

Youth Vibes for Europe: A case study of an Erasmus+ youth mobility project

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Abstract

Keywords: youth work, youth mobility, Erasmus+ program

Introduction

Erasmus+ is the European Union program and initiative which operates in the fields of education, training, youth and sport for the period 2014-2020¹. Education, training, youth and sport can make a major contribution to help tackle socio-economic changes, the key challenges that Europe will be facing until the end of the decade and to support the implementation of the European policy agenda for growth, jobs, equity and social inclusion.

Fighting high levels of unemployment - particularly amongst youth - is one of the most urgent tasks for all European governments. There is a high percentage of school drop-out, running a high risk for youngsters of being unemployed and socially marginalized. The same risk threatens many adults with low skills. Technology and new media are changing the way in which society operates, and there is a need to ensure the best use is made of them. EU businesses need to become more competitive through talent and innovation.

Europe needs more cohesive and inclusive societies which allow citizens to play an active role in democratic life. Education, training, youth work and sport are key to promote common European values, foster social integration, enhance intercultural understanding and provide a sense of belonging to a community, and to prevent violent radicalization. Erasmus+ is an effective instrument to promote the inclusion of people with disadvantaged backgrounds, including newly arrived migrants.

Another challenge relates to the development of social capital among young people, the empowerment of young people and their ability to participate actively in society, in line with the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty to "encourage the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe". This issue can also be addressed through non-formal learning activities, which aim at enhancing the skills and competences of young people as well as their active citizenship. Moreover, there is a need to provide youth organizations and youth workers with training and cooperation opportunities, to develop their professionalism and the European dimension of youth work.

Well-performing education and training systems and youth policies provide people with the skills required by the labor market and economy, while allowing them

¹ REGULATION (EU) No 1288/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 11 December 2013 establishing 'Erasmus+': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0050:0073:EN:PDF>).

to play an active role in society and achieve personal fulfilment. Reforms in education, training and youth can strengthen progress towards these goals, on the basis of a shared vision between policy makers and stakeholders, sound evidence and cooperation across different fields and levels.

The Erasmus+ Programme is designed to support Programme Countries' efforts to efficiently use the potential of Europe's talent and social assets in a life-long learning perspective, linking support to formal, non-formal and informal learning throughout the education, training and youth fields. The Programme also enhances the opportunities for cooperation and mobility with Partner Countries, notably in the fields of higher education and youth.

In accordance with one of the new elements introduced in the Lisbon Treaty, Erasmus+ also supports activities aiming at developing the European dimension in sport, by promoting cooperation between bodies responsible for sports. The Programme promotes the creation and development of European networks, providing opportunities for cooperation among stakeholders and the exchange and transfer of knowledge and know-how in different areas relating to sport and physical activity. This reinforced cooperation will notably have positive effects in developing the potential of Europe's human capital by helping reduce the social and economic costs of physical inactivity.

The Programme supports actions, cooperation and tools consistent with the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy and its flagship initiatives, such as Youth on the Move and the Agenda for new skills and jobs. The Programme also contributes to achieve the objectives of the Education and Training Strategic Framework for European cooperation in Education and Training and of the European Youth Strategy through the Open Methods of Coordination.

This investment in knowledge, skills and competences will benefit individuals, institutions, organizations and society as a whole, by contributing to growth and ensuring equity, prosperity and social inclusion in Europe and beyond.

Impact

Impact is the effect that the activity carried out and its results have on people, practices, organizations and systems. Dissemination and exploitation of results plans can help to maximize the effect of the activities being developed, so that they will impact on the immediate participants and partners for years to come. Benefits to other

stakeholders should also be considered in order to make a bigger difference and get the most from the projects of Erasmus+ EU Programme.

In our case, the first lines of beneficiaries are the young people who participate to Erasmus+ EU Programme (youth exchanges, training courses etc). They have gained knowledge to become successful youth workers, to be able to effectively coordinate and develop volunteer resources within projects and activities of their organizations related to build, inter-cultural and inter-religious dialog, to promote democracy, active citizenship and solidarity.

They have also gained knowledge and were introduced with new social intervention methods and ways to be used in building activities. Since the participants of the Erasmus+ EU Programme work with volunteers engaged in building activities, we should add to the list of beneficiaries all those volunteers who had direct contact with volunteer managers, but also local communities where volunteers will implement projects in order to improve their community status.

Training courses (TC)

Training courses of Erasmus+ EU Programme have impact on local community and significant improvement of building processes. Organizations promoters of the training courses also have benefit from projects because they now have trained youth workers, volunteer managers who are able to work with their volunteers and prepare them for building activities on the field. Benefit of training courses is also seen in the established contacts between young people and youth workers from participating countries which strengthens the cooperation among them and by sharing good practices contributes to increased quality of implemented projects.

At the same time, capacities of the organizations were strengthened for implementation of different projects, mostly in the framework of the ERASMUS+ programme, which had result in increased number of project ideas and by that more young people had the opportunity to be actively involved.

Each partnership and project idea encourage the follow up of a future event. Participants show great interest about funded possibilities and have decided to continue developing their project ideas and apply to ERASMUS+ programme and other local funds.

Youth exchange

It might be even more important today than before to create an awareness of different cultures. Growing up today is not always so easy, especially if a youngster lives on margins as not being part of the “norm” and the dominant class. There is a kind of invisible traditional perception on how society shall be and how you as a person shall be or behave. There are a lot of norms in EU countries that differs completely from others. Therefore, the purpose through Erasmus+ EU Programme is not only to create awareness about different cultures and traditions but also to increase the knowledge about nationalism, migration, culture and EU-identity in youth.

The added value given to young people, who participate on Erasmus+ exchange programs, is in great percentage of level and importance. Youngsters are getting insight of other cultures and traditions, new ways of thinking and exchanging thoughts, crushing of stereotypes and share of good practices. Also, participants of youth exchange programs develop their language and communication skills, show their will in voluntarism and get a significant push-back for applying for job opportunities in the future.

Youth work in Greece

Youth work is a polyvalent and multifaceted practice which takes place in a wide range of settings, varies from unstructured activities to fairly structured programs and reaches a large diversity of young people. It touches a lot of different themes and is on the interface with many other disciplines and practices (Coussée, 2009). It is happening across countries and communities, in all its forms, in different settings and contexts and there is no doubt that any attempt to study the history of youth work always presents a vexing challenge that cannot be accurately described.

As Dora Giannaki (2014) says despite the existence of legal provisions regarding youth issues, there is no special official definition or legal framework for youth work in Greece. However, youth work does exist as a social practice constituting an integral part of educational and welfare work and plays a significant role in supporting young people’s safe and healthy transition to adult life. Youth work in Greece involves a complex network of providers, community groups, nongovernmental

organizations and local authorities supported by a large number of adults working as full-time or part-time paid staff or as unpaid volunteers.

All these different organizations share a more or less common set of youth work values such as: working with young people because they are young people, and not because they have been labeled or are considered deviant; helping young people develop stronger relationships and collective identities while respecting and valuing difference and promoting the voice of young people.

Youth work connects with young people's leisure and recreational interests, complements formal educational processes, addresses contemporary social issues such as unemployment, and reflects the particular needs and tasks of young people as they move through the transitions of adolescence and young adulthood (The Socio-economic Scope of Youth Work in Europe, 2007).

In Greece, due to ongoing economic crisis in the country with obvious consequences in all social aspects, the role of youth work sector might be called on to undertake functions substituting the welfare state, which is currently being downsized and marginalized. According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority the basic salary for newcomers in the labor market has been set by law at much lower than the existing basic salary and moreover the extremely high youth unemployment has set Greece in the position of the countries with the highest rates in the world (48% in March 2012, 62.9% in May 2013, 51,30% in November 2014, 50.10% in December 2015 and 45,70% in November 2016). Moreover, the 49.67% of 925 young people participating in a national research say that they are very stressed over their economic future and the 32.7% of them say that they are very stressed over their finance which impacts their personal and social life (Stergiou & Tsakiridou, 2012), (World Health Organization, 2011), (Mathers & Schofield, 1998).

Most of the students believe that the economic crisis has influenced their ambitions and has created stress on their vocational settlement in a country that lacks in strategic plan to support vulnerable youth (Stergiou & Tsakiridou, 2012).

As Emslie (2013) says, funders, employers, and practitioners in youth work typically share a dedication to quality service delivery and good outcomes for young people. Such moral commitments emphasize the value in articulating shared interests in professionalization within framework deriving the need for promoting the formulation of a comprehensive institutional framework for youth work and youth workers. Another initiative is to set up quality standards for youth work and the

development of a professionally accredited youth worker training scheme. Also, the need for drawing up a national action plan for youth work and effective cross-sectoral cooperation between public authorities and other relevant agents in the field is widely recognized.

Essential promotion of research on youth work issues through a closer dialogue and contact between policy makers and Greek academia/youth researchers (Giannaki, 2014). According to Finn Yrjar Denstad (2009) a youth policy must be based not on the perceived needs of young people, but on real-life needs that can be documented through research. There are two dimensions of knowledge that a knowledge-based policy comprises. One is the research/scientific knowledge and the other the practical/experiential knowledge and both are equally important to the development of policy.

In order to develop a national strategy for youth, a government needs to collect relevant updated research focusing on young people, or initiate such research when the existing material is insufficient. An evidence-based approach is crucial for the implementation of the strategy and therefore, basing a youth policy on relevant evidence is essential for the monitoring and evaluation process. Without accurate baseline data, which only comprehensive field research can provide, it will not be possible to measure the real impact of the policy (Finn, 2009).

As Davies (2010: 1) states '*Youth work is a way of working with young people that has been thought up and practiced by human beings in all their diversity*', opens the doors for a strong debate about the definition of the term. There is a danger of youth work to become a «craft», following many versions of the same set of instructions that can somehow be identified in published bibliography relating to the profession (Belton, 2009:7). On the other hand, Coussée (2014: 7) explains analytically: '*Youth work is a polyvalent and multifaceted practice. It takes place in a wide range of settings, it varies from unstructured activities to fairly structured programmes, it reaches a large diversity of young people, touches a lot of different themes and is on the interface with many other disciplines and practices*'.

When the conversation about youth work comes up to the state level legislation and regulations by law or specific acts, we notice that in Austria, Estonia, Germany, Ireland, Norway and Romania there are specific frameworks for the provision of the term and its implementation. At European level, in general, youth policy documents do

not address youth work as a profession and less movements are done to improve the target groups' [youth workers] policy development (Mairesse, 2014).

For the case in Greece, along with other southern European countries like Spain and Italy which are also in the context of financial crisis nowadays, youth work is endorsed in various laws –mainly in legislation regarding youth employment and education without specifications and acts like in Ireland (Institut fur Sozialarbeit und Socialpadagogik, 2005).

As Dora Giannaki states (2014:92-98) youth work in Greece can be divided into three big chronological and historical phases. The first phase is where we notice the birth and development of the notion 'youth work' –near to the newly constituted Greek state after the liberation of the Ottoman Empire up to 1974 – the fall of the Junta and political changeover to democracy. At this period, no organized state service for youth existed, but some steps were made in terms of state funding for civil society and social welfare for orphans and needy youth (Giannaki, 2014: 92).

At the second phase, after the restoration of democracy in Greece, youth work started to take flesh and bones by the foundation of the General Secretariat of Youth (1983) and the newly imposed laws who referenced that is the state's duty to respect and protect youth (Articles 16 and 21 of the Greek Constitution). After these structures being made and started working properly, we can note a series of important provisions for young people, such as tourism programmes, discount youth cards and free theatre tickets. In other words, an effort of reinforcing greek youths' leisure time and recreation. To give them the opportunity to explore and invest on their free time with activities of mental and physical development. During this period, many youth clubs were set up all over Greece in parallel with the establishment of a network of cultural youth associations (Giannaki, 2010:78).

At the third phase, where we firstly note the Presidential Decree N. 274/1989 and its revisions which indicate all the legal conditions of youth work in Greece and deals and develops the following issues:

- i. youth employment
- ii. sports
- iii. education
- iv. family
- v. military service
- vi. deviant behaviour

- vii. media
- viii. participation

Although that the above legal provisions exist and try to solve youth issues, there isn't any official definition or legal framework about youth work. There are many activities and practices that are described in general as "youth work" like health and social support, counselling, education and training and personal development, career services, etc. (Giannaki, 2014:100). As we clearly understand, youth work is sorted and related between leisure time and recreation mostly by giving a space for youthful experimentation and cultural development.

Exploring furthermore the involvement of youth workers in Greece and the target group of the profession, we notice that they usually work with young people between 15 and 25 with extensions in each case. As Bohn and Stallman states (2007:24) most youth services provide a mixture of "open" youth work and they are targeting particular groups of young people, usually those with less advantages or with lack of inclusion. Their education and training isn't specific without any recognized qualifications but, people who work with youth or want to become youth workers usually get university degrees in the fields of education/ humanities and/or social studies or by vocational training institutes and centres of adult education (Bohn & Stallman, 2007:31).

After the great boost which has been offered as an outcome after the country's involvement into the EU matters and institutions, especially after the Erasmus+ agreements and applications, the need for more training opportunities and facilities is urgent. As Bohn and Stallman (2007:24) notice the structures and institutions that provide and promote youth work has a variety of providers. That includes –except public authorities and social care institutions- a network of community groups and NGOs who are keen to participate in international projects, exchanges, training seminars and strategic partnerships. The entities and main subjects of youth work provision are (Giannaki, 2014:101):

- a. The General Secretariat for Youth and Life-Long Learning which is a part of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs being responsible for implementing the government's youth policy.
- b. The Institute of Youth and Life-Learning (INEDIVIM) which is a legal entity of public interest being responsible for non-formal learning education structures

and for the technical/scientific support for the implementation of European youth projects.

- c. The National Youth Foundation, a private law legal body that functions under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs – offering mainly housing services and cultural/educational activities to a large amount of young students in secondary education or higher.
- d. Second Level of Local Government bodies (regions or peripheries).
- e. First Level of Local Government bodies (municipalities).
- f. Non-Governmental Organizations

All these entities need to be reinforced during the context of the financial struggle and economic crisis. It is a period, which is marked by a dramatic increase of youth unemployment, social marginalization, expressions of racism and rise of ultra-nationalism and fascist movements. There is no doubt that "serious transformations in economy, production and the labor market of the last decades, especially the exponential global economic crisis have diversified and accurate difficult conditions integrating young people into society and the labor market" (Papadakis, 2013:15). Absolutely indicative is the finding of Eurostat on the dramatic 24,9% of the youth unemployment rate for Greece in 2015, which has the highest rate in EU-28 and Euro area since 2004 (note that higher rates were recorded during 2013 and 2014)². Table 1 below, shows clearly the evolution of youth unemployment as one of the most important and critical problems of the European Union, with dire consequences to the new workforce.

² See the statistics at [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Unemployment_rate_2004-2015_\(%25\)_new.png](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Unemployment_rate_2004-2015_(%25)_new.png)

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
EU-28	9.3	9.0	8.2	7.2	7.0	9.0	9.6	9.7	10.5	10.9	10.2	9.4
Euro area	9.3	9.1	8.4	7.5	7.6	9.6	10.2	10.2	11.4	12.0	11.6	10.9
Belgium	8.4	8.5	8.3	7.5	7.0	7.9	8.3	7.2	7.6	8.4	8.5	8.5
Bulgaria	12.1	10.1	9.0	6.9	5.6	6.8	10.3	11.3	12.3	13.0	11.4	9.2
Czech Republic	8.3	7.9	7.1	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.3	6.7	7.0	7.0	6.1	5.1
Denmark	5.5	4.8	3.9	3.8	3.4	6.0	7.5	7.6	7.5	7.0	6.6	6.2
Germany	10.4	11.2	10.1	8.5	7.4	7.6	7.0	5.8	5.4	5.2	5.0	4.6
Estonia	10.1	8.0	5.9	4.6	5.5	13.5	16.7	12.3	10.0	8.6	7.4	6.2
Ireland	4.5	4.4	4.5	4.7	6.4	12.0	13.9	14.7	14.7	13.1	11.3	9.4
Greece	10.6	10.0	9.0	8.4	7.8	9.6	12.7	17.9	24.5	27.5	26.5	24.9
Spain	11.0	9.2	8.5	8.2	11.3	17.9	19.9	21.4	24.8	26.1	24.5	22.1
France	8.9	8.9	8.8	8.0	7.4	9.1	9.3	9.2	9.8	10.3	10.3	10.4
Croatia	13.9	13.0	11.6	9.9	8.6	9.2	11.7	13.7	16.0	17.3	17.3	16.3
Italy	8.0	7.7	6.8	6.1	6.7	7.7	8.4	8.4	10.7	12.1	12.7	11.9
Cyprus	4.6	5.3	4.6	3.9	3.7	5.4	6.3	7.9	11.9	15.9	16.1	15.0
Latvia	11.7	10.0	7.0	6.1	7.7	17.5	19.5	16.2	15.0	11.9	10.8	9.9
Lithuania	10.9	8.3	5.8	4.3	5.8	13.8	17.8	15.4	13.4	11.8	10.7	9.1
Luxembourg	5.0	4.6	4.6	4.2	4.9	5.1	4.6	4.8	5.1	5.9	6.0	6.4
Hungary	6.1	7.2	7.5	7.4	7.8	10.0	11.2	11.0	11.0	10.2	7.7	6.8
Malta	7.2	6.9	6.8	6.5	6.0	6.9	6.9	6.4	6.3	6.4	5.8	5.4
Netherlands	5.7	5.9	5.0	4.2	3.7	4.4	5.0	5.0	5.8	7.3	7.4	6.9
Austria	5.5	5.6	5.3	4.9	4.1	5.3	4.8	4.6	4.9	5.4	5.6	5.7
Poland	19.1	17.9	13.9	9.6	7.1	8.1	9.7	9.7	10.1	10.3	9.0	7.5
Portugal	7.8	8.8	8.9	9.1	8.8	10.7	12.0	12.9	15.8	16.4	14.1	12.6
Romania	8.0	7.1	7.2	6.4	5.6	6.5	7.0	7.2	6.8	7.1	6.8	6.8
Slovenia	6.3	6.5	6.0	4.9	4.4	5.9	7.3	8.2	8.9	10.1	9.7	9.0
Slovakia	18.4	16.4	13.5	11.2	9.6	12.1	14.5	13.7	14.0	14.2	13.2	11.5
Finland	8.8	8.4	7.7	6.9	6.4	8.2	8.4	7.8	7.7	8.2	8.7	9.4
Sweden	7.4	7.7	7.1	6.1	6.2	8.3	8.6	7.8	8.0	8.0	7.9	7.4
United Kingdom	4.7	4.8	5.4	5.3	5.6	7.6	7.8	8.1	7.9	7.6	6.1	5.3
Iceland	3.1	2.6	2.9	2.3	3.0	7.2	7.6	7.1	6.0	5.4	5.0	4.0
Norway	4.3	4.5	3.4	2.5	2.5	3.2	3.6	3.3	3.2	3.5	3.5	4.4
Turkey	.	9.5	9.0	9.1	10.0	13.0	11.1	9.1	8.4	9.0	9.9	10.3
United States	5.5	5.1	4.6	4.6	5.8	9.3	9.6	8.9	8.1	7.4	6.2	5.3
Japan	4.7	4.4	4.1	3.8	4.0	5.1	5.0	4.6	4.3	4.0	3.6	3.4

: Data not available

Source: Eurostat (online data code: une_rt_a)

Table 1 - Unemployment rate 2004-2015

In Greece the percentage of young people (15-24) who have become unemployed, was in July 2014, 50.7%, while recording a drop-in comparison with September 2013 (57.2%), remaining however at a very high level. Suffice it to note that in July 2014, 160,000 young people were unemployed in Greece³. It is also evident the gender gap in youth unemployment: with regard to youth unemployment by gender in Greece, as for November 2016, women occupied the first place with a share of 48.8%, followed by men with 43%⁴.

Thus, a series of initiatives has to be set –along with a renewed strategy for youth policy in Greece. The proposals that Dora Giannaki (2014:103) gives and surely we –as youth workers agree- include:

- a. Formulation of a comprehensive institutional framework for youth work and youth workers;

³ Eurostat, 2014b: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/5176670/3-30092014-BP-EN.PDF/7e9d2b65-dc8b-4a27-a08c-8cd4702d3da8?version=1.0>

⁴ Eurostat, 2016b: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/refreshTableAction.do?tab=table&plugin=1&pcode=teilm021&language=en>

- b. A set of national standards for youth work and further development of a professionally accredited youth worker training scheme;
- c. A draw of a national action plan for youth work and effective collaboration between public authorities and relevant associations;
- d. An essential promotion of research on youth work issues through a closer dialogue and contact between policy makers and the Greek academia/research in youth.

All these, hopefully have to be implemented in an environment of social cohesion and political normality. We have to raise our heads to look into the future of the Greek youth and demand their rights. Youth policy has to be set and revised in order to avoid a setback to philanthropy.

Youth Work and Digital Media

In recent years, electronic games, home computers, and the Internet have assumed an important place in the lives of children and adolescents (Gros, 2003). This Information Communication Technology (ICT) environment has a great influence on the people who use it and on the social context in general, with several effects already visible in the society at large. For example, the digital generation has far more experience in processing information rapidly than its predecessors, has an ever increasing capacity for parallel processing which involves a more diversified form of concentration, has a problem solving approach to things that is similar in many ways to a computer game: performance and constant revision of the action, without any planning of the processes (Prensky, 2001). Also, this digital generation, through ICT and digital games has the potential to improve social skills and foster communities of practice in which knowledge is shared informally and members feel accepted and respected (Stewart, et al., 2013). Especially, for young people who are facing the risk of social exclusion, this is highly relevant. Being able to interact meaningfully with family or friends and to identify with a cultural group or community and to feel recognized by others is a key part of societal participation. Those who can fall back on a strong social network will also feel supported in engaging in activities they might not feel confident to undertake

alone. As Lenhart et al (2008) state that contrary to stereotypes, gamers are not socially isolated as inept nerds who spent most of their time alone. Over 70% of gamers play along with a friend –either cooperatively or competitively (Entertainment Software Association, 2012). Examples are many for virtual social communities with fast decisions need to be made about who to trust, who to support, whom to reject or how to lead a group (Granic et al., 2014). These immersive social contexts lead researchers to propose that gamers are rapidly learning social skills and acquire prosocial skills and behavior that might generalize to their peer and family relations outside gaming environments (Gentile & Gentile, 2008; Gentile et al., 2009). Games that are specifically designed to reward effective cooperation, support and helping behaviors are keener to give important prosocial skills to young players (Ewoldsen et al., 2012). According to Ackermann (2001), digital games can also be a site for creative learning and participation. Digital games can provide a safe environment, in which people can experiment without suffering the consequences and where they can discuss topics that may be difficult to bring up in everyday life. Many digital games enable perspective - taking through role-play and a range of digital games allow their players to act and communicate anonymously. The ability to approach an issue from different viewpoints has been put forward as an important learning principle (Moore & Anderson, 1996). According to (Stewart, et al., 2013), ensuring equal employment opportunities for all in society, especially for vulnerable social groups, such as people with low literacy, migrants, and young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs), has become a fundamental moral imperative, as it increases the chances for these people to enjoy active and productive participation in society. In the case of adults, social inclusion not only involves successful labour-market participation but also the maintenance of wellness throughout life. Demographic aging calls for new ways of coping with aging, empowering individuals to stay active in work, family and the community. ICT-based empowerment strategies encouraged by the Digital Agenda of the European Union offer promising new opportunities in this regard.

When young people develop their own youth culture with their own youth language we should be capable to understand that they are truly a digital generation growing up in cyber environments, they have mediums of social networking and maybe second life fantasies. If we are to communicate effectively with them, to provide them guidance and support, then we have to be well prepared to do this on their terms (Badham &

Wade, 2005). Thus, we as youth workers and/or educators need to be involved with new media, the internet and various gaming platforms and features. This means that we have to be informed how by “playing games” and by which tools we can assist on youth engagement towards understanding and addressing social issues. Play-based approaches work well (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2007). If you want to find out how young people feel about something you can elicit their views through pretend play and role play.

A way of bringing forward quality tools and methods into *play* could be through greater use of ‘serious games,’ also known as immersive learning simulations, game-based learning, or gaming simulations. According to the McKinsey Centre for Government report (Mourshed et al, 2013): ‘Serious games enable users to apply their knowledge and skills in complex, real-world scenarios. The serious-games industry is still nascent, although it has been growing rapidly worldwide; sales reached €1.5 billion in 2010, and are projected to increase by almost seven times by 2015.’ There is great potential for developing tools that help to raise awareness of skills and competences achieved through non-formal and informal learning. These skills and competences could also provide engagement with social issues and problems within society in general.

Nowadays, games have their pervasive social nature. As Lenhart et al (2008) state that contrary to stereotypes, gamers are not socially isolated as inept nerds who spent most of their time alone. Over 70% of gamers play along with a friend –either cooperatively or competitively (Entertainment Software Association, 2012). Examples are many for virtual social communities with fast decisions need to be made about who to trust, who to support, whom to reject or how to lead a group (Granic et al., 2014). These immersive social contexts lead researchers to propose that gamers are rapidly learning social skills and acquire prosocial skills and behavior that might generalize to their peer and family relations outside gaming environments (Gentile & Gentile, 2008; Gentile et al., 2009).

Games that are specifically designed to reward effective cooperation, support and helping behaviors are keener to give important prosocial skills to young players (Ewoldsen et al., 2012). It is tempting to conclude that games with exclusively non-violent, prosocial content leads to prosocial behaviors, but also the on-going research may show that violent games are just as likely to promote prosocial behaviors (Granic et al., 2014:73). Another factor to determine if violent games are associated with

helping, prosocial behavior vs malevolent, antisocial behavior is the extent whether are played cooperatively vs competitively.

As Granic et al. (2014) note, “social skills are also manifested in forms of civic engagement: the ability to organize groups and lead like-minded people in social causes”. Lenhart’s et al. (2008) study showed that by focusing on the link between civic engagement and gaming, we see that adolescents who played games with civic experiences, like massive multiplayer online role-playing games, were more likely to be engaged in social and civic movements in their everyday lives (e.g. charity, volunteering, persuading others to vote).

Despite the fact that most survey studies in the field did not differentiate the causal direction of effects of gaming, it seems that there is a diverse set of potential benefits of gaming relevant to children’s cognitive, motivational, social and emotional development (Granic et al, 2014: 73). For those that hope to leverage the civic potential of games, the strong and consistent relationship between teens’ civic gaming experiences and civic engagement is encouraging. Kahne, Middaugh & Evans (2009) state that “it indicates that the same kinds of experiences that foster civic outcomes in well-controlled classroom studies may achieve similar results in gaming environments”.

Youth Vibes for Europe- case study

Description

The artifact of this study is a video which presents a youth mobility activity, taking part under the Erasmus+ program between 20 and 26 of June 2018, hosted by the Association of Active Youths in Florina, GR. This video depicts all four (4) stages of gaming activities trying to explain and promote how youth activities can be held in a youth work context with games and digital media.

The key aim of the project of the youth mobility was to improve skills and competencies of young people in identifying how well they can use their leisure time in a constructive manner, in terms of their physical and mental health, and also in terms of developing active citizenship as a healthy use of recreational time. It promotes participation of young people in decision-making both in their own lives and also within

the organization particularly in developing leisure-time games that are active, challenging and creative, that can in turn be implemented by other young people.

Our participation to the new Greek National policy framework and the structured dialogue identifies the fundamental elements of this project on physical and mental health of young people as a key policy outcome, as well as the active participation of young people. At a European level, according to the EU Strategy of Youth – investing and empowering, one of the key priorities is “Improving access and full participation of all young people in society” and identifies health and sport and participation supporting our young people to be active citizens as two fields of action. This project fits that priority.

Objective of the Artefact

The young people learned to develop their communication skills, both with young people from another country and also with adult leaders and decision makers within the organization. The project also enhanced our youth participation policy at local level and contributed towards the development of a model of best practices for young people getting involved in the running of their youth organizations. Finally, the project supported the development of our partner organization’s skills in recognizing and promoting youth participation as a key leisure time activity.

Our objectives for this project and artefact were for the young people:

- To have the opportunity to engage with young people from a different culture in a positive way
- To be exposed to new experiences and opportunities
- To develop supportive relationships with a significant adult outside their family environment
- To engage in informal, yet positive and structured activities
- To form positive relationships based on consistency, reliability and trust with both their peers and their leaders
- To develop social, interpersonal and life skills

- To learn to be peer leaders and to develop the quality of their participation in our organizational structures.
- To learn to become positive, contributing members of the European community and recognize the benefits of being active citizens

and finally, *to have a clear outcome on how activities are realized through gaming and digital media.*

Issues and needs

The young people in this project came from a broad range of backgrounds, with a variety of social and economic challenges. Several of the young people are isolated because of personal challenges. The organizations have been working with these young people to support them to recognize that opportunities exist that do not have to be limited because of personal circumstances. Each of the young people in this project have demonstrated skills in leadership and representation of their peer groups. This youth mobility program was a progression in their learning and a chance for them to experience cultures and countries that otherwise may not have been available to them. There is a real need to allow these young people to experience new opportunities. These young people will be role models for other young people participating in the organization, and for their own communities in that they will be a real example of how commitment and application can lead to achievement.

The project will be a real youth participation project, with the young people highly involved in identifying and determining activities and organization of the program through gaming. Taking part in a youth mobility is a great way for young people to learn to become positive, contributing members of the European community, and to recognize the benefits of being active European citizens. Being exposed to a new culture will help the participants to develop a mutual understanding between themselves and the young people from the other country. Some of the young people that are taking part in the exchange are coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. Some have never been outside their country and they will be exposed to new experiences and cultures.

Rationale

It is very important to provide media and a well-organized activity plan to the youth work sector. With this artefact, a youth organization, an informal group of young people, or individuals who work with young people, can understand how the project planning and project implementation of youth mobility activities can be set.

In order to ensure that learning competencies are explicit, we are taking the three key areas identified by youth pass regarding non-formal learning as a basis to identify these competencies. Under each area we identify a number of key competencies that this youth mobility will achieve:

- Personal Development of critical thinking, creativity, initiative taking, decision taking, and managing feelings
 - o Decision making skills
 - o Emotional capabilities including Self-esteem, empathy, confidence and managing feelings
 - o Attitudes including aspirations for education, work and the future Youth Pass
- Active Citizenship
 - Active participation
 - o Committee roles and understanding of collective actions
 - o Knowledge of their own country
 - o Knowledge of Europe
 - o Development of social networks
 - o Community involvement

Context

There are several tools available that provide useful information on developing and implementing youth work activity sessions. However, a lack of a more concrete and complete approach of a whole youth mobility project in a digital way is the uniqueness of this artefact. In this proposal, we digitalize the project planning and implementation of a youth mobility activity in a multicultural youth work setting.

When young people develop their own youth culture with their own youth language we should be capable to understand that they are truly a digital generation growing up in cyber environments, they have mediums of social networking and maybe second life fantasies. If we are to communicate effectively with them, to provide them guidance and support, then we have to be well prepared to do this on their terms (Badham & Wade, 2005). Thus, we as youth workers and/or educators need to be involved with new media, the internet and various gaming platforms and features. This means that we have to be informed how by “playing games” and by which tools we can assist on youth engagement towards understanding and addressing social issues. Play-based approaches work well (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2007). If you want to find out how young people feel about something you can elicit their views through pretend play and role play.

In recent years, electronic games, home computers, and the Internet have assumed an important place in the lives and children and adolescents (Gros, 2003). This Information Communication Technology (ICT) environment has a great influence to the people who use it and to the social context in general, with several effects already visible in the society at large. For example, the digital generation has far more experience in processing information rapidly than its predecessors, has an ever increasing capacity for parallel processing which involves a more diversified form of concentration, has an problem solving approach to things that is similar in many ways to a computer game: performance and constant revision of the action, without any planning of the processes (Prensky, 2001). Also, this digital generation, through ICT and digital games has the potential to improve social skills and foster communities of practice in which knowledge is shared informally and members feel accepted and respected (Stewart, et al., 2013). Especially, for young people who are facing the risk of social exclusion, this is highly relevant. Being able to interact meaningfully with family or friends and to identify with a cultural group or community and to feel recognized by others is a key part of societal participation. Those who can fall back on a strong social network will also feel supported in engaging in activities they might not feel confident to undertake alone.

Construction

How are you proposing to develop this artefact, the timeline, the skills and resources you will need to complete it.

In order for developing our proposed artefact, we follow the timeline described below:

Phase 1: Before the Mobility project

Tasks Division, preparation of materials, Setting the media tools, arranging the youth working group, creation of research and interviews tools

Phase 2: During the Mobility Project

Daily participation and recording all youth work activities.

Phase 3: After the Mobility Project

Editing all digital material gathered during phase 2, editing all research data from interviews and electronic questionnaire, creation of final artefact

The skills that are needed to be described go as follows:

What: Digital competence involves the confident and critical use of Information Society Technology (IST) for work, leisure and communication. It is underpinned by basic skills: the use of computers to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet.

How: Digital competence requires a sound understanding and knowledge of the nature, role and opportunities of IST in everyday personal and social life as well as at work. This includes main computer applications such as word processing, spreadsheets, databases, information storage and management, and an understanding of the opportunities of the Internet and communication via electronic media (e-mail, network tools) for leisure, information-sharing and collaborative networking, learning and research. But the reasonable use of Information Society Technology also requires a critical and reflective attitude towards the information available and responsible use of interactive media.

Resources

The list of resources that are needed for the realization of the youth mobility and after all the proposed artefact are:

1. Digital cameras
2. video editing software,
3. computers,laptops etc.,
4. online research tools,
5. materials and tools for the non-formal education (NFE) activities

Evaluation Methodology

The methodology used for the evaluation of the youth mobility project along with the tools that helped the whole process is as indicated below:

- a) Focus groups. Each group involved different participants representing civil sector, business, local authorities, youth;
- b) 24 questionnaires targeting young people including unemployed youth and young people with fewer opportunities;

We selected to implement and capitalize communication between research-participants by formulating a focus group, consisted both heterogeneously (e.g. gender, age, region, place of living, ethnicity) and homogeneously by taking into consideration the limitations, our organizational capacities. So, the methodological tool of focus group discussions gave us the opportunity to generate and collect data in a more simple and convenient way. This means that instead of asking questions in a style of interview, we selected to encourage the participants to interact with each other by various means, e.g. questions, exchange of ideas, fill-in's, comments, share of experience. This tool is useful for exploring knowledge between groups, examine and understand not only the beliefs but their way of thinking and its cause.

Thus, we selected to use a certain manner of facilitation of a group discussion in order to get the appropriate dynamics that got us useful data for the continuation of our research. Also, group discussion of a focus group formulation gives us the ability to triangulate our results by using multiple methodological tools and cross-referencing our final data.

For the questionnaires, we used the electronic form of Google, in order to gather responses from all participants and to be more effective by using new media and ICT tools to approach respondents. For the needs of the analysis of this survey, we apply

both qualitative and quantitative tools of classical thematic content analysis (De Sola Pool, 1959; Berelson, 1971; Curley, 1990). The analysis is based on a linguistic content analysis in the context of structural semantics to reveal apparent mechanisms of the production of meaning (Barthes 1977; Greimas 2005⁵; Kress et al 1996; Lagopoulos & Boklund-Lagopoulou 1992; Randviir & Cobley 2010). The analysis is not being confined to a formalistic approach of texts, but it scrutinizes them as an integral part of a material, with socioeconomic and political context.

Results

The total number of participants in the evaluation process of the youth mobility project was 24. The 66.7% were males and the 33.3% were females as shown in Chart 1.

Which gender do you most identify with?

24 responses

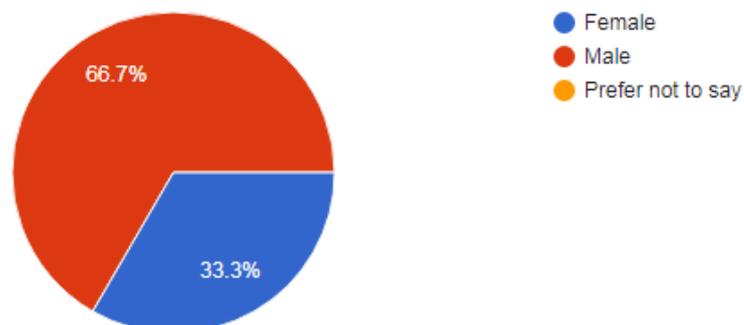


Chart 1 – Participant’s gender

The average age of the group was 24.8 years, the youngest participant was 18 years old and the oldest one was 44 who was the group leader of one of the partner’s organizations of the project (Chart 2).

⁵ As it was used by Lagopoulos and Boklund–Lagopoulou (1992), Boklund-Lagopoulou (1980), Christodoulou (2003, 2007, 2014).

What's your age?

24 responses

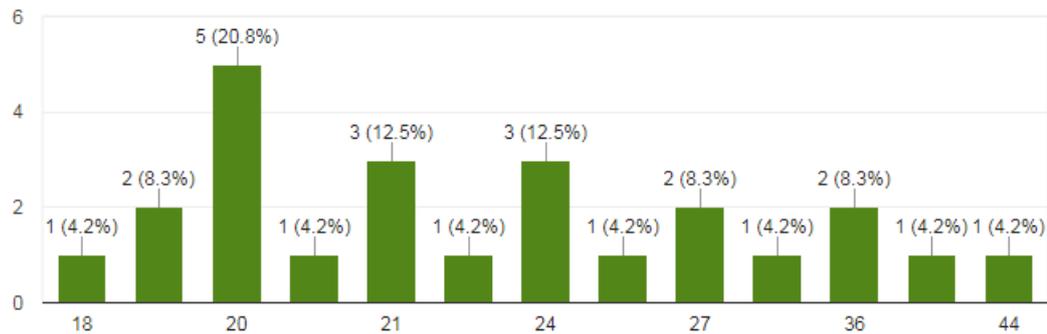


Chart 2 – Participant's age

The majority of the participants (45.8%) holds University/College degree, the 20.8% has a post secondary diploma, while the same percentage (20.8%) holds a Master Degree. The 8.3% of the 24 participants has finished secondary level education, and the 4.2% holds a PhD.

What's your highest education level?

24 responses

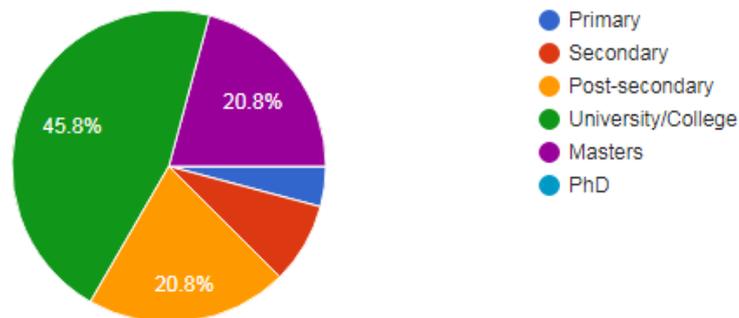


Chart 3 – Participant's educational level

Following, the level of satisfaction for each daily activity is presented using Likert scale from 1 = Didn't like at all to 5 = Liked it very much.

Day 1 - Getting to know each other (Portraits & Envelopes)

24 responses

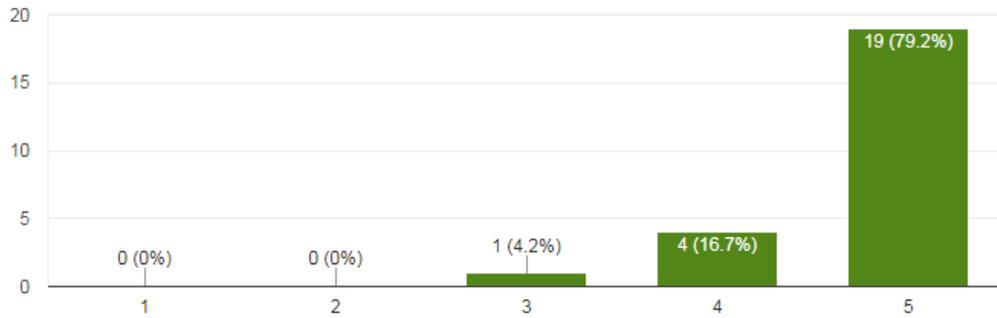


Chart 4: Portraits and Envelopes activity evaluation

Day 1 - NGO Bazaar (Presenting our NGOs)

24 responses

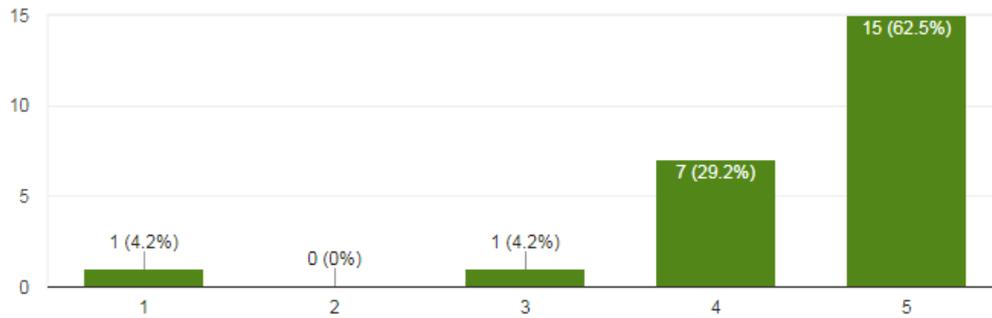


Chart 5: NGO Bazaar activity evaluation

Day 2 - Motion Machine (Creating your own innovative machines)

24 responses

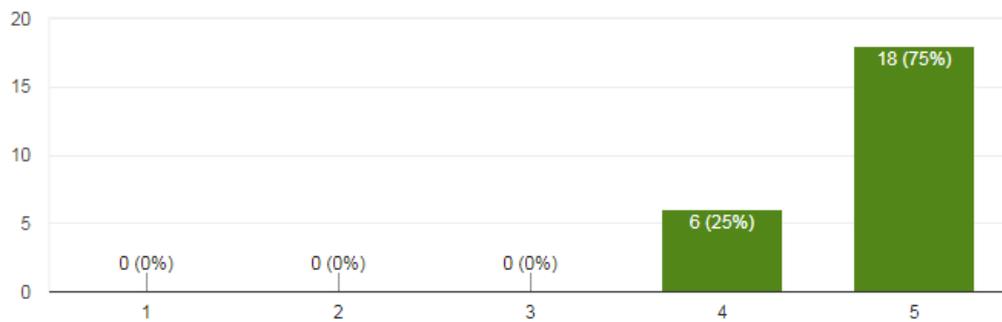


Chart 6: Motion Machine activity evaluation

Day 2 - City Treasure Hunt

24 responses

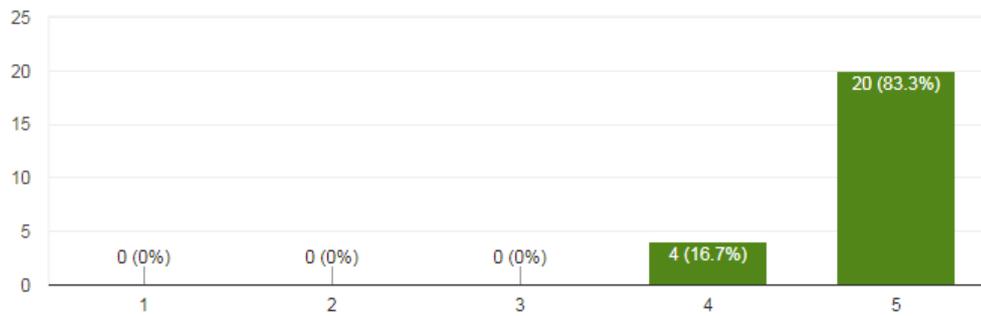


Chart 7: City treasure hunt activity evaluation

Day 3 - Mission Impossible (10 tasks to be accomplished in 90 mins)

24 responses

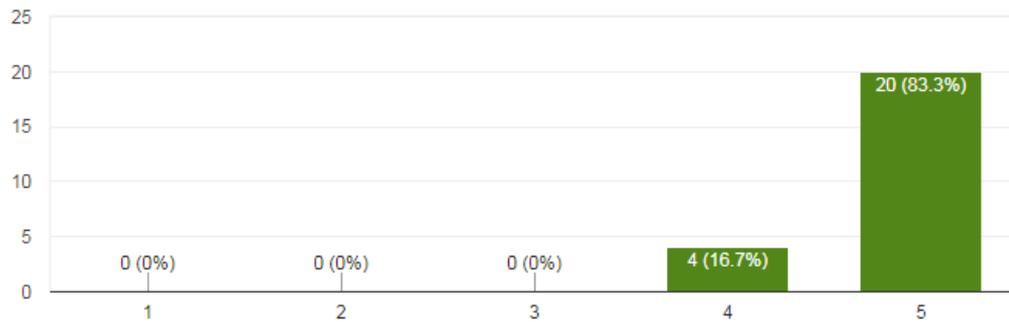


Chart 8: Mission Impossible activity evaluation

Day 3 - World Cafe (Discussion on EU matters at the park)

24 responses

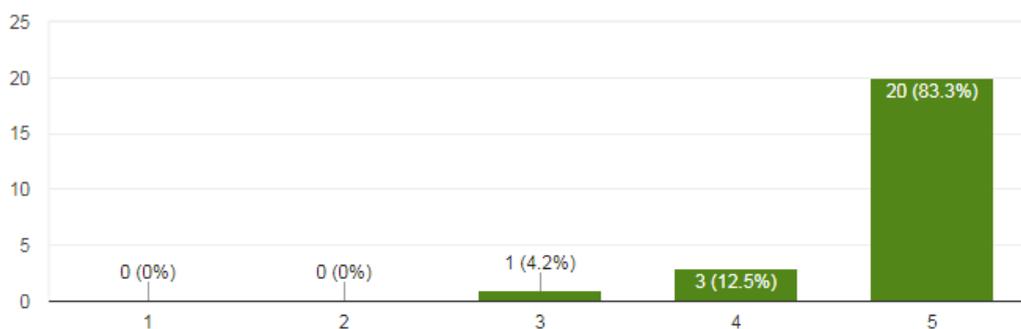


Chart 9: World Café activity evaluation

Day 4 - Prespa Lake trip

24 responses

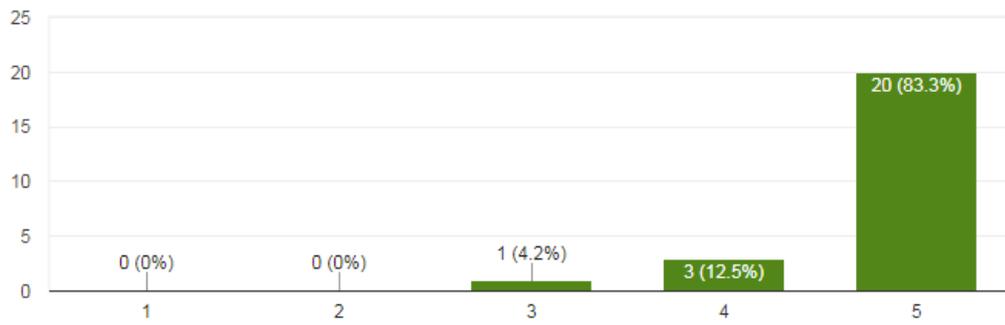


Chart 10: Day trip activity evaluation

Day 5 - Outdoor activities at the ZOO

24 responses

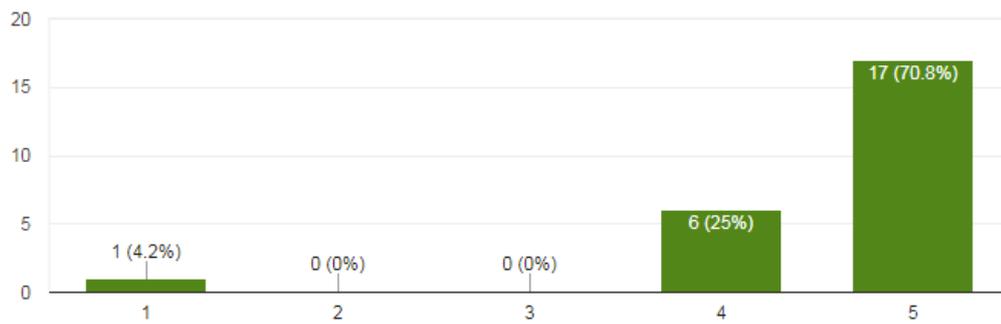


Chart 11: Outdoor activity evaluation

Day 6 - Future project planning

24 responses

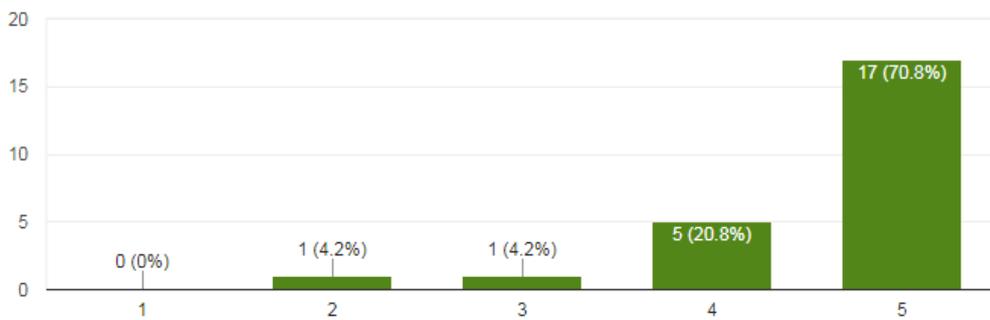


Chart 12: Future planning activity evaluation

Day 7 - Closing Reflection and Evaluation

24 responses

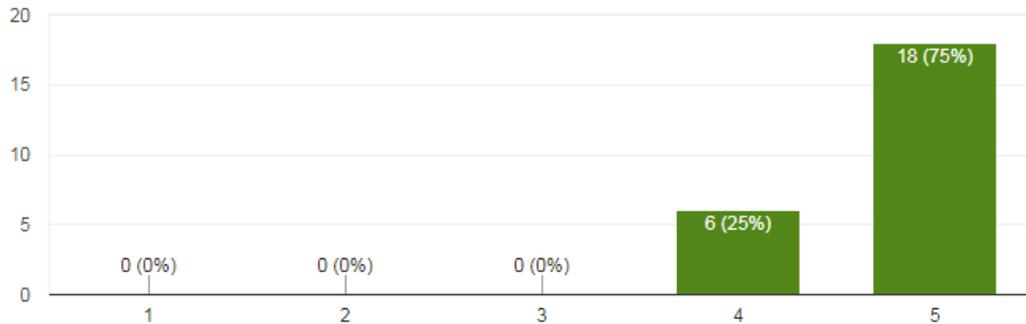


Chart 13: Closing activity evaluation

Every day activities

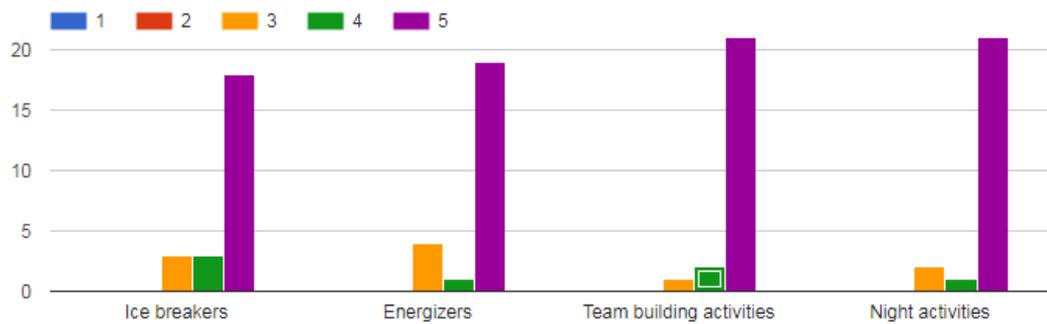


Chart 14: General satisfaction of everyday activities

General feedback

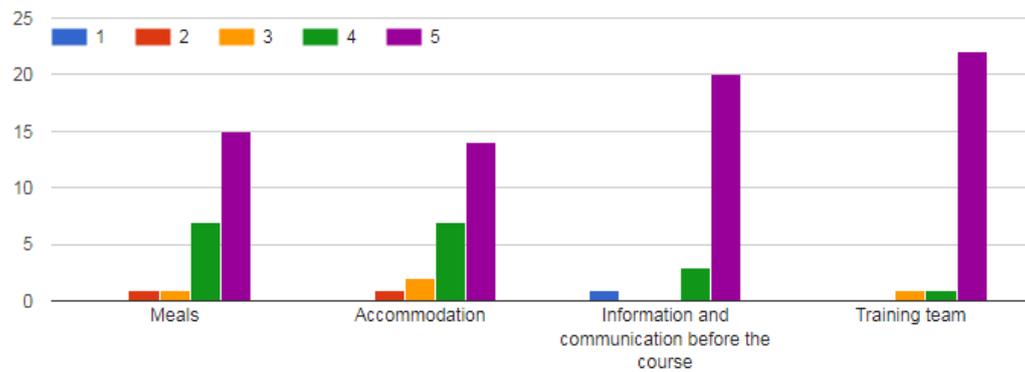


Chart 15: General satisfaction of the youth mobility project's logistics and training services

How confident you feel about attending future projects?

24 responses

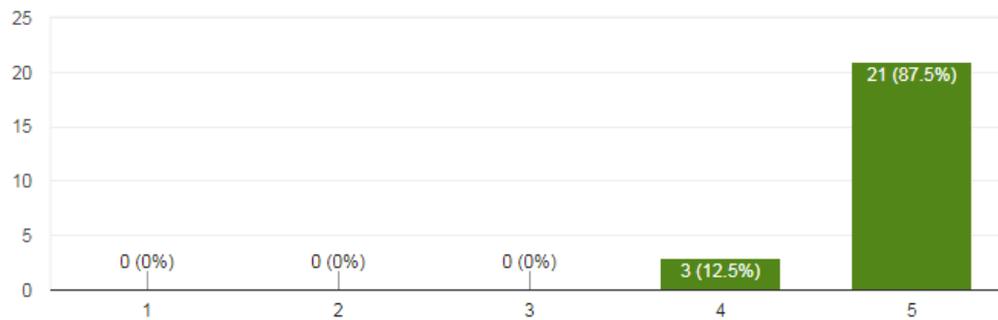


Chart 16: Participant's level of confidence for future project attendance

Please rank your overall satisfaction of the "Youth Vibes for Europe" Youth Exchange

24 responses

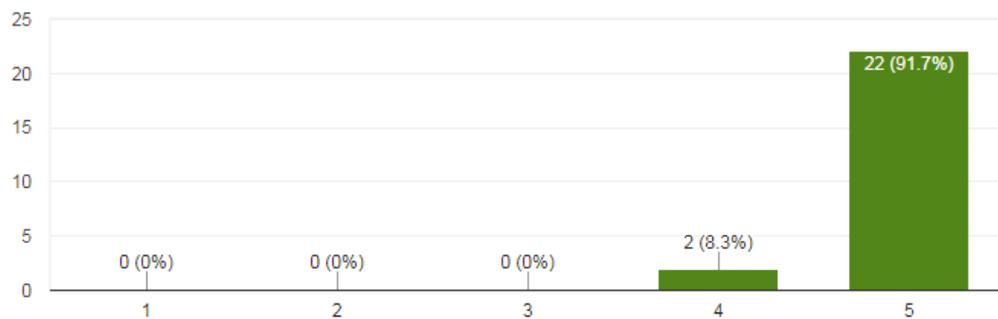


Chart 17: Overall youth mobility project satisfaction

Discussion

At the European level, young people have long been a priority on the EU policy agenda. As one of the directors of the European Commission Directorate General of Education and Culture⁶ points out, initially mobility was the driving force behind youth

⁶ Mairesse, P. (2009) Youth work and policy at European level, in Verschelden, G, Coussée, F, Van de Walle, T & Williamson, H. The history of youthwork in Europe and its relevance for youth policy today: Vol. I.

policies in Europe. With the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, exchanges were not only to be between those in educational institutions, but the development of youth exchanges and youth workers was to be encouraged. Therefore, the introduction of the then EU Youth for Europe programme which facilitated cross-border youth exchanges between young people in youth clubs and youth organisations was a natural extension of the Erasmus programme.

Comparing the political landscape across EU countries there is evidence that young work is a policy priority, and youth work is growing in importance as it gains more prominence on the political agenda. Countries are at different stages in terms of how developed their youth work; however, in the vast majority of countries in Europe there are notable critical policy developments that affect youth work. In some countries the critical developments in youth work policy are at the stage of being developed for the first time, whereas in others they are replacing strategies and political commitment to youth that has a longer tradition. It could be viewed that the renewal of a youth work strategy or plan is not as significant as putting a new strategy or plan in place for youth for the first time, however, the renewal and replacement of older strategies and programmes indicates the renewed importance of youth policies at national and regional level.

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