THE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

SMART Generation project

The Policy Recommendations were developed within the framework of the SMART Generation project (2015-2017), coordinated by Centro culturale Francesco Luigi Ferrari (Modena, Italia, www.centroferrari.it) and implemented together with Solidarci (Caserta, Italia, www.arcicaserta.it), Fundacion Cibervoluntarios (Madrid, Spain, www.cibervoluntarios.org), Anfmr – Rural Women National Association (Rucar, Romania, www.anfmr.ro), Ligzda Youth Organization (Rujiena, Lettonia), EAEA – European Association for the Education of Adults (Brussels, Belgium, www.eaea.org).

SMART Generation project and **The Policy Recommendations** are coordinated by an international pool of experts composed by: Giovanni Bursi, Valeria Ferrarini, Paolo Tomassone, Alice Toni (Centro culturale F. L. Ferrari); Giovanna Maciariello, Paola Maciariello (Solidarci); Yolanda Rueda Fernandez, Angel Sola Lopez (Fundacion Cibervolutarios), Ana Vorovenci (ANFMR), Daina Roze (Ligdza) and Aleksandra Kozyra (EAEA).

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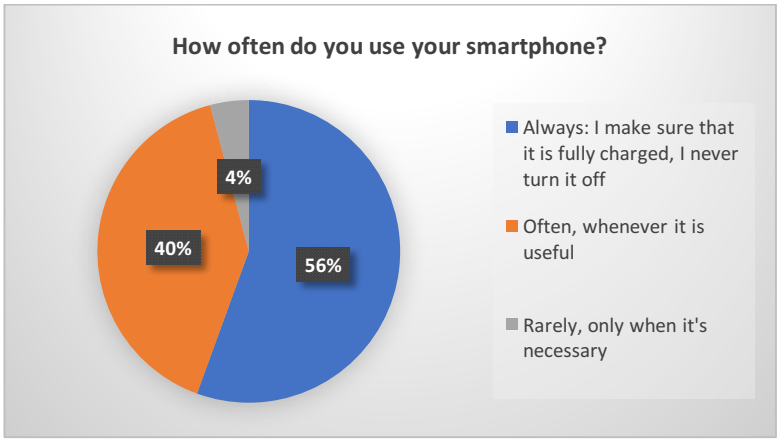
INTRODUCTION

Why invest in smartphone education?

The ubiquity of smartphones is impossible to ignore. According to Eurostat, in 2014, 80% of all young people in the EU connected to the internet through a mobile device; in eight EU Member States, the proportion reached 90%. As many as 74% used mobile phones for this purpose, comparing to 44% for portable computers. Presumably, by 2017 this figure has only increased. Already in 2012, the daily internet use overtook the daily computer use among young people, suggesting that they prefer to connect through mobile devices[1].

Additionally, 75% of the respondents of the Smart Generation survey, aged 14-19, said they used their device to connect to the internet "many times a day". As many as 55% admitted they were trying to make sure that their smartphone was always charged, as can be seen from the graph below.



Young people and smartphones: the implications for education

This increasing use of smartphone among young people has complex implications for their everyday life, bringing both risks and opportunities. The online activity of young people, frequently taking place on social media and through instant messaging, makes them particularly vulnerable to new forms of harassment such as cyberbullying. A quarter of the respondents to the Smart Generation survey admitted that they had already been insulted online; 30% of them never reported it to anybody. The increasing exposure to online media also requires highly developed skills in critical thinking: as young people can now check any piece of information within seconds, the ability to distinguish reliable data from false information has gained importance.

In spite of those risks, the potential that smartphones have for learning has not gone unnoticed. Having the advantage of being instantly connected and easily available, they can support students in learning and monitoring their progress through different applications. Some of the tools can facilitate collaboration between the teacher and the students. The teachers who tested the Smart Generation Pedagogical Model have also found that working with smartphones increased motivation and participation of students who are normally shy.

ICT tools at schools and non-formal education providers: do they really work?

The potential of technologically-driven tools in education has also been taken recognized at the EU level. The 2013 Communication of the European Commission entitled Opening up Education noted that "open technologies allow All individuals to learn, Anytime, through Any device, with the support of Anyone", adding that most institutional strategies "tend to oppose openness to education that ICT provides" with restrictive regulations[2].

[1] https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/595bef31-60fa-4bdf-89c9-e24f0dc2b59c/language-en/format-PDF/source-36684691

[2] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52013DC0654

Those schools that did invest in ICT infrastructure, however, do not necessarily have encouraging results. According to the results of the PISA study, the impact of ICT use in schools on student performance is "mixed, at best"[3]. Simply supplying the school with computers and other devices is not enough. A similar conclusion is made in "Mobile Learning. A Handbook for Developers, Educators and Learners". The authors note that "administrators can't simply say: 'Here's a tablet!' and assume education will change in any fundamental way", calling for systemic changes at the institutional level. The following recommendations address some of the issues that public authorities and learning providers need to face to make sure that children and young adults use their smartphones in a conscious way and thus facilitate their learning opportunities. They have been drafted based on the results of the Smart Generation survey and the testing of the Smart Generation Pedagogical Model, as well as desk research.

[3] http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/education/students-computers-and-learning_9789264239555-en#.WagbrOlLc2w

FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES (NATIONAL/REGIONAL/LOCAL)

PR n. 1 – INTRODUCE POLICY DIRECTIVES TO ENCOURAGE MOBILE LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM

As many education policies predate the use of smartphones, there are no references to their use in the classroom. Some of the newer policies ban their use at school. No clear guidelines at the policy level will lead to vast fragmentation in institutional practices.

PR n. 2 – INVEST IN DIGITAL SKILLS

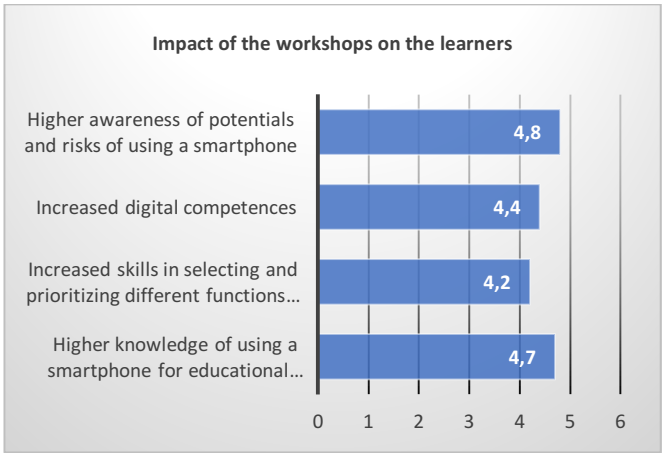
Invest in digital skills of teachers and educators by embedding them in the curricula for initial teacher training and increasing funding for in-service development.

Did you know that….
A joint EC-OECD survey shows that six teachers out of ten have not received any training on using ICT in the classroom. Studies also show that 70% of teachers in the EU wish for more professional development on ICT skills[4].

The pilot implementation of the Smart Generation model also showed that many teachers need support in confident use of ICT. Many of them reported that they felt discouraged to use modern technologies in the classroom as they assumed that the students were already more skilled at using them. Development of digital skills needs to be included in pre-service and in-service training of teachers, with sufficient funding earmarked for this purpose.

Confidence matters
According to a recent (2013) European Schoolnet study, only "between 20-25% of students are taught by digitally confident and supportive teachers having high access to ICT and facing low obstacles to their use at school". The survey also shows that teachers who are confident about their digital skills use technology frequently in the classroom even when they face "low access and high obstacles to use it at school"[5].

Schools that tested the Pedagogical Model reported that more time should be spent on issues such as digital identity, relationships, knowledge and safety. The topics need to be discussed in depth throughout the school year to make sure that students understand the risks of using mobile devices and how to avoid them. Learners can benefit significantly from workshops similar to those tested by the Smart Generation consortium, as seen in the graph below.



[4] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52013DC0654
[5] http://www.eun.org/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=9be81a75-c868-4558-a777-862ecc8162a4&groupId=43887

PR n. 4 – INVEST IN STRONG WIRELESS NETWORKS IN SCHOOLS

Some schools in Romania that participated in the testing of the Pedagogical Model had trouble implementing the online activities due to problems with the internet connection.

Case study box:
Ireland recently made a nation-wide investment to put WiFi into classrooms. The five-year plan, launched in 2015, identifies the rollout of wireless networks within schools as "a key Government priority".[6]

PR n. 5 – STRENGTHEN MULTI-STAKEHOLDER COOPERATION TO ENSURE SAFE ONLINE ENVIRONMENTS

Strengthen multi-stakeholder cooperation at the national, regional and local level to ensure safe online environments for children and young adults.

To ensure that children and young adults can access the internet and use their smartphones safely, different stakeholders need to work together, bringing in their own area of expertise. Teachers, parents, as well as industry, research community and NGOs should be encouraged to cooperate through structured networks, especially in awareness-raising activities.

Case study box:
The Better Internet for Kids initiative was launched by the European Commission in 2013, encouraging awareness-raising activities on a safe use of the internet. As part of the initiative, the Insafe network of Safe Internet Centres conduct campaigns in cooperation with different stakeholders to help young people stay safe online. For example, in March 2017 the Bulgarian Safe Internet Centre hosted a meeting between online safety experts and Facebook managers, discussing fake accounts, hate speech, cyberbullying and fake news[7].

[6] https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/the-government-wants-to-put-wifi-networks-into-classrooms-1.2381344
[7] https://www.betterinternetforkids.eu/web/portal/home

FOR SCHOOLS AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING PROVIDERS

PR n. 6 – INTRODUCE WORKSHOPS ON SMARTPHONE EDUCATION

Several teachers and educators who tested the Pedagogical Model said they would welcome an opportunity to have a series of workshops on the topic. Several of them suggested including all partners in the yearly planning. In those schools where it is not possible, some elements can be incorporated into already existing school subjects. The topics of digital identity, safety, knowledge and relations can be discussed during a foreign language class, social studies or ICT. In fact, teachers and educators that have tested the model consider it to be "easily adaptable" to usual educational practices.

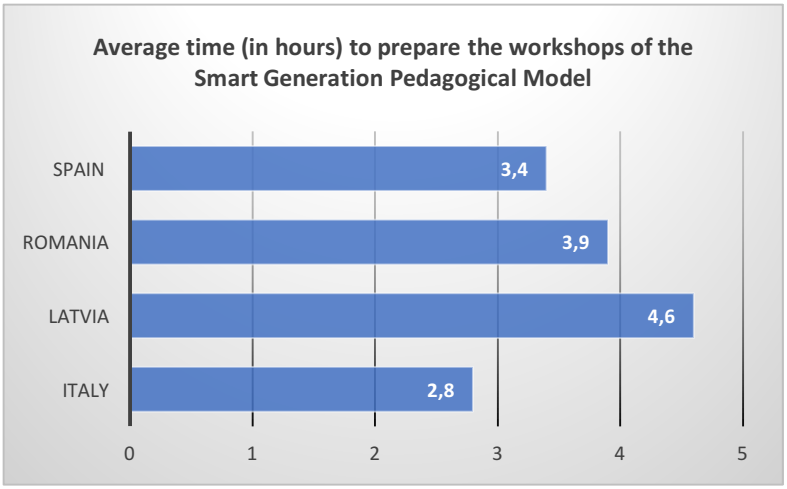
PR n. 7 – ENSURE THAT YOUR SCHOOL NETWORK IS SAFE BY INTRODUCING AN E-SAFETY POLICY

Making sure that the learning environment is safe is paramount. eSafety labels are now available to make sure that the school and all learners can use the network safely. The eSafety label offers an assessment form to help schools and other education providers evaluate their infrastructure, policy and practice.

Did you know that….
According to the European Schoolnet study, only 40% of students in Europe are in schools with a policy on safe internet use.

PR n. 8 – SUPPORT TEACHERS AND EDUCATORS IN MOVING TOWARDS MORE TECHNOLOGIGALLY-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS IN THE CLASSROOM BY ORGANISING REGULAR TRAINING AND ENCOURAGING DIALOGUE

It is not enough to supply a classroom with tablets or other mobile devices and expect teachers to immediately use them effectively in the classroom. Teachers and educators need time and support in changing the way they work. In the case of the Smart Generation testing phase, teachers and educators needed an average of 3 hours to prepare the workshops.



It is also important to create a learning environment also within the school to help teachers exchange their knowledge, which can be structured – through regular meetings – or informal.

Case study box
Cybervoluntarios in Spain engaged their "cybervolunteers" to train other teachers, which turned out to be very effective. In some cases, learners themselves might be helpful. During the testing phase of Smart Generation Pedagogical Model in Romania, some of the ICT teachers as well as a few students were involved in the preparation of the workshops.

PR n. 9 – ENCOURAGE COLLABORATIVE AND PAPERLESS LEARNING THROUGH MOBILE DEVICES

Mobile devices are an excellent way of sharing the work with everybody. Students and teachers can work together on a common document, run a test or an interactive survey and immediately see the results, share the resources with each other. It also strengthens the communication between the students, teachers and parents. This way of learning not only encourages collaboration and makes the resources easily accessible, but also reduces the use of paper and doesn't require students to carry heavy backpacks around.

Did you know that….

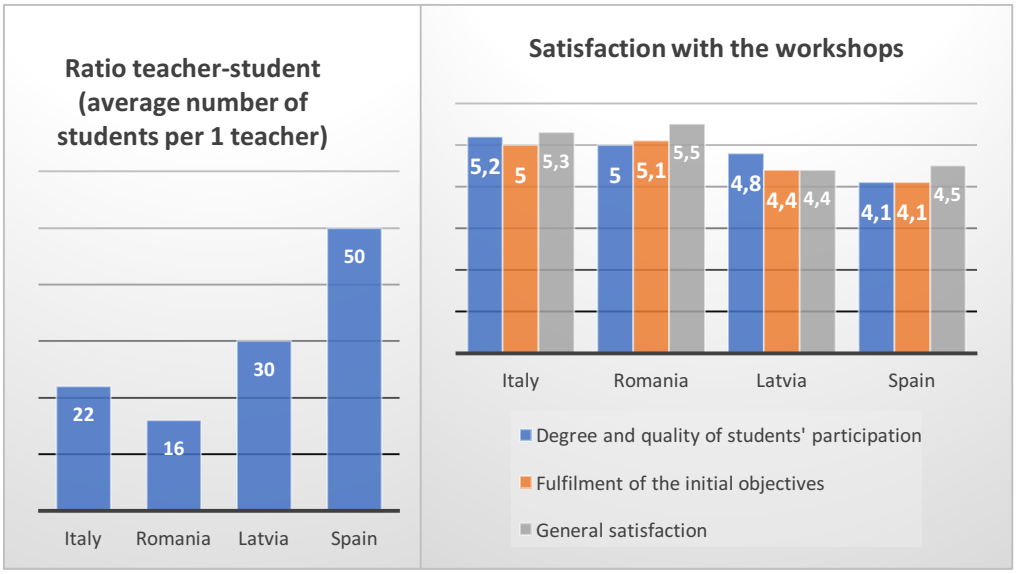
An average *school uses* approximately 250,000 pieces of paper per *school* year, according to Edutopia[8].

PR n. 10 – CONSIDER INTRODUCING THE BRING YOUR OWN DEVICE POLICY

While some schools provide tablets for students, others opt for a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy, believing that it is not only cost effective, but also brings other benefits. According to a Norwegian school that tested the BYOD policy, students who bring their own device to school take more responsibility for it and, as they are more familiar with the device, can work on it more effectively[9].

PR n. 11 – PROMOTE PERSONALIZED LEARNING AND ENCOURAGE WORKING IN SMALL GROUPS

The learner needs to be in the centre of the learning process. Overcrowded classrooms often keep students from getting their voice heard. The testing phase of the Smart Generation Pedagogical Model has clearly demonstrated that the workshops were more successful and beneficial for the learner when delivered in smaller groups, influencing particularly degree and quality of students' participation.



[8] https://www.edutopia.org/blog/paperless-schools-techology-ben-johnson
[9] http://fcl.eun.org/documents/10180/624810/BYOD_norway.pdf/a1d695eb-af2a-4194-8d6b-9967a7d57978

PR n. 12 – USE MOBILE DEVICES IN THE CLASSROOM TO ENCOURAGE CREATIVITY

Many students are unaware of the potential of smartphones, looking at it only as a communication tool. The multimodality of the smartphone can allow students to present their work in a number of creative ways – through videos, songs, images. There is a wide variety of applications that can help students express themselves through non-formal learning, for example through digital storytelling.

CONCLUSIONS

The Smart Generation consortium believes that mobile learning devices have a key role to play in opening up education as a flexible and accessible learning tool. However, to make sure that those devices are used to their full potential and that young people benefit from a safe learning environment, public authorities and learning providers need to step up to the challenge.