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RESEARCHER

IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Participation

STRENGTHENING EU VALUES THROUGH DIGITAL PARTICIPATION
RIGA, LATVIA | 28-30 OCTOBER 2025

Who am I

Researcher in **the field of youth**

Focus: Participation
(civic & political)

Adolescents, youth, policies &
human rights

+20 years in the sector
(14+ in research)

United Nations, European
Commission, Council of Europe

(I)NGOs & governments

SALTO Participation & Information
(strategy review & development)

Participation in the 21st century

What is participation

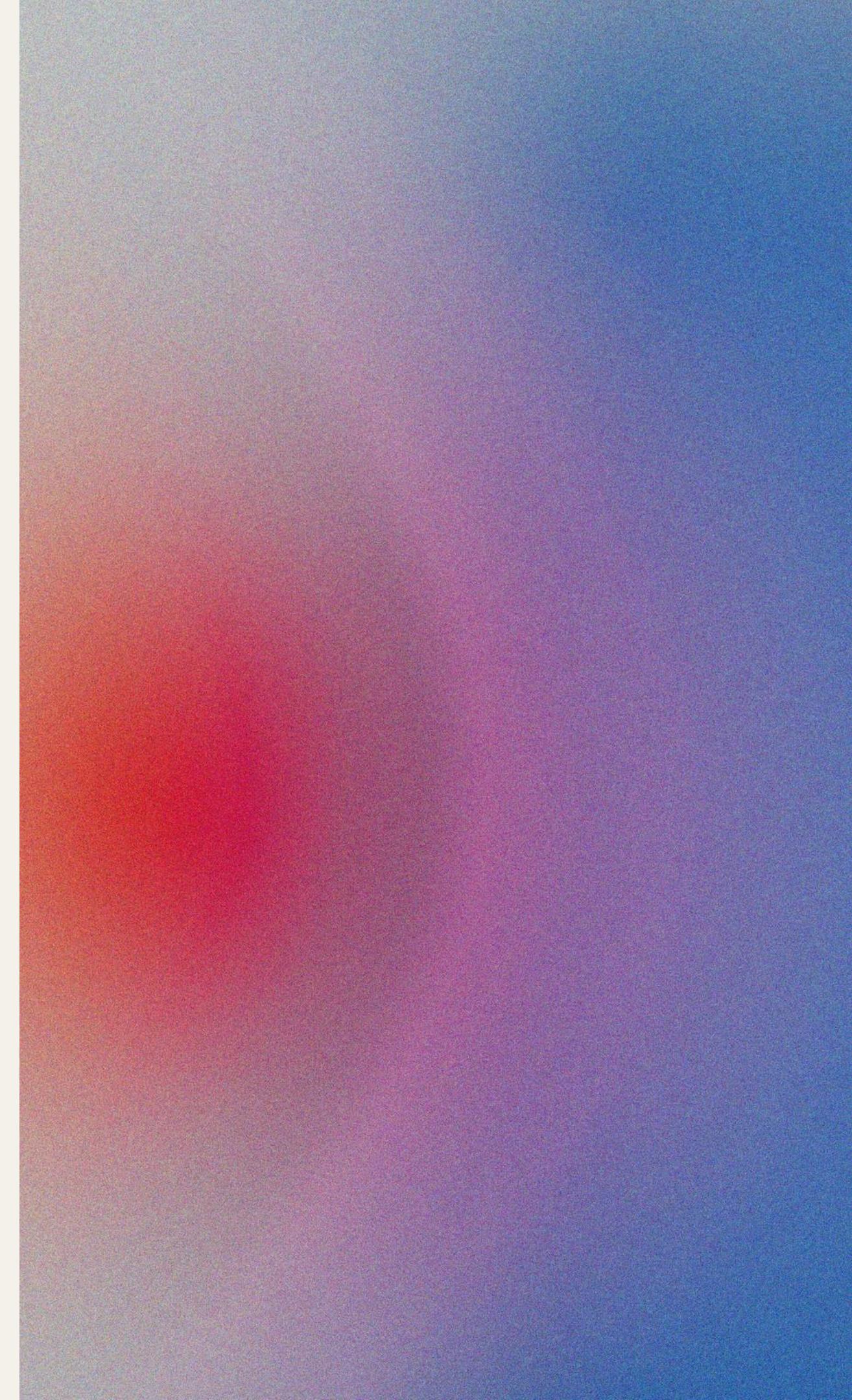
In everyday parlance: "to take part"

In democracy:

**The ability to have a say in & shape
the decisions that impact your life**

Autonomy, agency, self-determination

and shaping your community, and the world around you



Why participation

The participation priority in Erasmus+ projects

- To develop the **knowledge and competencies** of participants in relation to democracy and participation (*participation as a theme*)
- To enable participants to **influence decision-making** in the planning, preparation, implementation, and follow-up of the project (*participation as a process/method*)

Participation in Erasmus+ projects

- To enable participants to **influence decisions in the democratic world** around them, such as policy decisions made by a public body
- To enable participants to **volunteer** their time and make an active contribution to democratic and civic life

Participation in the 21st century

What characterises the 21st century? (so far)

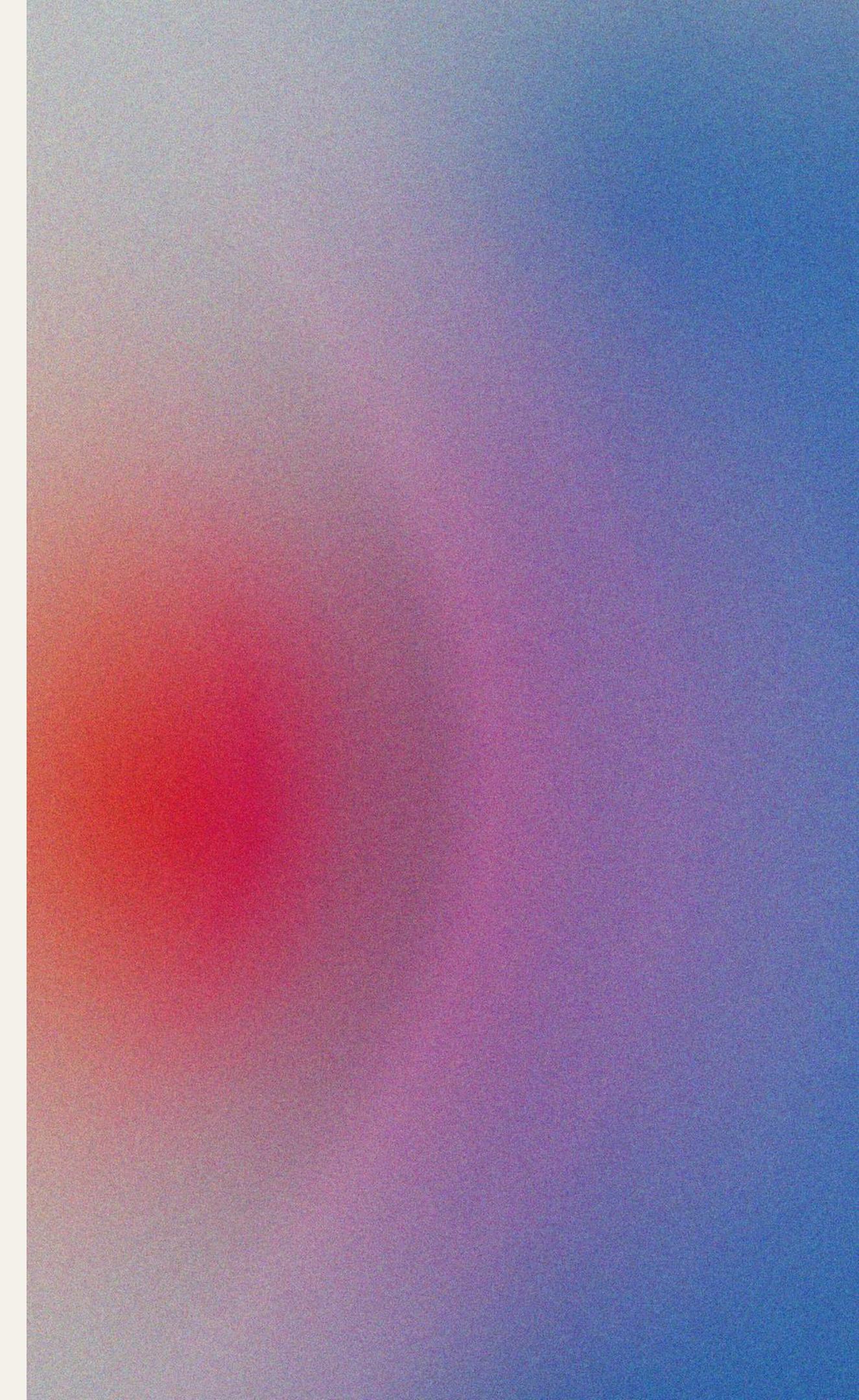
Among other things...

Rise in global economy

Geopolitical shifts & upheaval

(9/11, Arab Spring, global financial crash, COVID-19, Ukraine, Gaza)

Rapid technological & digital change



Concerns about democracy in the digital age

Pew Research (2020) *Many Tech Experts Say
Digital Disruption Will Hurt Democracy*

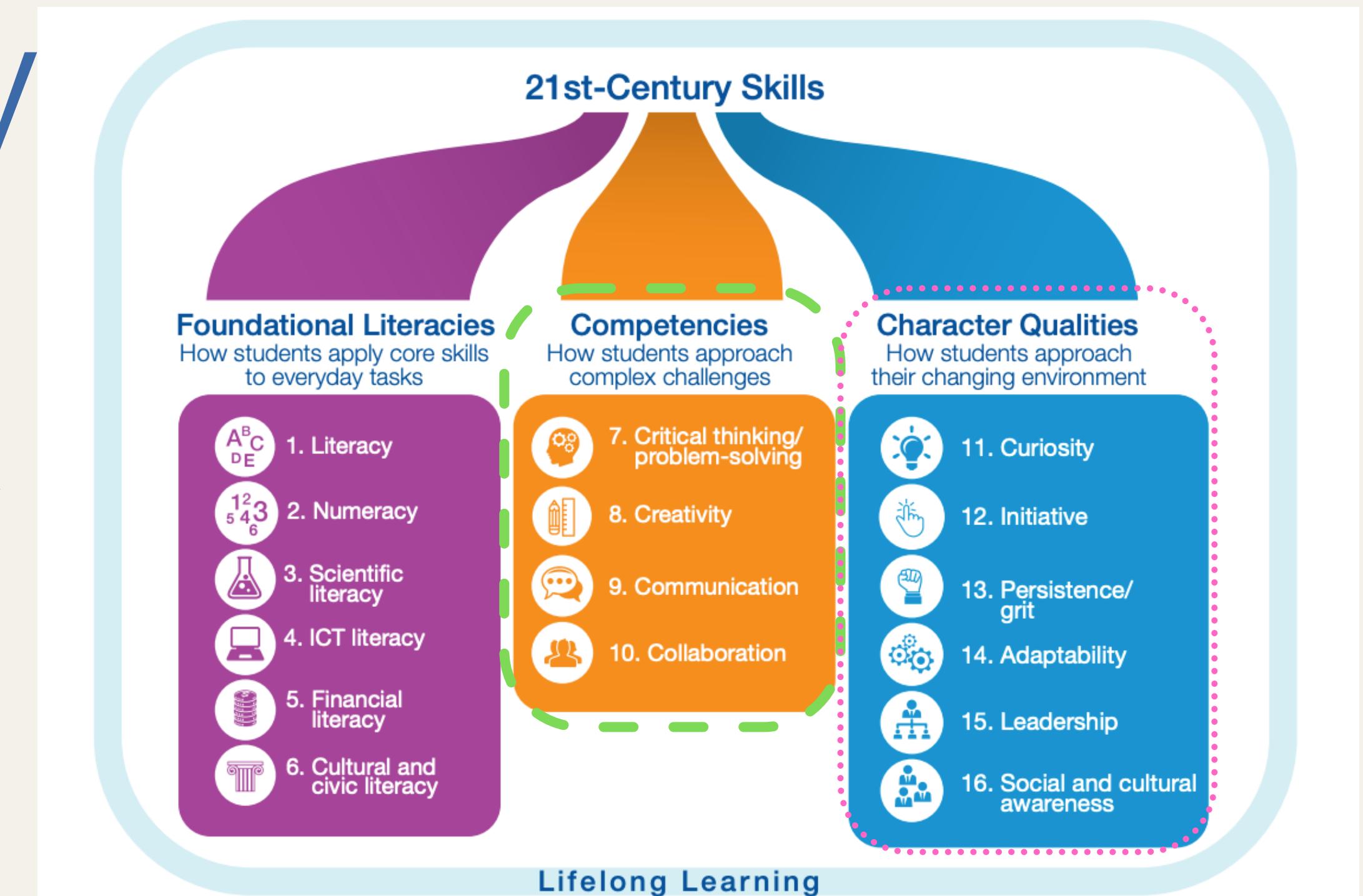
Participation in the 21st century

Skills for the
21st century

21st century
skills

21st century skills

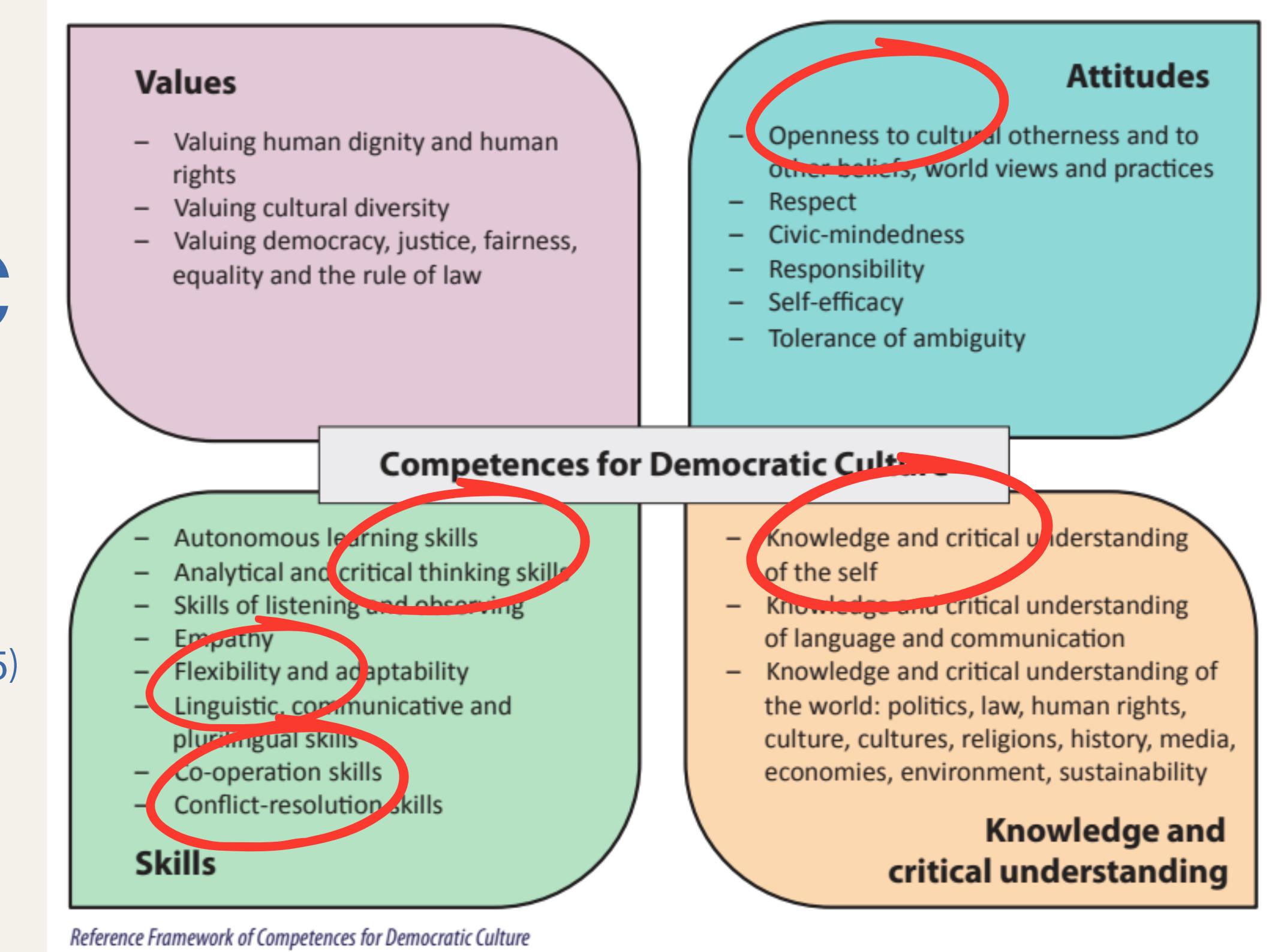
Skills needed to “thrive in a rapidly evolving, technology-mediated world” (WEF, 2015)



Adapted from World Economic Forum (2015) *New Vision for Education: Unlocking the Potential of Technology*

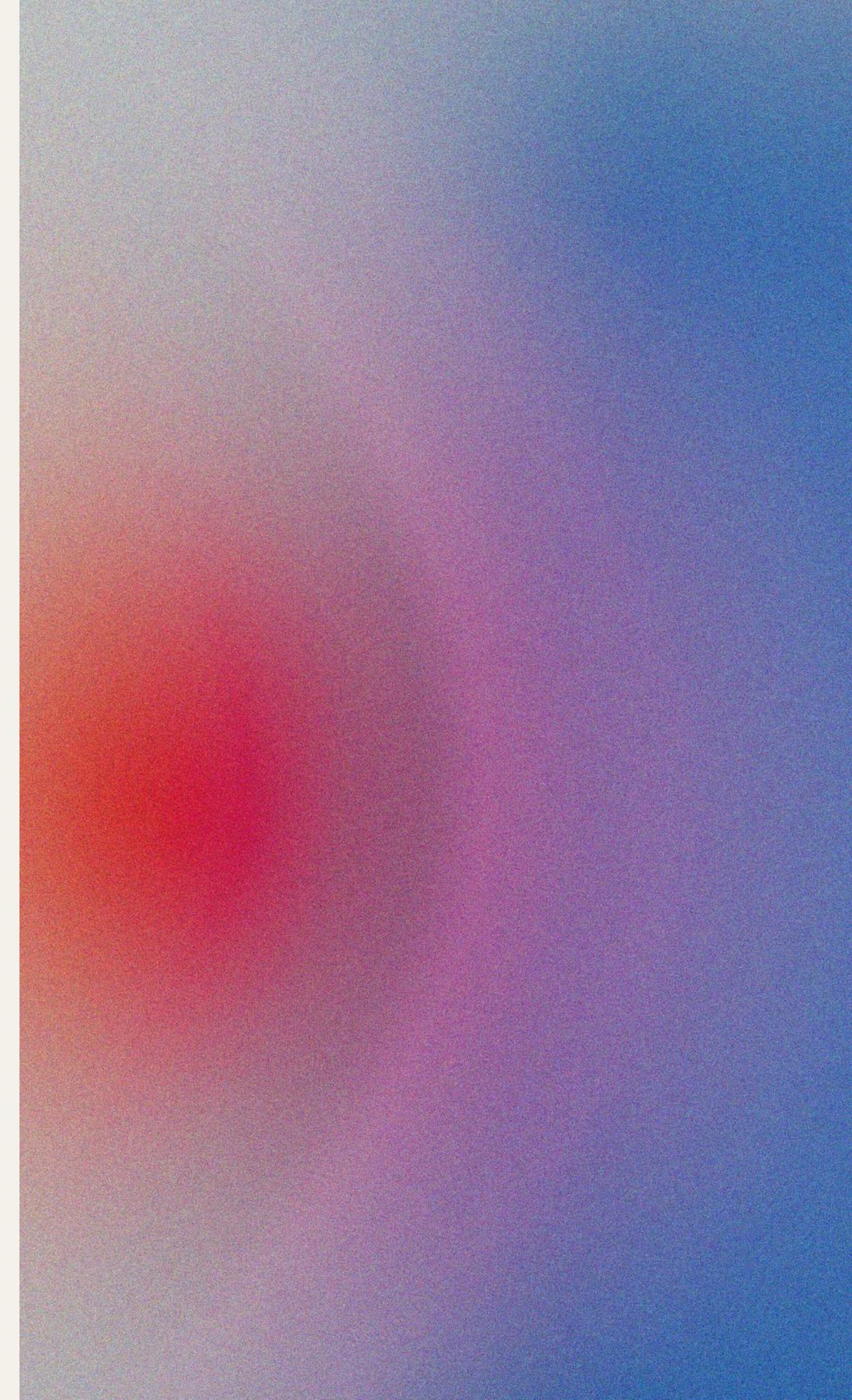
Competences for Democratic Culture

Competences that our education systems should develop in students to “prepare them for lives as active citizens in democratic societies” (CoE, 2025)



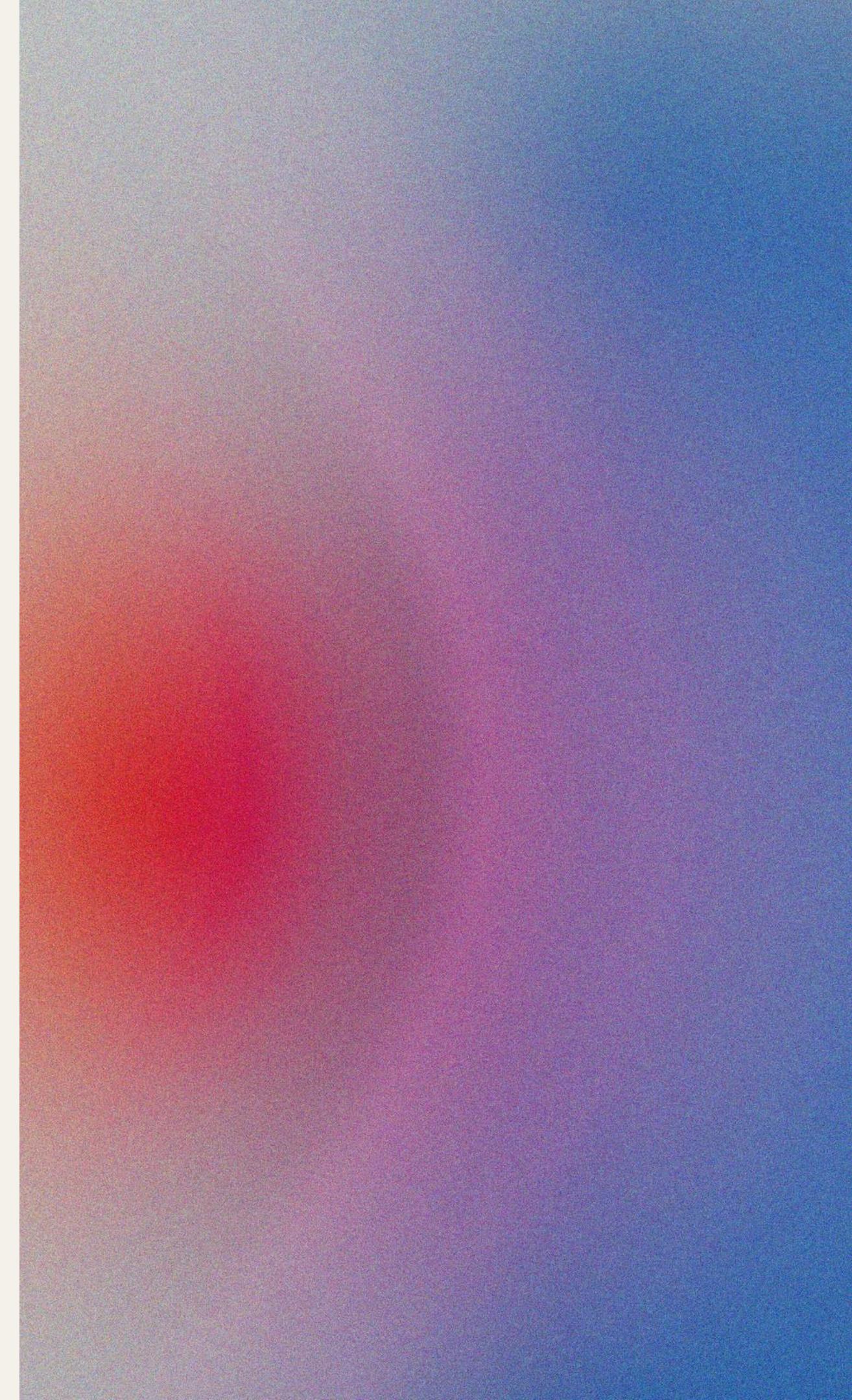
Adapted from Council of Europe (2025) *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture: Guidance Document for Education for Sustainable Development*

21st century
skills are also
skills for
democratic
culture



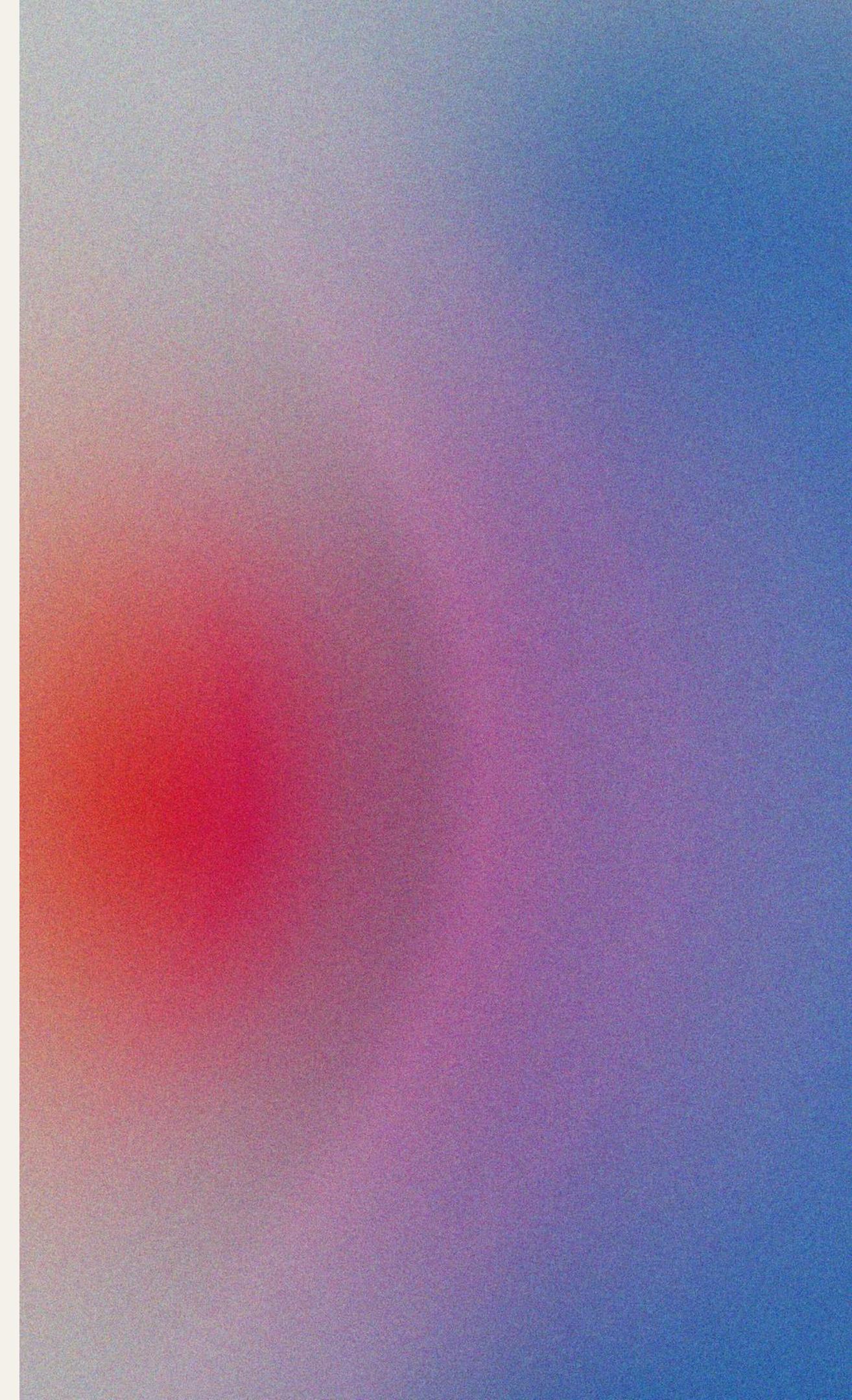
Participation in the digital century needs *analog* skills

- Challenges to democracy in a digital world is a *symptom* of challenges to democracy as a whole
- Digital technologies *mediate* (and *exacerbate*) existing challenges to democracy, but not cause it alone
- 21st century skills & competences for democratic culture need to be cultivated in **offline, everyday engagement** with democratic life - no easy digital fix



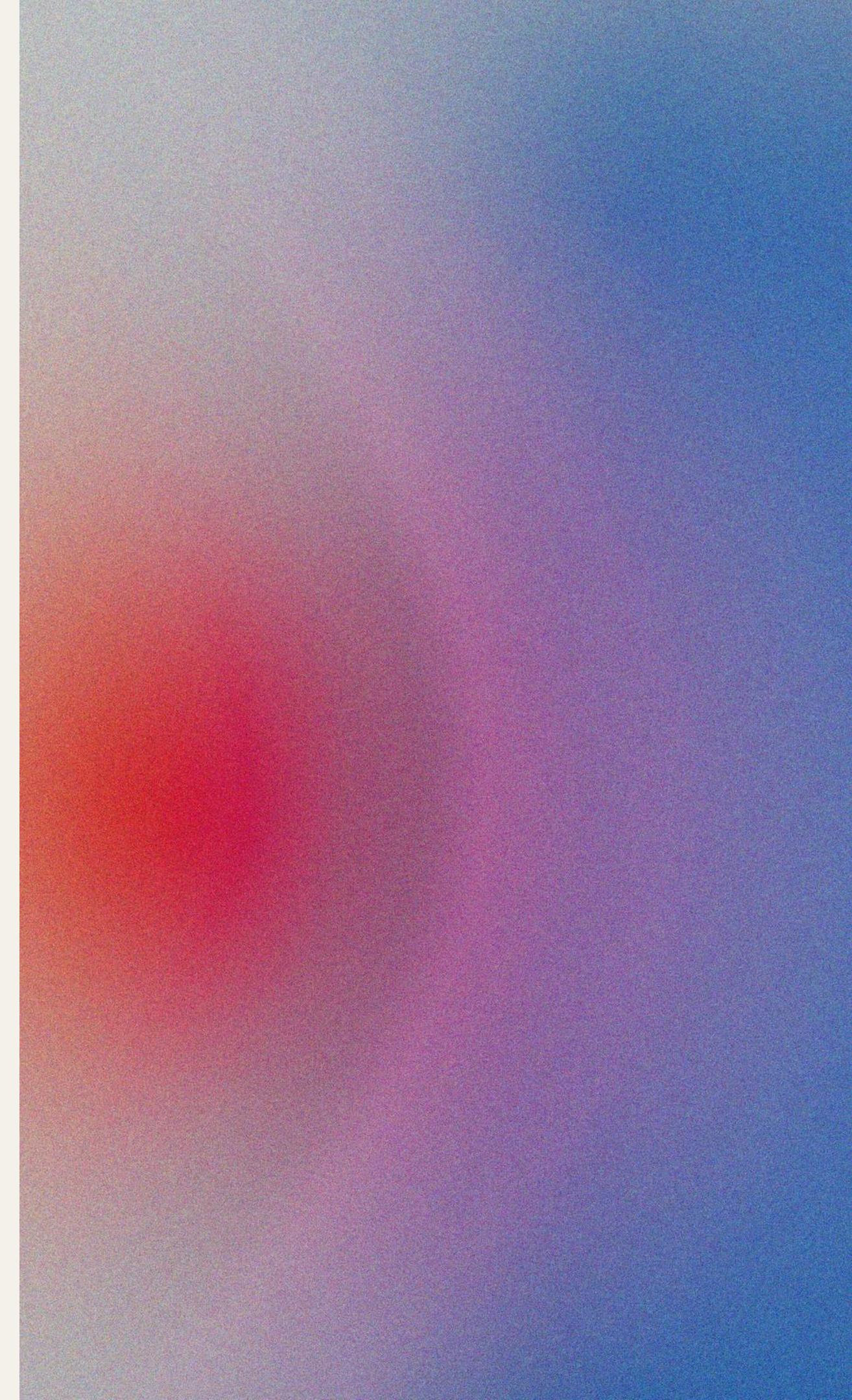
How E+ can help to enable this

- Bringing 21st century skills & skills for democratic culture together
- Thinking (and working) cross-sectorally: in the field of Education + Training & field of Youth
 - Education & Training: Captive audience, mass populations (but formal education is traditionally hierarchical)
 - Youth: Youth work, non-formal education is by design collaborative, non-hierarchical (but lacks the scale)



How E+ can help to enable this

- More than just *participation as a theme* (not just learning about democracy in theory)
- Need to embed *participation as a **practice** - living democracy*
- **Lessen hierarchies, emphasise lived experience of being heard** (most of us don't have this experience)
- Creating spaces of **deliberation**, shared decision-making, opportunities to identify **shared interest**, even in conflict: *what do we have in common? (**solidarity**)*
- Schools & educational centres can be **laboratories of democracy**



How do you support
participation in the
21st century through
your work in
Erasmus+?

Thank you

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