the opportunity to influence and/or initiate the agenda.
5. The context and approaches are appropriate and child friendly, according to age and maturity.
6. Opportunities for learning (adult and children) are built into the participation process.
7. Children have active roles in all phases of decision-making cycle, not just expressing a view.
8. Participation is meaningful and relevant for participants.
9. Children's contributions are confidential and free from risk.
10. Participation increases awareness, builds social capital and empowers children.

11. Children receive support, training and resources where needed.
12. Participation involves dialogue and collaboration with adults.
13. Activities are monitored and evaluated.
14. There are clear measurable benefits / outcomes for participants.
15. Possibilities are created for children to take action / implement the solutions.
16. Participation is on-going / sustainable, and not a one-off event.
17. Participation is linked to wider civic and/or organisational decision making.
18. Systems and culture of learning and change exist in response to children's participation.

On the basis of this listing (above), some questions are worth reflecting upon. We might wonder, if WYRED could be rendered even more inclusive if it were to be sustained or re-run. We might wonder about the *quality* of the dialogues between adults and young people and how consequential these were – assessing quality was beyond the scope of this review. We might also consider if there are further *impacts* on society to be felt as a result of the impacts of the research young people carried out. Lastly, we invite reflection on the processes of involving young people in oversight, monitoring and evaluation of WYRED throughout too.

I have noted that there was not a young person advisory group. This was not a requirement for success or a necessary component for ethical clearance. Indeed, since the research was designed with so many sub projects, we can imagine there was a veritable army of advisory groups in each and every sub-project. However, a child/youth-led advisory group overseeing the entire WYRED project might have added some young input into wider governance and direction. That might also have ensured involvement of young people in project-wide monitoring and evaluation, and could have functioned in the generation of final insights through member checking. Thus, a final area for WYRED project to consider is how they involve young people in 'member checking' about the final findings and insights (though this may already be completed or in train). It would be excellent to consider ways to check with

young people about these before finalizing. Also, we can expect the on-line environment will function as one mechanism for feedback for all children and young people and the wider public. Perhaps considering augmenting that mechanism with other face-to-face feedback meetings would also be worthwhile.

The following, drawing on the interim report too, are the other outstanding ideas for going forward with ethical practice:

- Credit. Whilst anonymity is a norm, are there ways of ensuring credit due to young people as the creators of research outputs and findings is provided should some young people wish this. Doing this without compromising others anonymity and traceability of others involved may prevent this. Some young people could benefit in terms of their cv for example.
- Conclusions. Can we be sure young people will get a chance to hear about and respond to and perhaps contribute to ongoing generation of conclusions and perhaps further academic papers, reports or other outputs?
- Advocacy and Lobbying. Are there new novel ways in which young people can sustain engagement in making a difference to policy and professional practice as the project concludes or post project. Perhaps the WYRED organization / association is a context in which this can be supported happen.
- Dissemination. Can young people be fully involved in dissemination? The WYRED dissemination plans could ideally include conferences and networking events. The interim ethics report mentioned events on the topic of “Citizen Science”, where delegates would benefit from hearing about the WYRED approach to supporting young people in research. [The global Citizen Science Association (CSA) and the European Citizen Science Association (ECSA) have their biannual conferences on alternate years.]
- A concern with Horizon 2020 funded projects is always their legacy at the conclusion of the project. There are ethical questions to be considered about how responsible it is to



encourage young people to join and participate in a network/platform/community that might not exist after funding runs out. Seeing the WYRED project predict this issue and mitigate it with the idea of establishing a “WYRED Association” is very encouraging.

### 3. References

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