

Girls Love Tech

Website: <http://girlslovetech.substack.com/>

Country: Serbia

Geographical focus: General/no specific focus

Scientific field/Thematic focus: Agricultural Sciences, Cross-thematic/Interdisciplinary, Engineering and Technology, General, Humanities, Medical and Health Sciences, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences

What is the good practice about?

"Every week, we help parents and teachers encourage girls' interest in tech through recommendations of great books, movies, projects, and activities that will show that technology is a tool that we choose how to use — whether it is making cars smarter, or designing jewellery."



Why is this initiative needed?

Research shows that to keep girls engaged in technology you need consistency and relatability. If they usually don't play with cars or robots, why do we think they'll enjoy doing it when it's tech-enhanced? Microsoft's global research shows that girls, irrespective of their upbringing, start losing interest in STEM and computer science between the age 11 and 14. This trend gradually worsens and by the time they're in college, 58% of girls believe that jobs requiring coding and programming are "not for them". Meanwhile, numerous research has shown that divergences between genders are not only a result of gendered expectations but unequal resource allocation as well. Both parents and teachers are lacking the resources to keep girls engaged to STEM.

The vast majority of STEM and robotics toys are marketed for and target boys in a gender-stereotypical manner. From Amazon's best-selling lists to any other prominent website, all promote dominantly blue-coloured toys, advertise with pictures of exclusively boys playing, and force motifs traditionally attractive to boys, such as cars, construction equipment, or Star Wars.

A similar example is what is used in coding classes, whether in school or through extra-curricular activities. An apparent lack of educational and entertainment resources targeting girls is a crucial problem, with an obvious market gap due to major education providers' neglect and disinterest in making true gender-neutral content.

The tech education and toy markets have been the same for quite a while and almost all players are operating on the same premise — boys are interested in tech, girls are not. A large part of our market outreach is offering a different angle on tired tropes. Firstly, the abovementioned narrative is obsolete, ethically and morally dubious, especially as technology is becoming a part of everything we do. Tech is about to become key in 9 out of 10 jobs in the future. Girls don't seem interested not because technology is boring to them. It's because the way we introduce tech is not interesting to them - they are left out of the mainstream conversation. Cars. Construction machines. Super-robots. Blue whatever. This is how most tech projects are presented, with a heavily, openly male-centred vision.

To counter the mainstream portrayal of technology as something that is not made for girls, we need to be consistent in showcasing exactly the opposite. This is where the "Girls Love Tech" platform comes in! Every week it provides parents and teachers with several ideas on how to keep girls engaged in technology, some of which take only 5 minutes.

What are the main objectives and activities?

The key objective is to nurture a different narrative and provide guidance on how to engage girls in tech. This is an important step toward fulfilling the mission to decrease the gender gap in tech. The project started with a free weekly newsletter, but the plan is, in time, to build an interactive community and other channels of communication. During summer, the project owners also plan to host workshops with programming schools, and build custom-made projects and products. All of this will help to achieve the mission to create a more diverse and inclusive future by enabling girls to take an interest in coding and robotics through play.

Currently, it is still the start of this project, after summer 2022 there will be more measurable results on the effects on girls' interest in tech, and their enrollment into extracurricular programming activities.

The initiators have won the WSA European Youth Innovator Award, and through our content, we are reaching 2000 people every month. Partnerships have been formed with 5 coding schools to work on their curricula to attract girls.

Who is involved?

The project relies on various international research, and hundreds of interviews with girls, parents and teachers; as well as on the project owners' experience from more than 10 events across Europe, where they were able to showcase our approach in front of 15,000 attendees. Policymakers were not involved in the implementation of this practice.



Can this good practice be replicated?

This can and should be replicated globally and it is not focused on the WB region. The gender gap in technology is a widely recognized problem and the content that is being created can be useful for teachers and parents worldwide. The content is provided in English.

So far, this is a low-budget practice, but in time, it would be great to have funding for content writers, as well as promotional activities.

The goal is to grow and enable this through additional paid content, such as workshops, ebooks and other products.

By creating a community around this new narrative, this approach will enter into teachers minds, coding schools, and educational curricula.

Further links:

⇒ <https://girlslovetech.substack.com/>

⇒ https://www.linkedin.com/posts/zojaku_lets-engage-girls-in-tech-activity-6938060525960380416-ivx

Relevant RRI keys: Gender Equality in Research and Innovation (R&I), Science Education

Type of practice: Promotional activities/events/campaigns, Publications/promotional material, Promotion of partnering opportunities, Sending targeted alerts

Target groups: youth (children, pupils), the general public, person on the street

Project owner: Haptic Synaptic, Zoja Kukic - contact can be established

