

CRISTINA BACALSO
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*

ALJAZEERA


News ▾Middle EastExplainedOpinionSportVideo

Trending > Gaza ceasefireRussia-Ukraine warOccupied West Bank

Economy | Media

AI models misrepresent news events nearly half the time, study says

According to the research, 45 percent of responses to questions the news had at least one 'significant' issue.




POLITICO

Magazine

THE MEDIA ISSUE

How Gen Z Became the Most Gullible Generation

The almighty algorithm is fueling conspiracy theories among young people and ruining their ability to tell fact from fiction on the internet.



WIRED

NEWSLETTERS


DELL CAMERON

SECURITY

OCT 3, 2025 9:21 AM

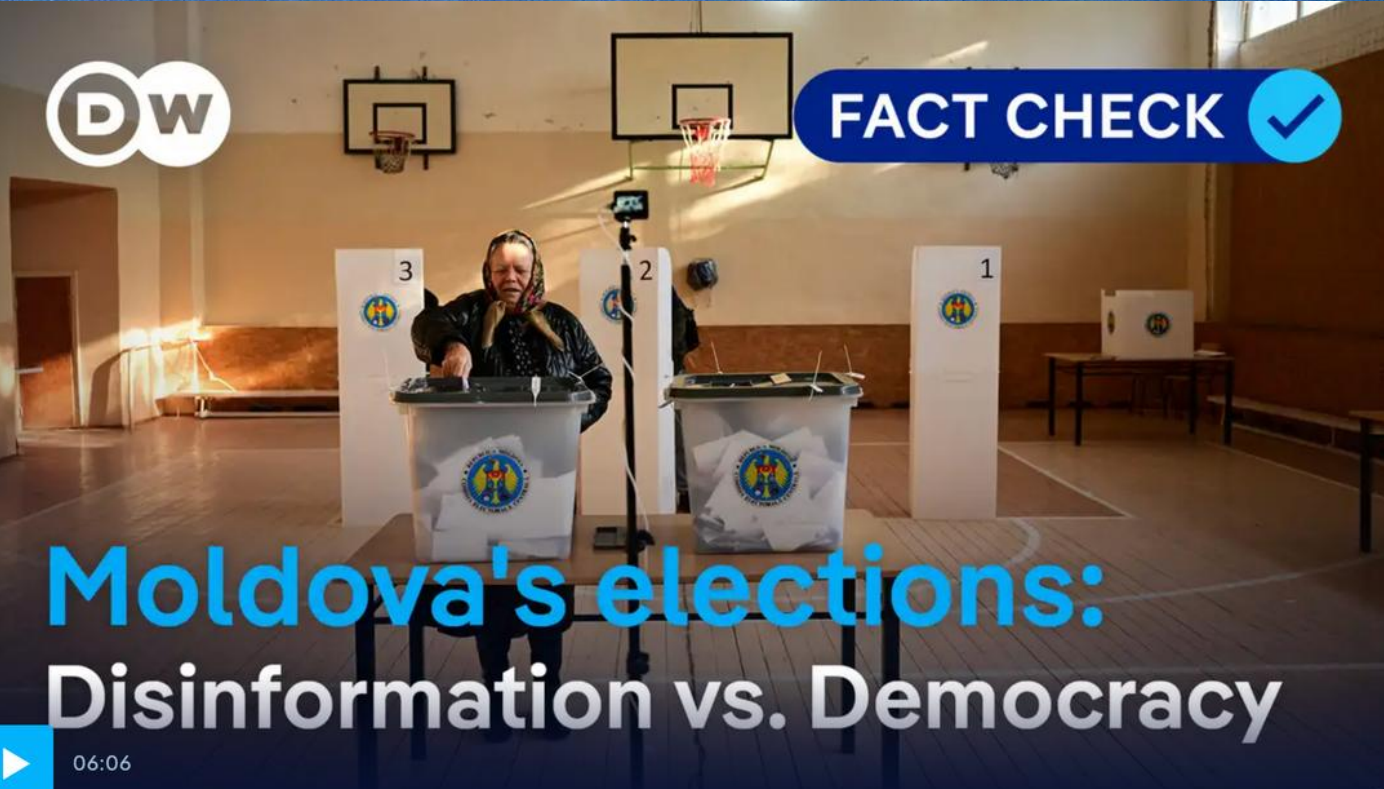
ICE Wants to Build Out a 24/7 Social Media Surveillance Team

Documents show that ICE plans to hire dozens of contractors to scan X, Facebook, TikTok, and other platforms to target people for deportation.



DW

FACT CHECK ✓



Moldova's elections: Disinformation vs. Democracy

06:06

DW

IN FOCUS

GazaTrump tariffsGerman politics

Latest videos

Latest

POLITICS | GERMANY

Far-right AfD appears as strongest German party on TikTok

06/04/2024

Politicians and figures linked to the far-right Alternative for Germany party use TikTok as a "parallel universe" to spread extremism, a study says. Meanwhile, other parties show "weak performance" on the platform.

EXPLORE

TIME


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ChatGPT May Be Eroding Critical Thinking Skills, According to a New MIT Study

TECHARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

by Andrew R. Chow

CORRESPONDENT



In Germany, social media algorithms are pumping out huge amounts of far-right, pro-AfD content

A new study found that, on TikTok and Elon Musk's Twitter, nearly 3/4 of all partisan content being pushed algorithmically to German users favored the party best known for its ties to neo-Nazis.

by JOSHUA BENTON @joshuabenton.com Feb. 20, 2025, 10:47 a.m.

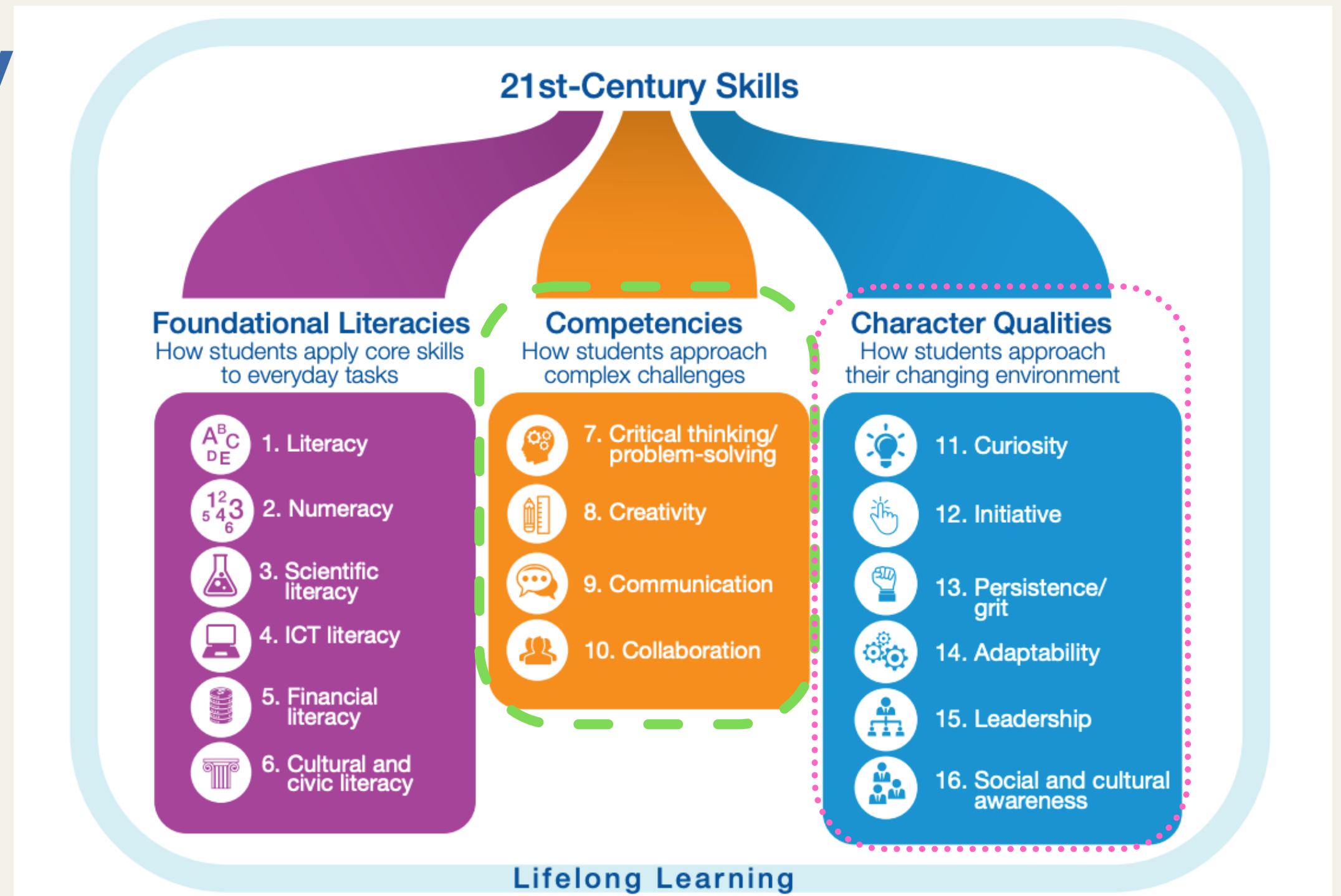
Participation in the 21st century

Skills for the 21st century

21st century
skills

21st century skills

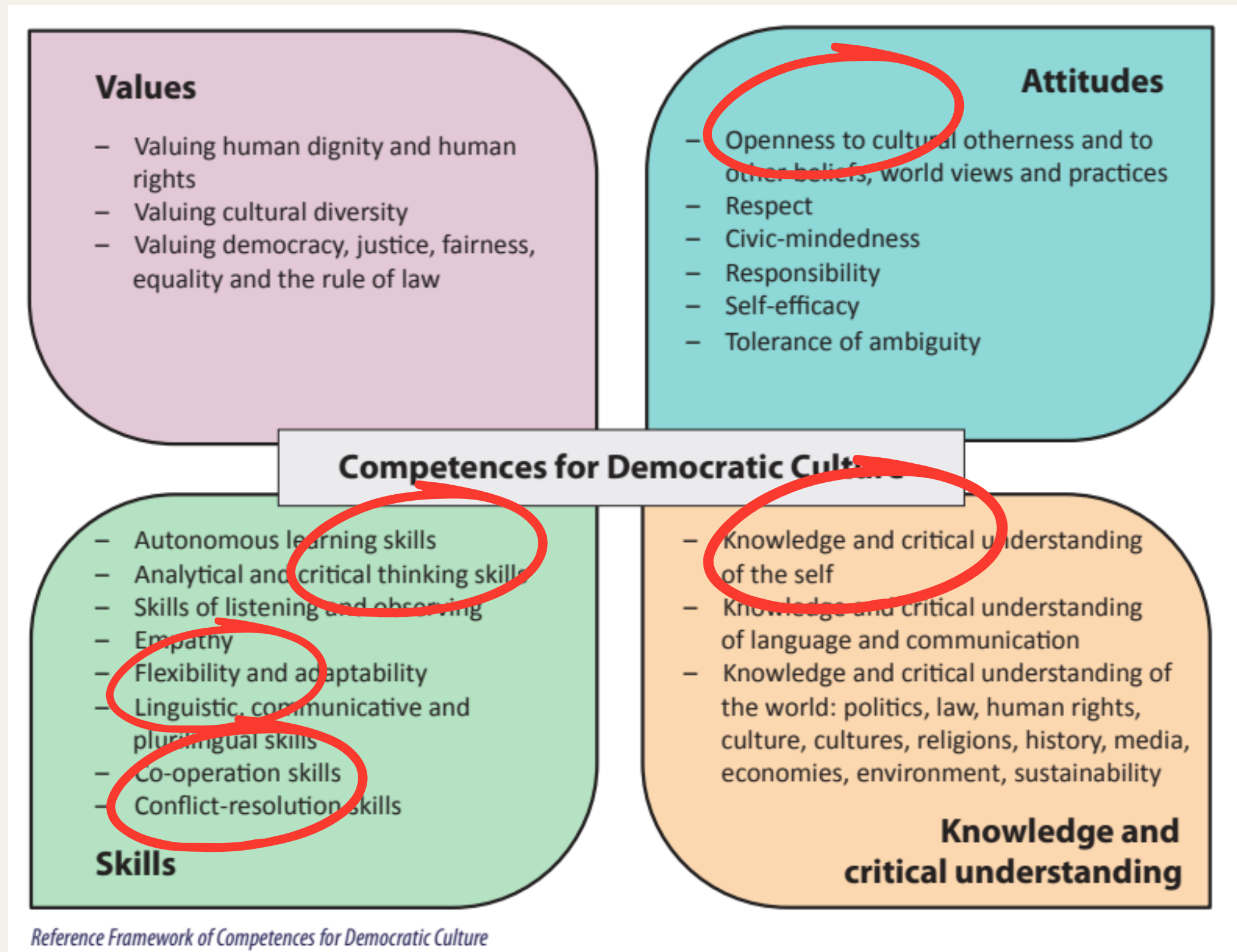
Skills needed to “thrive in a rapidly evolving, technology-mediated world” (WEF, 2015)



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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