# The importance of international youth work

A participatory youth research that shows how non-formal education supports the learning and development of young people, youth workers and their organisations.

# The importance of international youth work

*A participatory youth research that shows how non-formal education supports the learning and development of young people, youth workers and their organisations.*

This research could not have been possible without the motivation, inspiration, ideas, critical questions and dedication of all youth researchers and senior researchers involved.

The researchers are (in alphabetical order): Razvan Mihai Bacanu (Romania), Francisco Barros (Portugal), Gabrielė Bartkutė (Lithuania), Celine Brinkman (The Netherlands), Lindi ter Brugge (The Netherlands), Nina Buckley (Ireland), André Costa (Portugal), Hélder Costa (Portugal), Eric Cunningham (Ireland), Rita Delgado (Spain), Jonay García Rodríguez (Spain), Ana Maria Gongadze Gongvadze (Spain), Andra Iulia Grigore (Romania), Esther Haro (Spain), Sanne van den Heuvel (The Netherlands), Ran Hogeweg (The Netherlands), Svajonė Leleikaitė (Lithuania), Mark McMahon (Ireland), Vika Matuzaite (Lithuania), Veerle Meijer (The Netherlands), Lucas Pérez Soto (Spain), Beatrice Poti (The Netherlands), Enrique Sánchez Ochoa (Spain), Elena Selaru (Romania), Anita Silva (Portugal), Manon Vaanholt (The Netherlands), Giedrė Valčiukaitė (Lithuania), Carly Weafer (Ireland).

Authors of the report: Sanne van den Heuvel, Margriet Braun, Maartje Bulthuis, Boglarka Szalma, Nicole Ketelaar.

March, 2019

# Contents

# INTRODUCTION

Does international youth work offer a valuable contribution to the development and education of young people? The six youth work organisations from Romania, Spain, Portugal, The Netherlands, Lithuania and Ireland involved in this research programme believe it does. The organisations collaborate since 2015 in providing an alternative form of education for young people all over Europe. This form of education is better known as 'non-formal education' and is enacted in an international youth work setting. It allows young people to have agency in their learning process, to find their intrinsic motivation for learning, to formulate their issues of concern and to have an impact in their communities. Contrary to formal education, learning outcomes within non-formal education, are not measured by standardised testing but are based on self- and peer assessment. The organisations involved were eager to explore ways how the impact of their international non-formal educational programmes could be measured. In line with their way of working, this should start with the inclusion of young people.

It resulted in ImpACT+, a research programme in which young people have been supported to perform qualitative research. An international team of youth researchers looked into the question whether international youth work has an impact on the personal and professional development of young people, youth workers, youth work organisations and their local communities. In this report, the results of this innovative participatory youth research are proudly presented. The report starts with a short explanation of the ImpACT+ project, a contextualisation of international youth work and followed by a detailed discussion of the ImpACT+ research.

The main focus of this report is on the participatory youth research, its methodology and conclusions. As a result of this report, the conclusions of the participatory youth research have been used for two sets of recommendations. One set of recommendations focusses on other youth work organisations and aims at increasing the outreach and quality of their international youth work. These recommendations are presented as a collection of best practices. The second set of recommendations is made available in an exhibition and corresponding booklet and aims at local, national and European stakeholders, gaining more support, knowledge and recognition of international youth work.

In order to reach the results of this project two fields of expertise have been collaborating; non-formal education and formal education & research. Joining forces resulted in the development and experience working with innovative non-traditional research methods that are coherent with the work of the youth work organisations and the research group Social Work of Saxion University of Applied Sciences.

# INCREASING IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL YOUTH WORK

## An alternative way in learning

The ImpACT+ project is rooted in the European youth policy framework. Within the European Union Lifelong Learning Programme, the Council of the European Union advocates an increased recognition of the 'crucial role of youth work as a provider of non-formal learning opportunities for all young people' (EU-CoE Youth Partnership, 2011, p.4). It is exactly within this youth policy framework, where the programmes of the ImpACT+ partnership are originating. The EU Strategy for Youth (European Commission, 2008) has two main objectives: providing more and equal opportunities for young people in education and the job market and encouraging young people's participation in society. These objectives are reached via strategies promoting non-formal learning.

## Non-formal education and learning

Non-formal learning and education (NFEL) – this report uses both the term of non-formal learning and non-formal education in connection – can be defined as 'any organised educational activity that takes place outside the formal educational system. Usually, it is flexible, learner-centred, contextualised and uses participatory approaches. It is always clearly communicated that learning takes place. In practice, this means that learning is creative, interactive and based on the needs and learning goals of the participants. Attention is paid to all three aspects of competence development; knowledge, skills & attitudes. Essential in this learning process is the constant reflection of the participants in order to understand their own learning experience and to find ways how they can continue to build further on it. The educational methods and techniques used are interactive, creative and invite the learner to take the lead' (The Youth Company, 2019).

The development and discovery of talents, skills and competences of the young people is a central point in international youth work (Brunner, 2016; Souto-Otero, Ulicna, Schaepkens & Bognar, 2012). Within this, the non-formal learning process of the participating young people plays a strong role. Characteristic for a non-formal learning process is that young people are guided and stimulated to take the lead in their own development (The Youth Company, 2019). By offering freedom and support, the young people can decide for themselves how and what they want to learn. This challenges them to take the initiative and to contribute to the design of learning activities.

## The outlines of the ImpACT+ research

With the above-mentioned educational strategy of non-formal learning in mind, the ImpACT+ partnership implemented between 2015-2017 six international multi-activity youth programmes, financed by the Erasmus+ Youth Programme. A total of 450 youngsters, 110 youth workers and an estimated amount of at least 60 staff members were part of these programmes. Although each of the organisations received a significant amount of positive feedback from the (young) people involved, the organisations wanted to get a better understanding of how these programmes contributed to the;

- personal and professional development of young people;
- personal and professional development of youth workers;
- quality development within the participating youth organisations;
- local communities the youth organisations work in.

In coherence with the identity of the youth work organisations involved, it was evident that young people and youth workers should have an essential role in the project. In collaboration with senior researchers of the research group Social Work of Saxion University of Applied Sciences, an approach was developed where young people are not solely the topic of research, but instead they are researchers themselves. It was evident that participatory youth research would allow both goals to be reached. This provided the outlines of ImpACT+; a research that aims to gather data on the impact of the non-formal educational programmes, but also teaches young people doing research.

In order to effectively use the outcomes of the research, it was decided that the ImpACT+ research will bring two sets of recommendations. These are developed as separate products for youth work organisations and policymakers. The recommendations have as aim to:

1. increase the quality and outreach of international youth work activities[1], consequently contributing to the development of young people, youth workers, youth work organisations and their local communities;
2. reach out for more stakeholders gaining more support, knowledge and recognition of international youth work among stakeholders and policymakers.

---

[1] Financed within the Erasmus+ Youth framework, focusing specifically on KA1 mobility for youth and youth workers.

## Multi-activity youth programmes

The ImpACT+ research is looking into the six non-formal learning programmes that the partnership has implemented between 2015-2017. These Erasmus+ youth programmes are best explained using LEGO as metaphor where Erasmus+ Youth mobilities can be considered to be the building blocks. The Erasmus+ youth programme supports young people and youth organisations with funding in order to learn during international activities (European Commission, 2019). The ImpACT+ partners experienced that a single international youth work activity sometimes limits the learning of young people and youth workers, and that dissemination of the learning in the local communities could be increased. Together, the partners aimed for long(er) term engagement of young people and youth workers that could potentially have more impact and go beyond a relatively short term exchange or training experience. Another goal was to strategically build on the participation and involvement of young people and youth workers. With the aim to reach programmes that were developed based on shared decision making and ownership of young people and adults.

Matching the envisioned long(er) term engagement and more impact with the possibilities which Erasmus+ is offering, six Erasmus+ multi-activity youth programmes have been developed [2] [3] : Big Questions of Life 1 & 2; Lead the Change 1 & 2 and Stay Human! 1 & 2.

> Big Questions of Life is a programme in which young people from socially and economically disadvantaged situations and more privileged young people are empowered to increase their self-esteem so that they dare to take a stance to pursue those things important to them in life. Young people are motivated and challenged to develop strong personal, interpersonal and intercultural competences. Attention is given to self-reflection, the ability to make choices, self-confidence, dealing with change and uncertainty, establishing meaningful connections and defining their role in the world.

---

[2] Not all Erasmus+ National Agencies can support the multi-activity structure in Erasmus+ youth projects.

[3] We believe that the findings of the ImpACT+ research will for a large extent be found also during single Erasmus+ youth activities.

Lead the Change is a programme dedicated to training young people to develop their leadership skills and create change in society. It is aimed to improve the capability of young people to enhance their potential and make a difference within themselves and in the society surrounding them. This programme is a hands-on programme in which young people are put at the forefront of change making, using a combination of training, exchanges, local activities and evaluation.

Stay Human! is a human rights education programme that connects both theory and real-life practice in a non-formal programme. In the human rights education programme, both human rights educators are trained, and a large group of young people are provided with the chance to get informed and aware of human rights in order to strive for a more just and equal society.

*Box 1 Short description of the programmes*

All these programmes have a different theme, but share specific characteristics:

- The programmes are based on the educational principles of non-formal learning. Young people are supported by youth work organisations and their youth workers to define their issues of concern, and determine themselves the learning objectives and the way to achieve these goals during activities. Self-management, agency and engagement are essential elements in this process.

- Youth work organisations use a model for programme and activity planning that is process based, focusing on the development of young people rather than merely pursuing predefined outcomes or results.

- The relation between young people and youth workers and the youth work organisations is based on mutual respect. Since the programmes are based on non-formal learning principles, young people are encouraged to learn from each other through peer-based education.

- Each programme consists of multiple activities of different length with different aims. The structure or order of the activities depends on the programme. Young people decide together on the programme content and the set-up of the programme. This process is facilitated via preparatory meetings, face to face and online, in order to prepare specific activities. Also during the activities itself, young people take the lead and based on their

needs, wishes and experiences they are stimulated to take more responsibilities. Young people and adults share decision making and ownership over the activities.

- Commonly, the programmes close with an evaluation meeting, were young people and youth workers reflect on the process and ensure the follow up of the programme.

- Some programmes include partner building activities or training courses where young leaders/ youth workers would get an extra preparation within the given topic of the program, focus on team building and building the partnership between the youth work organisations.

- Depending on the programme and the role a person has in the programme, people can attend as many activities as relevant during one programme. However, for each activity a clear profile, roles and responsibilities is communicated. Usually young people and youth workers take part in one up to 4 activities.

- The activities are inclusive, meaning all young people should be able to participate 'regardless of their gender identity, race, religion, sexuality, family background, educational level, socio-economic status and the country or place they come from' (The Youth Company, 2019). Young people join the programmes through youth organisations from different countries.

## ImpACT+ project structure and timeframe

The ImpACT+ research is supported by a project framework. This project has been structured as such that young people are at the heart of the work and the organisations involved equally share the work and responsibilities. Following gives a short overview of the ImpACT+ project, its activities, timeframe and budget.

- The ImpACT+ time frame consisted of 20 months in which all work was completed, starting in September 2017 and ending April 2019.

- In the first 14 months, the participatory youth research took place using a combination of three international training courses and intermediate periods of research work and collecting data in the local realities of the youth researchers. This report will describe in detail the way the participatory youth research was set up, the used methodologies and the conclusions of the research.

- In month 12 the international project management teams started with the first design proposals for the recommendations for stakeholders and youth work organisations. The international project management teams consisted of one young person and one senior project manager per partner organisation. This team had four meetings in order to manage the overall ImpACT+ project and deliver the recommendations for stakeholders and youth work organisations.

- Each youth work organisation organised one or more multiplier events in which the ImpACT+ research and the two sets of recommendations were shared on local, national and European level. Each partner organisation developed a dissemination strategy that comprises a timeframe of six months up to one year after the project ends.

- The above mentioned results are published online and will be available for at least five years and can be used by youth work organisations throughout Europe, stakeholders and policymakers.

- Each of the partner countries has hosted at least one of the activities, either one of the three training courses for the youth researchers or one of the four international project meetings.

- The three sets of results of the ImpACT+ project were led by three organisations, based on their prior experience and competence. In collaboration, all partner organisations have carried out the work for the outcomes of the research.

- Total project budget €211.800,-

## Engaging youth in research

The engagement of young people is an inevitable aspect of youth work. It results from the emphasis on participation and 'doing things with' young people. The currently dominant image of young people is one of active, wordy citizens that have a role in decision making (Dedding, Jurrius, Moonen & Rutjes, 2013). From that point of view, participation is often used as a method to give young people the opportunity to share their knowledge, develop skills and competencies and increase their say in decisions that are made. With the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, youth participation became embedded in a more profound international policy. Youth participation offers insight into the needs of young people and access to the expertise of young people which is valuable to improve youth work and youth programmes within organisations (Jurrius, 2012).

Young people and youth workers are at the heart of the youth work organisations involved in the Impact+ project, and real participation of young people is the central principle in their work. The methodology used to study the impact of the multi-activity youth programmes allows young people to be actively involved in the decision making processes, enabling them to have a clear say how the research is taking shape. The active participation of both young people and youth workers has been essential for the success of the research (Berg Powers & Allaman, 2012). Participatory peer-research can overcome issues of legitimacy and accuracy which traditional methods can pose. Peer researchers are already located in the world of those being researched; they share a common language and everyday experiences. Being similar in age and experience also encourages participants to open up to peer-researchers in a way that power relationships may prevent in traditional research (Dedding, Jurrius, Moonen & Rutjes, 2013).

The participation of both the young people and the youth workers in the research not only contributes to a better validation and understanding of the research results, it also strengthens the learning process for both young people and the organisations they represent. Involvement of young people helps to overcome issues of legitimacy and accuracy of the research. Participatory youth research engages young people in evaluating programmes that are designed to serve them (Studulski, van Velzen & Hoogenboom, 2018). In this way, young people can conduct research on issues and experiences that affect their lives, developing knowledge and sharing it to be put to use.

## What is participatory youth research

The development and increasing visibility of youth research are influenced by positive youth development and participatory evaluation methods. Vast amounts of research have been done; still the actual practice of implementing participatory youth research remains challenging (Berg Powers & Allaman, 2012; ZonMw, 2018). Although the importance of the involvement of young people in research and in decision making is widely accepted, it remains a challenge to create meaningful cooperation between researchers and young people. Often enough youth participation appears to not have the effect that was strived for. Doing research with young people requires specific expertise. Though, not all organisations have this specific expertise or want to invest in it. Youth-led research tends to take up more time than a non-participatory research and, for different kind of reasons it remains a challenge to keep young people involved during the course of a research (Delgado, 2006).

There are a variety of ways in which participation can take shape. Roger Hart described in the UNICEF publication Children's Participation, from tokenism to citizenship (1992) different levels of youth engagement. Hart used the metaphor of a

ladder in which participation ranges from manipulation and decoration to child initiated initiatives shared with adults. The first three rungs on the ladder can be seen as non-participation. Here, children are included in activities, though their role cannot be defined as participatory. The other five rungs on the ladder describe different degrees of participation.

It is not the aim of Hart to use the ladder of participation as a classification for the quality of programmes. Not every young person, nor every programme requires the same degree of involvement. However, he argues that each programme should be designed as such that the opportunities to participate are maximized. The ImpACT+ research described in this paper can be placed on the sixth rung of the ladder: 'Adult initiated, shared decisions with children'. Hart calls it 'true participation', since the decision-making is shared (1992). Important in this kind of cooperation is that all persons are involved and that particular concern is given to those who need it. This will ensure inclusion of all persons and enhance the common decisions throughout the process.

A participatory process can be recognized by the way that people deal with each other in cooperation. Aim is to work together on an equal basis in which the focus is on the opportunities of all persons involved to change their situation for the better. To realize this, a couple of principles must be taken into account. The cooperation should take shape based on the awareness that each person has a unique set of skills and knowledge. All forms of knowledge, whether it is based on experience, intuition or local knowledge must be valued. Besides, also the concept of time will need to be regarded differently. Not efficiency and time-management, but the process within a group and the time the group needs to come to decisions are indicators for measuring time. This can be challenging for researchers that are used to work in a more traditional research setting (ZonMw, 2018; Dedding, Jurrius, Moonen & Rutjes, 2013).

# THE PARTICIPATORY YOUTH RESEARCH ImpACT+

## Structure of the research

In the ImpACT+ research, seven organisations, from six countries are represented; the youth work organisations that implemented the multi-activity youth programmes and the research group Social Work from Saxion University of Applied Sciences. The team of youth researchers consisted of six research groups, one group from each youth work organisation: Ireland, Romania, The Netherlands, Lithuania, Spain and Portugal.

Each research group consisted of two youth researchers and one youth worker. All youth researchers had been former participants in (one of) the multi-activity youth programmes. The youth researchers have a diverse background and were between 17 and 27 years old. Participation in the youth researchers' team was not subjected to any prior academic or research experience of the participants. The research group offered space to ALL young people.

The youth workers were part of the research team for two reasons. Because of their role in facilitating the programmes they were essential as researchers in the participatory research. Besides, they also played a role in supporting and motivating the young people throughout the research process.

Next, to the research groups, each organisation was represented by a team of project managers. Also here, the learning element was integrated into the structure. Each team consisted of a junior and a senior project manager. It was the task of the project managers to facilitate the youth researchers in their work. The project managers were also responsible to further develop the research outcomes into tangible products that could be disseminated by organising multiplier events in their own countries.

A senior researcher coordinated the overall process of the research. As a representative from the research group Social Work from Saxion University of Applied Sciences, this researcher was guiding the youth researchers through the steps in the research. Although the young people took all decisions, it was the leading researcher who had the final responsibility in verifying if the working methods followed research methodology.

In the preparation of the training courses, the leading researcher was supported by two teams of student researchers. These students were bachelor Social Work students at Saxion, who were working on their final thesis. Their research was supportive of the work of the leading researcher.

Throughout the research, there have been three training courses in which the youth researchers came together. The training was facilitated by the senior researcher and a senior youth worker. It was the senior youth worker who took care of group building and the workflow. Most importantly, the youth worker ensured that all researchers could equally contribute to the research process.

During the training courses, the group worked together to design the different phases of the research. After each of the three training courses, the youth researchers spend ten working days in which they carried out the agreed steps of the research within their organisations. The results of this work served as input for each following training course.

## First training course

This training course took place 20-24 November 2017 in Losser, The Netherlands. During this week the foundations of the research have been laid out. The group was formed and crucial decisions were taken about which research methods to use and in which way. There were 21 youth researchers (of which 6 were youth workers), 5 student researchers, 1 senior youth worker and 1 leading researcher present at this training.

**The first step was to get acquainted**

- Getting to know each other's names, background, expectations, fears and needs.
- Learning about the participating organisations and their way of working, how is youth work taking shape in the different countries.
- Understanding the local communities in which the organisations function and the position the young people have in these organisations.
- Knowing about the programmes that are subject of this research.

The focus in the first training week was on group building. Extensive attention has been paid to getting to know each other and creating safety within the group. Of the five days that the training course lasted one whole day was spent on getting to know

each other and building group cohesion. This was done through interactive games, a variety of exercises in both safer small groups and the larger group and more physical activities where people needed to rely on each other. Specific attention was given to the expectations, fears and contributions that youth researchers bring with them. This has been extremely important for the further process of the research. By paying attention to getting acquainted, a sense of security was built in which people felt free to give their opinion and work together.

Through interactive play and plenary presentations a better understanding was built on the similarities and differences that exist between the participating organisations. This helped in understanding the background that each participant comes from. It also gave an insight in the context that the different participating youth organisations work in. This information has been used later on during the training course when decisions were made on choosing the research method. In addition, attention was paid to the content of the multi-activity programmes Big Questions of Life, Stay Human! and Lead the Change. Some youth researchers had participated in more than one programme, although very few had participated in all three programmes. In order to obtain a common agreement of the subject of the research, the content and structure of all three multi-activity programmes was presented to each other.

**Defining the 'rules of the game'**

- Formulation of a Code of Conduct in which each participant can express their needs and wishes regarding the cooperation.
- Learning about what research is and which steps have to be taken in order to get to the conclusions.
- Agreement on the way decisions are made within the group. All decisions will be made based on consensus and specific attention is given to the voice of the minority.

Since the research group would be working together for almost a year, it was important to agree upon the way this would be done. A concrete example of how the rules of the game have been decided upon is the formulation of a common 'code of conduct'. Together the group decided how they want to take care of each other and what is important for them in working together. Like in any other decision that has

been made during the research, the discussion continued until consensus was reached. It has been an important element in the cooperation that during decision making no voting was used in order for the voice of the minority to be heard. In any decision that was taken throughout the research, it has always been the group as a whole that has made the decision. This process of common decision making stimulated the participants to listen to each other and take each other's needs into account.

The 'code of conduct', as well as all other outputs during the training course, were written down on flipcharts that would hang on the walls. This enabled the youth researchers to look back into it any time during the week.

Already during the first day it was clear that all groups came well prepared to the training course. They were aware of the purpose and idea of the research. Although, since most of the youth researchers did not have experience in doing research it was important to start from the very beginning. Based on a short and simple story all phases of doing research were clarified and concretized. The different steps in research were explained and put in a timeline. This helped youth researchers to see what kind of decisions and tasks belong to which phase of the research. The visual overview of the steps helped during discussions. It would happen that youth researchers looked too far ahead in the process and worry about decisions that need to be taken later on. It created an insight in the process that was ahead.

**Formulating the exact research question**

- Through discussion and exchange a common definition of 'impact' was made.
- Common decision on the final formulation of the research question.

Once the foundation was laid, the researchers could get started with the research itself. In smaller groups they discussed about elements of what 'impact' entails. Within these groups they also shared their thoughts and remarks on the proposed research question. Interesting is that the youth researchers, although inexperienced in doing research, were very well able to come up with relevant issues, as a group they had a large body of knowledge that could be used. For example the question on validity was raised. Also, the question how to ensure that the research will not only measure

'positive impact' and how to tackle this, is something the youth researchers themselves came up with. The role of the leading researcher in this process has been to follow the decisions that were made and to verify whether they comply with qualitative research methods.

The results of the discussions in the smaller groups were shared in the plenary. They were looked into with the group and they commonly agreed on the exact formulation of the research question.

**Defining the research method**

- Prior to the training course, the student researchers prepared a list of 8 possible research methods that would fit the aims and character of the ImpACT+ research.
- The methods are looked into deeper according to a predefined set of guidelines in order to make a smaller selection.
- A selection of three combinations of mixed-method research is experimented with in try-outs and reflected upon.
- Based on the reflections and seen from the perspective of the local communities of the partner organisations a decision is made on which research method to use.

The main goal in this first training course was to make a decision about the most suitable way of collecting data, matching the research question and the context of the research. Prior to the training course, the student researchers had made an investigation of possible creative research methods (Kara (2015); Bryman (2008); Delgado (2006); Jurrius (2012)). They came up with eight methods, ranging from semi-structured interviews to world café or group discussions. It was up to the youth researchers to choose which of these methods would be used. For this, the youth researchers made a list of guidelines. Together with a short explanation of each research method, the usability of the methods was discussed.

The guidelines served to make a first selection of the methods. Based on the discussion in the smaller groups and the conclusions that were shared in the plenary,

a choice was made for three combinations of mixed-method research: world cafe with mind mapping, group discussion with photo voice and art-based with semi-structured interview. These combinations have been experimented with during try-outs in the following days. The group of youth researchers was divided in three and each group took on the role of researcher using one of the selected combinations of research methods. The other two groups would than take the role of respondents. All groups had half a day to prepare themselves and think of ways to test the methods, after which each method was tried out and reflected upon. The reflection was done in a structured way, also this process was decided upon by the researchers themselves.

Doing the try-outs was fun for the researchers. It revived old memories and helped to bond by sharing their experiences with the programmes. Actually going through the steps related to each research method also helped them to get a clearer picture of what was expected from them. The reflection after each try-out helped to create a common understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of each method. After lengthy discussion and over-hours of reflection, the group of youth researchers came to a common decision on which research method to use.

- The advantage of the method world café in combination with mind mapping was that it encouraged respondents to share multiple experiences and people could revive their memories with the stories of others. The researchers were experienced with this method, which helped in facilitating the process. Though, the method required all respondents to be in one place in the same time. For a number of partner organisations this was problematic, since respondents are living far away from each other.

- The group discussion with photo voice was regarded interesting because of the possibility for respondents to express themselves creatively. However, since most of the researchers had no experience in facilitating a group discussion and the analysis of the data coming from a group discussion is not easy, it was decided to not use this method.

- The art-based method in combination with semi-structured interviews combined the creativity of the photovoice method with a safer and more common way of collecting information. It was agreed upon that the art-based method with a semi-structured interview fits best with the character of the research, the local conditions each organisation deals with and the competencies of the youth researchers themselves. The youth researchers decided unanimously to use this method of research.

**Planning what is ahead**

- Agreement on how to invite respondents for the interviews and what assignment will be given for the creative pieces.
- Making a planning for the coming 4 months for sending out invitations, receiving the creative pieces, doing the interviews and transcribing and translating them.

Once the decision was taken which research method to use, there was a big relieve among the youth researchers. It gave them the outline of what was to be expected, though concretely how to implement it, was still to be decided upon. The last day was spent on practical issues. Again, the youth researchers themselves came up with issues to discuss and possible solutions to it. It was encouraging to see to what extend the youth researchers as a group had the knowledge among them to shape the research in a valid way. As a group they dealt with the question how to ethically manage the data and how to include respondents that are minors. They agreed upon their role as researcher being a former participant and how to ensure that responses are not influenced by that. A plan was made on how to send out the call to respondents, what selection criteria to use and what are the agreements concerning the creative pieces. They discussed which elements should be taken into account as topics for the interview and how many interviews can be expected per researcher. And lastly, in the national groups, they made a planning for the coming months on how to make it happen.

**In between the training courses**

- Contacting the former participants and inviting them for an interview.
- Each youth researcher conducted three interviews, which they transcribed and translated.

It was agreed that during the course of the 4 months in between the training courses each youth researcher would conduct 3 interviews and transcribe and translate the interviews. The leading researcher, together with the student researchers prepared a topic list for the interview and a number of 'how to'-documents on doing an interview and dealing with names in a transcription.

The national teams had different approaches to how to contact the former participants. This depended on the number of participants and the fact whether the participants were regular visitors to the youth organisations or not. The kind of information given to the participants on the aim of the research and the creative piece that was to be made was the same among all countries. The researchers were mostly in contact with each other within the national teams, though the group as a whole did exchange questions, feedback and successes through online channels.

## Second training course

This training course took place 10-12 April 2018 in Dublin, Ireland. The aim of this training course was to reach agreement on the method of data analysis. By analysing part of the transcripts together, a coding scheme had been established, with which youth researchers could analyse all transcripts. At this training there were 21 youth researchers (of which 5 were youth workers), 2 student researchers, 3 (junior) project managers, 1 senior youth worker and 1 leading researcher.

**Catching up**

- In some national teams there had been changes in the representation of youth researchers. It was explained who stepped out and which new members were added to the research team.
- Sharing of what has been done during the past months and how it went.

Just like during the first training week, this course started with extensive attention for interpersonal relationships. This time the focus was not so much on getting acquainted, but much more on blowing off steam. The researchers had made the promise to have conducted all interviews before this training week and have it

transcribed and translated into English. A large part of the research groups had started too late and they still worked hard on it during the last weekend before training. Especially the confirmation that it was 'a lot of work' for everyone, created a bond. Still, they all kept their promise and had their work ready.

For different reasons, some youth researchers had dropped out in the period between the two training courses. In the cases where this happened, the national groups dealt with it among themselves and either found replacement or decided to divide the work within the team. It was important that the youth researchers that newly joined the research in this period had an understanding of the way of working that was developed during the first training course. This was ensured by looking back into what had been done during the first training course, which main decisions were taken and commonly looking forward to what is ahead and the final goal of the research. There was a moment of reflection, first in the national groups and after that in the plenary on the process up till now. They looked back to the cooperation in the group, any positive discoveries they encountered or challenges that were overcome and what they learned. Also they shared among each other whether they were missing anything in the process or that elements could be added to the research and how. It helped in bonding and becoming aware of their own learning process as well.

**The process of labelling**

- Getting everybody on the same track, introducing the technique of labelling and what is important in this.
- First round of labelling based on the topic list used during the interviews, reflection on this process and formulation of draft coding scheme.
- Second round of labelling, reflection and formulation of final coding scheme.
- Create common understanding of the terminology used. Formulation of 'dictionary' for all categories used in the coding scheme.

This training course lasted only 3 days, whereas the other training courses had 5 days. That is why it was necessary to work effectively. This is a bit at odds with the

non-formal working method in which the young people themselves determine how they will work on things and discussion is a large part of the learning itself. In this case, however, there was already a fairly well-defined programme at the start of the training. This programme was put together by the main researcher together with the senior youth worker. The idea was that two rounds of labelling would be carried out, where each round led to a more specified categorisation of codes to be used for all the transcripts.

For the first round of labelling the leading researcher had selected a number of key phrases that were based on the leading topics dealt with in the interviews. These topics were a proposal to the youth researchers to start off with. The majority of the youth researchers were labelling for the first time and they did not have an idea of what to look for. The categories helped them to give direction to the process. However, it was free for the researchers to see other patterns and come up with other or categories that emerged from the transcripts. This would then lead to a first coding scheme to be tried out.

In the first round, the researchers set to work in their own national teams (groups of 3) with one transcript. It was an easy start, since they knew the context, the interviewee and what was meant with things that were said. With scissors and markers, flipcharts and glue the transcripts were cut into smaller pieces and organized around the predefined categories. With all the groups having one interview done, we mixed the groups to exchange what they found and to share in what way they organized the information. Through presentations of their work they looked for differences and similarities in how they categorised the information. This was then shared in the plenary and based on this discussion the researchers arrived at a second, provisional coding scheme. During the discussions, the youth researchers themselves determined which terminology was used to make clear what they were talking about. So instead of the 'scientific' terms codes and categories, it involved terminology like large and small indicators. It was important that the researchers knew what they were doing, whether they used the right wording to express themselves was not the aim of the exercise.

With this new set of categories, the youth researchers set off for a second round of labelling. The groups were this time organized in pairs with researchers from two different countries. The purpose of this second round was to check whether the preliminary coding scheme was functional. In addition, it was also important to exchange experiences and information between countries, so that a more general picture emerged of possible answers given during the interview, regardless of the context or background of an interviewee.

After this second round, the researchers met again in the large group and discussed together about which categories should be included in the final coding scheme. This

was not a simple discussion, the importance of the decisions was widely felt, not everyone was equally capable of communicating with each other on the same level of abstraction and besides there wasn't always agreement about the meaning of certain words. In order to make it clear and concrete for all researchers an explanatory 'dictionary' was made of each category that the researchers could all agree with. This was also needed for when they would go home and finish the labelling, for everybody to be clear what the meaning is of each category.

**Youth workers, organisations and local communities**

- Which information is already present regarding the impact on youth workers, organisations and local communities and what information is still needed/ which elements are missing?
- Which research methods can be used to gather the needed information? Agreement on method and reflection.

Up till now, the research had focused mainly on the impact on young people and youth workers. The interviews were held with young people and youth workers, though the impact on the professional development of youth workers and on the youth organisations and their local communities had not been specific subject of the research yet. In order to save time, it was decided that simultaneously with the labelling of the interviews, a smaller group of researchers and project managers would look into how to deal with this question. Based on the personal interest of the youth researchers they could decide whether they would work on the labelling or discuss further steps on how to collect data regarding the organisations and local communities. Each national group delegated one youth researcher to this smaller working group.

The working group reflected on the decisions that were made up till now and activities that have been undertaken. The method to be used for collecting the remaining data should take into account the national realities of every group, the time limitations and the individual capacities and skills in the research group. Bearing in mind that translating and transcribing the interview had been a challenge and a long process of labelling was still ahead, the method should also be as motivating as possible. Based on these preconditions, the group decided to send out a set of

additional questions for youth workers and youth leaders which would be added to their interview transcripts, specifically focusing on their professional development. For the partner organisations it was decided to make a questionnaire to question the impact of the multi-activity programmes on their organisations and their working environment. In this way, the full scope of the research as planned could still be investigated without asking too much effort from the youth researchers.

**Planning what is ahead**

- The youth researchers dividing the tasks and making a time table on when and how to conduct the labelling of the interviews.
- It is agreed upon how to send out the additional questions to the youth workers and the questionnaire to the organisations.

After this training course there would be still a lot of work to be done. A total of 48 interviews needed to be labelled, analysed and organized. Next to this, the additional information from the youth workers and the youth organisations needed to be processed in order to be able to formulate conclusions during the third training course. In making sure that all tasks would be done, a step-by-step planning was made. A visual timeline was fixed on the wall and in the plenary all activities were inserted to it. Clear deadlines were set, including moments to evaluate and catch-up in between. This gave a clear overview for all researchers on what still needed to be done and who is responsible for which part of it. The planning took place in an atmosphere of openness where there was room for clarification and fine tuning. Since during this training course the group was split up in two and each group had worked on different tasks, it was important to ensure that all were on the same page to continue further. The meeting was closed with a sharing of each group member on how they felt regarding the big task that is still ahead of them. It was motivating to realize that, despite the upcoming scope of work, people felt good knowing what is ahead and confident of their contribution to overall process.

**In between the training courses**

- All youth researchers finished labelling their interviews within the national teams.
- A number of youth researchers formed a small group to analyse and structure the data, making it easier to come to the conclusions of the research during the last training course.

During the second training course a start was made with the labelling of the data, though most researchers still had 1-2 transcripts that needed to be done. They organised within the national teams to finish this process together. The coding scheme and related 'dictionary' that was made during the second training course was used as a guideline and check to ensure the labelling was done similarly in all different countries. Next, the youth researchers divided the responses from the questionnaire in order to categorise the answers given by the youth organisations.

Together with a smaller representation of the youth researchers, the leading researcher used the time in between the training courses to organise the data as such that it was possible to formulate conclusions during the last training course. Given the vast amount of data it would not have been possible to process everything within one week only. The smaller group 'summarised' each quote in order to group them and make a preliminary selection of topics on which the conclusions could be based. This was used as input for the third, and last, training course.

## Third training course

This training course took place 20-24 September in Arcos de Valdevez, Portugal. The youth researchers also played an active role in the final phase of the research. During the third training course, in September 2018 in Arcos de Valdevez, Portugal, the researchers formulated conclusions and recommendations. At this training there were 15 youth researchers (of which 4 were youth workers), 1 senior youth worker and 1 leading researcher.

**Catching up**

- In some national teams there had been changes in the representation of youth researchers. It was explained who stepped out and which new members were added to the research team.
- Sharing of what has been done during the past months and how it went.

Although the youth researchers had been in contact in between, it was five months since the group was together as a whole. As usual, the meeting started with bonding and catching-up on how everyone had been doing. Each national group reflected on how the work had been going in their team, what had been done and what the expectations were for the upcoming training course. Both more frontal presentations and interactive exercises were used where everyone took a role and all researchers got into working mood.

Also in this phase of the research there had been some researchers that dropped out for various reasons. Unfortunately, none of the members of the national team from Spain were able to attend the last training course. To clarify things for the group as a whole, it was shared who was not able to attend and why. Also the two new researchers who hadn't been in the first training courses introduced themselves.

To prepare for the work ahead, the group first looked back to what had been done from the start of the research up till that point. Looking back at the amount of work that had been done helped to bond and to gain a better understanding of where the group stood in the timeline of the research. Besides the labelling of the interviews and the questionnaire that all researchers had done, a smaller group had worked on a first round of data analysis over the summer. The group as a whole was informed about this process and the outcomes. It resulted in a common understanding of which steps had been taken (and why) and what was left to do to cross the finish line.

**Analysing data and drawing conclusions**

- Based on the quotes from the interviews with young people and youth workers the main topics are selected per category and a conclusion is formulated.
- Based on the answers to the questionnaire main conclusions per topic are formulated.
- A commonly shared conclusion on the impact on the personal and professional level of young people and youth leaders/ youth workers, the impact on organisations and the impact on local communities is formulated.

The aim of the third training course was to come to a commonly shared conclusion on the main research question. The youth researchers were curious and exited to get to this final point. They had been working towards this moment over the past ten months. The working materials they had in order to come to the conclusions were prepared over the summer. All youth researchers had selected relevant quotes from the transcripts, based on the categories in the coding scheme that was made during the second training course. The leading researcher, together with a smaller group of researchers had additionally worked on summarising all the quotes into recurring topics, such as 'change of perspective', 'empowerment' or 'thankful'. This meant that within each category from the coding scheme there was a list of topics based on which the youth researchers could start drawing conclusions.

To find a way to grasp the big amount of data, the categories were divided among smaller groups of 2 or 3 people. Each group would make a start describing the results using the same set of questions when looking through the data. It was up to the researchers themselves to make choices of what was relevant or not, using their own experiences as reference. This working session resulted in an overview of emerging topics for each category, all justified with relevant quotes and argumentation. The work done by the smaller groups was presented in the plenary so all researchers were equally informed about the topics and results that emerge from the data. The group could ask questions and clarifications. This process contributed strongly to the

sense of ownership among the researchers regarding the results and conclusions to the overall research.

The next step in the process was to come to a general conclusion regarding the impact on the personal and professional development of young people and youth workers. It was the challenge of the group of researchers to distil the large amount of data into an overall conclusion, based on the results and justifications that were formulated for each topic. For it to be a group process, the 'snowball method' was used. The group was divided into 4 smaller groups and was given 20 minutes to make a first general conclusion. The outcome and result depended fully on their choices, communication and common decision. Next, the 4 groups joined together into 2 groups, shared their results and wrote a common conclusion within a timeframe of 15 minutes. Lastly, the whole group came together and agreed on a conclusion that all researchers share.

Next was the analysis of the data from the questionnaire. This would give answer to the question of impact on youth organisations and their local communities. The same strategy was used in this process. The results from the questionnaire were previously structured into four categories. The youth researchers divided into 4 groups, looking into the data with similar questions that were used with the data from the interviews. Again, the group of researchers made their own conclusions, deciding what is relevant or not based on their own experiences. It led to a general conclusion for each category which was shared in the plenary. This ensured that all people were equally informed about the results that came from the questionnaire. Using the 'snowball method' again, a short paragraph length conclusion was written for both the impact on youth organisations and on local communities.

In order to finish it up, the group needed a bit more time to finalize the exact wording of the overall conclusions on young people, youth leaders, youth organisations and local communities. This was done in 4 small groups. When finally the conclusions could be read aloud for the whole group, a big feeling of relieve and pride came of over the group. They succeed in doing something they hadn't expected on beforehand. In an international group of unexperienced researchers, they managed to work it out and bring it to a result.

**Presentation of the conclusions**

- The youth researchers prepare the separate elements of the presentation.
- Presentation to the project managers of the overall conclusions of the research and the research process. Q&A with project managers.

Now that the research had come to an end, it was time to present the results to the project managers of the organisations the youth represented. The youth researchers themselves decided how to prepare for the presentation and which elements of the research should be presented. Although inexperienced in reporting and doing research, the group did not need any guidance from the leading researcher in how the research could be presented. They commonly agreed to present it in the same order as any other research would be presented.

In order to prepare, the group split in groups of 2 or 3 persons, where each group prepared one part of the presentation. Shortly before the presentation itself they shared in the plenary what they are going to tell during the presentation. Great attention was given to make sure that all members of the research team had a role in the presentation. Since all youth researchers had been working on all aspects of the research they were all equally informed about the things that were presented. They had the tasks divided, but it could just as well have been others presenting the same part. In the presentation the researchers decided to use flipcharts to visualize their presentation. It was the way they had been working throughout the past months, which made it fitting in with the presentation of the research itself.

After the presentation, the project managers had the possibility to ask clarifying questions and pose remarks. The researchers decided among themselves who would answer which question and they helped each other in adding up to the answers. The researchers felt proud and relieved about the work they did. At the same time, they felt worried about how the project managers will use their results. They felt strong ownership over the research.

It was an emotional moment to present the results, there was a feeling of relief and accomplishment. Afterwards, the youth researchers reflected on the results, the

presentation and the Q&A session in the plenary. Here, in the safe space the researchers could share their personal thoughts, feelings and remarks. It helped to relieve stress and celebrate the moment. The group bonded stronger thanks to the expression of trust and ownership.

**Best practices and recommendations**

- Translation of the conclusions of the research to best practices and recommendations.
- Selection of relevant quotes to the best practices and recommendations chosen.

For the project managers to be able to use the results of the research, the youth researchers sat together with the project managers to select best practices and recommendations from the research. Workshops were organized in which both researchers and project managers took place. The youth researchers helped to interpret the results and to use the information from the categories to formulate both best practices and recommendations. This gave the researchers the possibility to provide further explanation and clarification on the results of the research and to share relevant quotes.

Based on the workshops, the researchers knew what the information was that the project managers needed. This helped them in working out the conclusions and finalizing the results from each category. Together they made an overview document with the results of all categories (and underlying topics, justified with quotes) including the overall conclusions. Next to that, the youth researchers selected relevant quotes that correspond with the best practices and recommendations that were selected in the workshops. The researchers choose themselves which quotes correspond best with the information that is sought for, since they were the experts in the research.

**Reflection within the research team**

- Reflection on the research process.
- Reflection on personal and professional learning of each researcher on individual level.

The research process of ten months had not only been a time in which young people learned about doing research. Equally important was awareness on the personal learning of each of the researchers. For this reason, throughout the training courses there had always been time to reflect on the group work, the personal development and the dimensions of learning. The national groups were offered a framework for reflection, though how they used the framework was fully up to them. In the safe environment of the national team, each participant would individually reflect on the different levels of learning, the development they have gone through during the course of the research and what it meant to them. It resulted in a deeper personal understanding of the learning process all researchers had been going through.

Besides the personal learning, time was reserved for reflection on the research process itself. For four different elements the same set of questions was asked. These were laid out in different corners of the room and youth researchers had the possibility to write their own thoughts, ideas or remarks where they found it applicable. They could use the other's remarks as inspiration or to add up to it. The reflection gave an extensive overview of how the youth researchers looked back at the research process. This is described in more detail in the paragraph on success factors and limitations.

# METHODOLOGY

The process of working together as a group, collecting data and analysing it has been described in detail in the chapters above. This chapter gives insight in how the youth researchers have dealt methodologically with the research question and the large amount of data.

## Theoretical framework

The conducted research has been a very practical, hands-on research. The youth researchers themselves implemented almost all phases of the research. They stepped in once the outlines of the research were set and made their own decisions on methods of data gathering and analysis. This was done using common knowledge, experience and guidance from the leading researcher. Though, the youth researchers did not study literature on the concepts they investigated. However, the absence of a literature study resulted in a self-made definition of the leading concept 'impact'. Through exchange and discussion the youth researchers formulated their interpretation of 'impact' in order to commonly share an understanding of what they are talking about when doing the research.

They agreed that impact is about a 'marked effect or influence' and can occur in a variety of ways:

- something can have a both direct and indirect effect
- the influence can be both on the individual and a group or collective
- it can be something that is tangible and intangible
- the effect and touch (all) aspects of life
- it can be seen on short and long term notice

## Research question

In the project application it was stated that the youth researchers would investigate the impact of the multi-activity programmes on:

- the personal and professional development of young people
- the personal and professional development of youth workers
- the quality development within the participating youth organisations
- the local communities the youth organisations work in

Keeping this framework in mind, the youth researchers formulated the following research question: *What is the impact of the six multi-activity programmes (Lead the Change 1&2, Big Questions of Life 1&2, Stay Human! 1&2), if any?*

## Data collection interviews

During the first training course the youth researchers agreed on the method of data collection regarding the impact on the young people and youth workers that had participated in one of the multi-activity programmes. This would be done by using a mixed method of semi-structured interviews and art-based data collection.

It was agreed that each researcher would conduct 3 interviews. The group of youth researchers from The Netherlands had 6 youth researchers, whereas the other groups had only 3 researchers. This was decided since the number of participants from The Netherlands in the three multi-activity programmes was larger than in the other countries.

In total 242 former participants were approached to do an interview. Not all countries succeeded to conduct the agreed amount of interviews. Reasons for that were multiple, sometimes because one of the youth researchers dropped out. Also, it appeared to be difficult to find respondents that were willing to participate. Quite a few responded that the making of a creative piece was an obstacle for the. It also happened that a number of respondents dropped out at a later stage. Divided per country the following number of interviews have been conducted.
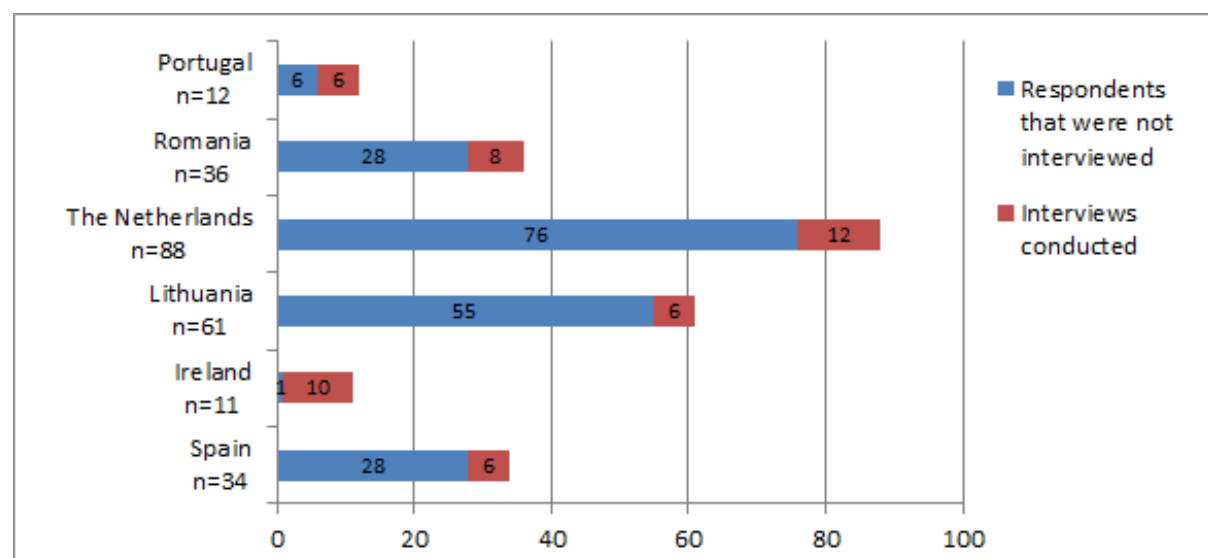


*Table 1 Number of respondents, n=242*

Each national team had its own way of approaching the respondents. This depended on the number of participants and whether the participants were regular visitors to the youth organisations or not. The message given to the respondents on the aim of the research and the assignment regarding the creative piece was the same for all countries. All respondents were asked to make a creative piece that 'shows if their participation in the programmes had an effect on them or their surroundings'.

Although the working language during the multi-activity programmes was English, not all respondents were fluent enough in English to be able to express themselves. Therefor it was decided to conduct the interviews in each countries' mother tongue. During the four months between the first and the second training courses (November 2017-April 2018) the youth researchers contacted the respondents, conducted the interviews and transcribed and translated them. In total 48 interviews were held, they varied in length from 20-90 minutes. All respondents signed a consent form and made a creative piece as was requested. The respondents range between 16 and 35 years old.

For the interviews a topic list was made, together with a couple of 'how to'-documents on the basics in doing interviews. The topics of the interview related to the creative piece and what it represented, the process of making the creative piece, the possible impact the programmes had on the respondents regarding expectations, memorable moments and competencies gained.

After the interviews, it became clear that the focus had been on the personal development of youth leaders and youth workers, instead of on their professional development as well. So to cover the possible impact on their professional development specifically, a set of additional questions has been sent out. This was sent to the 16 youth leaders or youth workers that were already interviewed and was added to their interview transcripts.

## Data collection questionnaire

During the second training course it was decided what kind of method for data collection the researchers were going to use for the impact on the youth organisations and their local communities. To answer this question, a questionnaire was made with six questions on possible effect of the participation in the programmes on their organisations or their local communities (see paragraph 'Labelling the data from the questionnaire' for an overview of the questions). The questionnaire was sent out in English since this was the working language used in the cooperation with these organisations in the past. It has been sent out through Google surveys to the 20 organisations that have been partners in one of the multi-activity programmes. This was conducted in the period after the second training

course (April-May 2018). The organisations had three weeks to respond to the questionnaire, after two weeks a reminder was sent to the organisations that did not yet respond. In total 12 organisations responded to the questionnaire. The organisations that did not respond were mainly organisations that had only a small number of participants in the multi-activity programmes. Since their participation in the programmes had not been a significant part of their work, they did not have interest in responding to the questionnaire. One other organisation that did not respond used to actively participate in the multi-activity programmes, though the cooperation had been stopped already before ImpACT+ because of other reasons.

## Labelling the data from the interviews

As described in detail in the chapter about the research process, the youth researchers have labelled the transcripts according to a list of categories. For each category, a difference was made whether this impact had taken place on a personal or professional level. There was also room for responses that no impact took place. The list existed of three different sets of categories. The first set of categories described ways of where and how the impact took place.

| Categories | Descriptions |
|---|---|
| **Expectations / motivation** | thoughts and reasons to go to the projects`` |
| **Feelings** | emotional state or reaction, or an idea of belief that was caused by the project |
| **Learning** | what and how we learned knowledge, skills and competences |
| **(self) Awareness** | becoming more aware of yourself and realizations of your mind-set |
| **Connections** | any change related to network, people, ideas, places and culture |

*Table 2 First set of categories*

The second set of categories was defined as the 'bonus track'. There could be an overlap in quotes grouped in the first set of categories and the second set. The aim of the second set of categories was to collect specific anecdotes, stories and examples that would clarify the impact mentioned in the first set of categories.

| Categories | Descriptions |
|---|---|
| **Proof of change** | concrete and tangible examples of change |
| **Key moment** | a specific moment participants describe |

*Table 3 Second set of categories*

The third set of categories was more of an addition to what had been said. In case relevant things came up that appeared to not fit in with the categories, these categories came in helpful.

| Categories | Descriptions |
|---|---|
| **Recommendations** | feedback / suggestions to organisations or people |
| **Other** | things mentioned during the interview that are relevant, but do not fit into any of the other categories |

*Table 4 Third set of categories*

During the second training course the youth researchers made a start in the labelling of the data. This continued when returning home after the training course. Most national groups worked on it together, they labelled their own interviews. When the labelling was done, a smaller group of youth researchers took up the task to 'summarise' each quote with one or two words. Here, the youth researchers worked with each others material. The summaries were used to orden the quotes when they were all put together from the six countries into one document per category. This list of grouped quotes per category was used as input during the third training course in making the conclusions.

## Labelling the data from the questionnaire

The questionnaire was sent out to all youth organisations that had participated in one of the multi-activity youth programmes. The questions were formulated by the youth researchers during the second training course and gave insight in the following:

- Did the participation in the programmes have an effect on the organisation?
    - o What was the effect related to (youth) workers?
    - o What was the effect related to the youth organisation?
- Did the participation in the programmes have an effect on the local reality? What was the effect?
- What challenges did the organisation face in working with the projects or in changing their work after the projects.
- According to the organisation, what contributed to the impact?

The answers to the questionnaires have been divided over the national teams. Each national team labelled 2 questionnaires. The labels that were used followed the questionnaire, the youth researchers took out the relevant information. The labelled questionnaires were input during the third training course in formulating the conclusions regarding the impact on youth work organisations and local communities.

## Data analysis

The data analysis has been dealt with during the third training course. To make a start with the conclusions, the youth researchers divided in smaller groups. Each group worked with the grouped quotes from one of the categories. Using the same set of guiding questions, the groups made a list of topics within each category. It was up to the researchers themselves to make choices of what was relevant or not, using their own experiences as reference.

The following set of guiding questions was used to analyse the large amount of data:

- What are the main topics that come up for each category? (no more than 10)
- How would you describe the impact related to each topic?
- Is there a story/ description of how this impact happened and what is it?

- Select quotes that justify the impact and the story.
- Is it possible to make an overall conclusion for this topic and what it could be?

This working session resulted in an overview of emerging topics for each category, all justified with relevant quotes and argumentation. Using the 'snowball method' the youth researchers then formulated conclusions on the impact of the multi-activity programmes. As a group, the youth researchers formulated an overall conclusion for each of the elements in the research: impact on young people, youth workers, youth organisations and the local communities.

# RESULTS

The youth researchers used the coding scheme to select up to ten topics for each category to describe the main results of the research. This resulted in a large list of topics ranging from 'experience', 'cultural awareness', 'empowerment' to 'positive environment' and 'evaluation'. Since the topics within categories did have overlap, the leading researcher has taken the task to regroup them. The results and quotes presented in this chapter are selected by the youth researchers. The leading researcher has selected the following seven elements according to which the impact of the three multi-activity programmes can be seen.

## High motivation and level of expectation

Participants had different reasons to join a programme, for the majority their expectations were more than met. "My expectation was to get to know myself, to know more, to expand my competences limit. And I got more than expected" (youth participant from Lithuania).

When describing their motivation to participate in an exchange, it became clear that there is an actual demand among young people to take part in exchanges that contribute to their personal development. Youth workers and young people both mentioned that one of the reasons why they took part was that they wanted to develop personally or professionally. They mentioned the wish to develop their skills on working in a group, connecting and networking with others, gaining leadership skills, but also learning to take ownership over their own learning process.

For some, learning more about the topic that was dealt with during the exchange was a motivator to join the programmes. *"I think it's important to keep growing" (youth leader from The Netherlands)*. The youth workers specifically mentioned they wanted to experience Erasmus+ programmes. *"As a youth worker, the Erasmus+ programmes were an area of work I hadn't adventured into as a method of working to socially engage young people" (youth worker from Ireland)*. Some people did not know what to expect

and did not have that many expectations due to the fact that they were unsure what they were going to do. Therefore some went in with an open mind; others went in a bit sceptical.

Also, the programmes provided people the opportunity to experience new places. People were expecting something that they weren't experiencing in their daily life. The opportunity to experience new cultures and to connect and work with people from different backgrounds was for many participants a motivation to join the programme. Some people mention that it was mainly the possibility to travel, what motivated them to join. Some people had never travelled before. *"The fact that you meet a lot of people, which are different from you, helps. Volunteering is an experience which helps you to know yourself and to get to know others"* (youth participant from Romania).

It also appeared that people with previous experience with similar exchanges had different expectations. It seems that due to their previous experience the expectations were higher than those of people who did not take part before in any programme. *"(...) it has definitely been worth any type of investment in time, money our effort. It has definitely changed my life in a lot of ways"* (youth leader from Ireland).

## Non-formal way of working
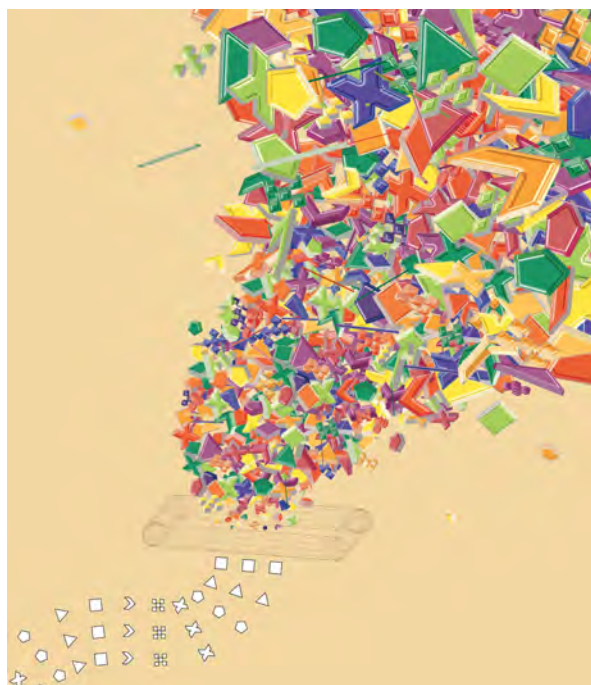


The safe, motivational, non-competitive environment encourages participants to experiment, fail and learn. *"I think our society should give more importance and value to this kind of qualifications that gain you through non-formal education. There is still a lot to do to really make justice to this excellent process"* (youth participant from Portugal).

The self-organized workshops on different subjects are regarded by respondents as the most appropriate education method to approach difficult topics. Working on specific topics during the programmes helped participants to learn more about themselves and the skills they possess. *"I gained more confidence in myself and my ability to facilitate workshops or public speaking by organising a youth exchange"* (youth leader from Ireland).

The way the projects are set up gives strong responsibility and freedom to the participants. They are themselves creators of the activities and programmes. Going through the process of problem solving and getting things done, sparked the motivation of respondents to become active also after the programmes. *"Experience as a participant motivated me to do more and being a youth leader was a logical next step (...). I think these possibilities give more responsibilities to not keep doing the same trick. I was also thinking about giving back what I've learned and experienced to others"* (youth leader from The Netherlands). The learning process is facilitated by the youth workers. They create a safe space in which participants can experiment and make mistakes. This process leads to an increased intrinsic motivation among the participants. The support from youth leaders and youth workers greatly contributes to the personal learning. They act as role models and they initiate reflection. Respondents mention that the programmes contributed to an increased perseverance in their work and in reaching their goals. *"(...) in one way or another you will become quite motivated to just do it, it's okay to make mistakes. Just do it, do not be afraid and I think that has also motivated me to take something else in life"* (youth participant from The Netherlands).

Respondents mention that being in an environment of like-minded and loving people allowed them to be free to be themselves. They felt more confident to share their opinions in a non-formal context. Participants became more comfortable to speak with people they don't know; they are more involved in discussions. *"(...) after so many years of formal studies, of everything that after all seems to be valued on a day-to-day basis, everything curricular, has taught me another way of doing things and working"* (youth participant from Spain).

There were people who expected a formal setting with teaching and conferences to tackle the subjects. They expected a formal way of learning and experienced non-formal education in the programme. The safe environment that is created through non-formal education methods helps participants to learn and overcome fear. It increases their confidence in sharing opinions and determining their personal reflection and learning. *"(...) for me the non-formal education process was really shocking at first, but then I thought it is amazing and new and innovative, and an extraordinary way to learn and it of course changes the way I deal with my problems and the way I also live in a certain way"* (youth participant from Portugal).

Each programme is closed with an evaluation meeting in which youth workers and youth leaders gather to look back on their personal learning and realization of the activities. *"Evaluation was a key moment. Realization of how much work had been put into the exchange"* (youth leader from Ireland). The evaluation helps the participants to define what they realised and how they learned. It encourages participants to get involved in future projects. The evaluation activity when closing a workshop or exchange offers support as some topics are 'hard hitting'. The moment of debriefing helps participants to share their personal stories and learn from them. *"I learned how*

*to take feedback from this project, I learned to work better in a team and to be silent when someone gives me feedback" (youth leader from Romania).*

## Change of perspective

Respondents often mention they learned from other people's experiences, perspectives and intercultural sharing. *"It made me see life a little differently in experiencing this. See there is a world outside of our daily life (…), there's a whole different culture out there" (youth participant from Ireland).*



The exchanges taking place in an international context gives people the possibility to learn from different cultures and to become more culturally aware. Participants mention they never had the opportunity to work with people from different backgrounds and a different mind-set. The programmes brought people from different backgrounds together in a safe and inspiring environment. It encouraged participants to become more aware of themselves and their interaction with others. *"I don't want to say that my entire life has changed, because it's not like it has, but my perspective on my own life has changed" (youth participant from Spain).* Respondents mention that through being in an intercultural environment and working in a group on specific topics, they learned more about themselves and others. Both the topics that were dealt with during the programmes and the confrontation with others gave participants a different opinion and new insights.

Respondents mentioned a lot about hearing other people's stories and how that impacted on them, especially stories shared by persons from the local reality. Through each other's stories, young people get more aware of the similarities between countries and cultures. *"I remember very well one thing (…) she was speaking in Italian, but it seemed that we didn't need translation to English, we understood everything through her emotion, through faces expressions, what is she saying, what is she talking about, so I very strongly felt the pain of other person (…). And that was the moment where I understood how we are alike" (youth participant from Lithuania).* Some felt really touched and empathised with the people sharing their story. After such activities they admitted that they changed their perspective.

Participants mention that they became more tolerant about different attitudes and behaviours. It changed the way of relating with other people, they became more open minded. This attitude helped them to lose the fear to travel and meet new people. It brings people together and has an impact on their attitude back home. *"That wherever you live it makes it look at the world in a certain way" (youth leader from The Netherlands).*

Indirectly, the projects result in more openness of the local community to the different topics of the programmes. Youth workers bring the experience with non-formal education and the exchange of experiences with international partners back to their local youth organisations and communities. *"I think I can say that all the participants felt the need to be more engaged in the society, to bring a positive contribution" (youth participant from Romania).* Participants were encouraged to learn more about non-formal education and learning about initiatives outside their home town. They also become more conscious of their responsibility to the natural environment.

The participation in the programmes caused some respondents to broaden their horizons and decide on their field of study. A number of participants decided to change their job, or became more critical about their values and started volunteering work. Some became youth workers in a youth centre. Both youth workers and young people mention that increasing their skills and knowledge strengthened their motivation and confidence. It leads them to grow and take on new challenges in their professional career. For some, it has led to changing career paths. "It has also changed me in the sense that it has opened me to other perspectives, to other approaches, my perspective as a social worker, if ever get to have that job" (youth participant from Spain).

## Understanding oneself and others
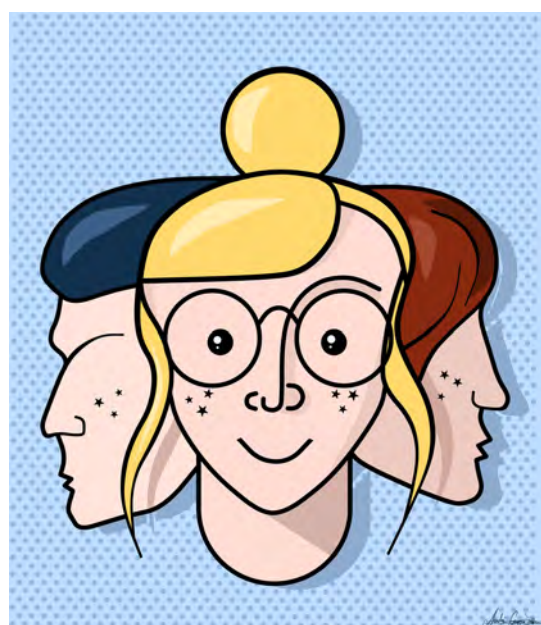


Stepping out of their own environments and going through the experience of bonding with people from different backgrounds, makes people become more aware of their own identity. *"I'm telling you I feel wonderful that they helped me to find these fears" (youth participant from Lithuania).*

Working on specific topics during the programmes helped participants to learn more about themselves, the skills they possess, their identity, dealing with other cultures, their strengths and weaknesses.

Participating in these multi-activity programmes made participants more open minded and learn more about themselves. *"I have discovered a great deal about myself and others, also at a professional level" (youth leader from Romania).* They feel freer to share their opinions and change their attitude or perspective regarding life and education.

Participants specifically mention the unique moments when they overcame the differences and became an international group showing their similarities. Going through the same experiences with their peers helped participants to bond with others and increase their empathy. Making new friends in a relatively short period of time increases the confidence of participants, changes their view on existing friendships and the relation with themselves. *"Just from the first youth exchange I have even entered a development of myself. That is just a whole process up to and including today" (youth leader from The Netherlands).*

The cooperation with people from different backgrounds made participants learn more about interaction with others. Respondents say they became more aware of the reasons behind people's behaviour and how that influences their own actions. Working in a diverse environment with people they just met, helps people to learn to deal with others and to control their emotions. The reflections, discussions and team building in the programmes made participants more conscious about themselves, others and their surroundings. *"The LGBT one I learned about my identity, and to just love myself" (youth leader from Ireland).* Participants notice they become more considerate towards themselves and others, which showed in not labelling people and being more patient to others. It became easier for them to be around other people which resulted in an increased involvement in volunteering. The inspiring atmosphere during the programmes encouraged participants to develop their qualities and be more conscious about their relation with others. Respondents mention that it motivated them to be more kind to people around them.

The way of working during the programmes, helped participants to gain soft skills such as empathy, active listening, giving and receiving feedback, flexibility and adaptability. Participants learned their soft skills through a variety of activities, such as discussions, reflections, active listening tasks or presenting topics, ideas and thoughts. Youth exchanges create a safe environment for participants to have a voice and talk in front of big groups. It helps them to bond with others and to work on a common goal. *"I am more confident now in the way I relate to others and in the way we have to adapt to change in ourselves to make new friendships" (youth participant from Portugal).* It gave them confidence and courage to open up to others, even people they did not know before. The programmes encouraged participants increase their patience in relations with others; improve their self-reflection, become more aware of the environment and more engaged in creativity and self-development.

In the professional field, participants felt more confident at job interviews and felt more committed to their work. On personal level participants noticed that they felt the need to share their feelings, to believe in themselves and act according to it.

## Empowerment and leadership skills

The positive experience of the project encouraged participants to undertake activities in order to experience the same or similar feelings again. It made them become more proactive. *"I proposed a campaign in the NGO (…) so when I came back, I said that and we had some funds and we were going to see what campaign. I suggested the possibility to do it and we did it" (youth participant from Spain).*



Throughout the programmes young people are given tools to achieve change in their personal life and/ or the direct environment they live in. This increases their confidence in their skills in realizing what they stand for. They feel empowered and proud of being capable of doing things that they thought that they could not, or never experienced before. It increased their involvement in their local communities. The desire to get more involved in society and to contribute positively was mentioned by a large number of participants. The knowledge that participants gained has been spread to others by telling stories, giving examples, sharing pictures and videos. *"I think I can say that all the participants felt the need to be more engaged in society, to bring a positive contribution" (youth participant from Romania).* The programmes encourage participants to get out of their comfort zone, overcoming fears and difficulties. Participants feel encouraged to continue being active, they gain confidence and independence and feel inspired to repeat the experience they had during the exchange in their local environment. They get involved in volunteering work, discover about places for debate or become more active in projects.

The structure of the programmes offers participants the possibility to grow and take a more active role as team leader in a follow-up activity. This increases their sense of ownership and gives them hands on leadership experience. *"I was always very worried about what people thought of me (…). I would rather do nothing, because then they could*
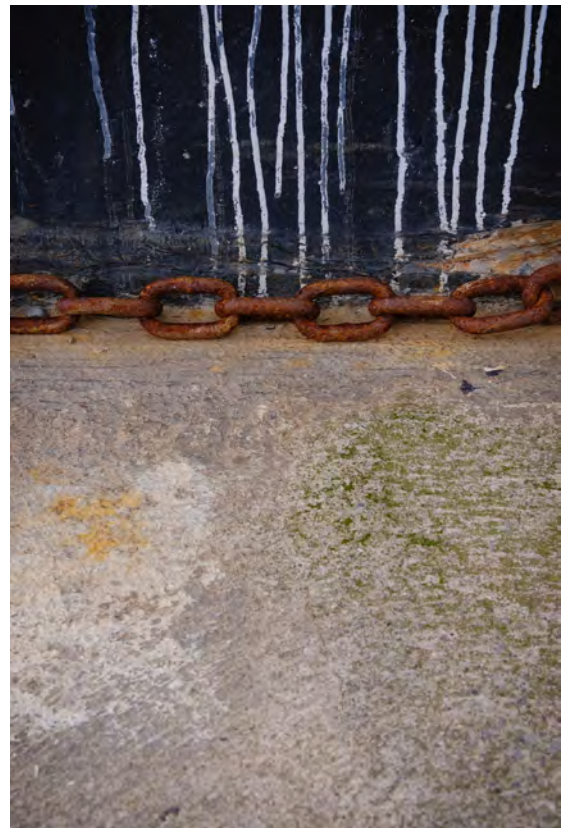
*not condemn me about it either. (...) I am accepted here and I have met nice people here and have been myself. I'm going to do that at home, so I just went on. By setting aside that piece of fear and continuing to develop myself" (youth participant from The Netherlands).* Participants mention that the programmes helped them to bring back old passions. They study and work more and increase their sense of empowerment. In their professional life, participants mention they became more perseverant, committed and engaged in their work. *"I can't stop bringing up the subject and trying to raise awareness of the people I have around. Much more than I would if I had not been in the exchange, because I have more perspective now, more knowledge" (youth participant from Spain).*

## Knowledge and skills



Youth exchanges create a safe environment for participants to have a voice, talk in front of big groups and fight stage fright. *"You can pass a certain barrier and people also give you confidence, (...) It is not a problem if you misspell a verb or don't remember a word in English. Yes that helped a lot!" (youth leader from Romania).*

During exchanges participants get specific information, offered to them through non-formal education methods. Participants mention that the methods make it easier to gain and process the information. During the programmes, knowledge is gained on specific topics, such as LGBT+ rights, non-formal education, no hate speech, migrant rights or children's rights. It was important for participants that the subject related to their life, this could be based on personal or professional interests related to studies or work. In some cases, the subject of the programme was their motivation to participate in the first place.

Participants learned specific skills, such as communication skills. This was done through variety of activities, such as reflections, active listening tasks and as well as presenting some topics, ideas and thoughts. Also, participants learned how to work in a team, how to bond with others, how to set goals and how to work commonly towards a goal. Both personally and professionally, participants grew and learned to work with people of different backgrounds, but also to adapt and to know what their

limits are in teamwork. Besides, the programmes help participants to develop leadership skills. They help young people to find their talents and to feel they can make a change in the world. *"In that moment I felt power that either I could start deciding myself (...) or just keep on swimming and not decide anything" (youth participant from Lithuania).* This process is encouraged through the possibility to observe the leaders in the programmes as role-models. Many respondents felt that the programmes determined them to overcome the fear of public speaking. It made people more confident to express themselves or even to feel the need to speak up.

Meeting with people from different backgrounds and cultures, communicating in another language and learning about topics related to language use makes young people to become aware of what they say and the power of words. They became aware of their use of language. Both in their personal and professional life, participants mention that they choose their words more carefully and they are more conscious before expressing their opinions and feelings *"I'd bring it up to friends and be like 'hey, you shouldn't be saying this, it is really not right'" (youth participant from Ireland).* Participants mention being more conscious in expressing their opinions and feelings. They improve their communication skills by leading discussions, which results in young people feeling more confident in speaking up.

While working in the national and international groups the participants not only learned other languages, they also improved their own mother tongue. *"It helped me be more careful with what the others have to say, if they answer me in a certain way if they are hurt by what I said or it bothers them what I do or say" (youth participant from Romania).*

Youth workers and former participants were expecting to learn more since they took part the second time in a different role, as team leader. They wanted to develop leadership skills and some became more motivated to do more in a sense of taking ownership of their own learning curve by the expectation to developing leadership skills. It increased their interest in reading. Also, participants mention that they got involved in new projects after they improved their English. *"... you also develop a foreign language" (youth participant from Portugal).* Youth workers mention the learning as a big part of their development process. Especially they mentioned learning by doing and learning to make mistakes as important. The non-competitive environment during the exchanges motivates and encourages participants to improve their (English) language skills.

## Increased well-being

The open space that was created throughout the programmes allowed participants to connect with others. Often, respondents mention that the friends they made from different countries were one of the most important things they take home from the exchange. The respondents said that belonging to a group created a safe environment for them to share their feelings and personal stories. *"It was a very safe space and when it was common discussion, best part was to be part of the project and I could freely share my ideas and all people were listening and debating on my ideas"* *(youth participant from Lithuania).* Since the participants have to work together to make the programme succeed, a strong feeling of belonging is created, the support and comfort of the group gives young people the encouragement to make it happen. Also after returning home, young people express their increased wish to spread their gained knowledge in their local communities.

Participants were very happy and thankful to participate; they liked the activities and meeting new people. Thinking back of the programmes, people are feeling nostalgic, especially regarding people they met and the feeling of belonging to the group. The participants also mention going through different kinds of intense emotions, related especially to people and the experiences. This also includes frustration, nervousness or uneasiness. They specifically remember the unique moments when they overcame the differences and became an international group showing their similarities. *"I feel like it was a great set of rules and a safe space set out straight away...when people can connect in a certain set of solidarity, they seem to meet on a level of understanding"* *(youth participant from Ireland).* Going through the same experiences with their peers helped participants to bond with others and increase their empathy. Making new friends in a relatively short period of time increases the confidence of participants, changes their view on existing friendships and the relation with themselves.

The exchanges encourage young people to get away from their everyday life and to overcome insecurities, fears and prejudices in a safe environment. The participants were encouraged to push themselves through their insecurity and out of their comfort zone. When they succeeded it created a sense of confidence and motivation

to look at yourself and your surroundings on a deeper level. *"But for a person, who hasn't participated at all... I don't know, it is maybe similar to explaining what hitch hiking is, others could say "are you nuts to hitch hike" and I think they would say the same about this" (youth participant from Lithuania).* Participants felt empowered and proud of being capable to do things that they thought that they could not do. That power gave them motivation not to stop the potential they discovered.

Some specific moments during the programmes have been mentioned as memorable. Respondents mentioned that through the final event they had the opportunity to share the work they have done with others. The organisation of a final event brought the respondents a feeling of happiness, accomplishment and connection to the local community. *"I think that everyone should try because it is always very difficult to explain what it was for us because it always has different impacts uhhh and I think experiencing is the only way to know" (youth leader from Portugal).*

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research had a twofold aim; providing opportunity for young people to gain experience in doing a research and measuring the impact of the multi-activity programmes. The process of doing research with the young people has been described in the chapter on the participatory research itself. The answer to the question whether the programmes do have an impact can be answered with a clear 'yes'. Following is an overall conclusion that describes the change that occurred among young people, youth workers, youth organisations and the communities they work in on different levels. The literal formulation that was made by the youth researchers is used here. The chapter ends with a reference to the recommendations following the research.

## Conclusions young people

The young people experience impact of the projects they participated in. The impact occurs on different levels:

- Participating in international activities for a lot of people meant stepping out of their comfort zone. On personal level people recognize that after the project they felt more comfortable with themselves, they gained new perspective to deal with their challenges. Due to new friendships, the international environment and the activities participants felt more motivated and empowered to participate in new projects and be more involved locally, spreading knowledge and volunteering.
- Young people gained new communication skills, knowledge, improved their English which can be used at personal and professional level.
- The experience made people reflect on their life, relationships and studies/ careers, and in some cases inspired them to make changes.

## Conclusions youth workers

In the role of supporting and guiding the international youth projects, youth workers improved leadership, communication, facilitation and reflection skills. Furthermore, youth leaders mentioned an increase in organisational, logistical and management skills.

Having experience with non-formal education, and taking part in the work by international partners made youth workers learn and take these skills and topics back to their local youth organisations and community.

Concluding, gaining work experience in an international environment lead youth workers to be more skilled and knowledgeable on different topics which increased their motivation and confidence and that lead them to grow and take on new challenges in their professional career.

## Conclusions youth organisations

According to most organisations participating in multi-activity programmes there was an impact on the organisations in three different levels:

- The context of the organisations: The impact was mostly around visibility and recognition by offering international experiences and thereby attracting the local young people. They had the opportunity to expand their local and international network and form new partnerships to create more initiatives. In this way they are contributing to the development of their own organisations. The organisations implemented new methodologies in their work like combining formal and non-formal education as well as peer education. This is experienced as an enrichment of their services.

- Youth workers: The youth workers gained skills and knowledge, for example in organizing, coordinating projects and facilitating activities. They also mentioned management skills and working with diverse groups. These skills and topics were taken to benefit organisations and their work with the young people.

- Young people: The young people were determined to be proactive and take new initiatives, attend new projects which led them to being more involved in the organisations, for example by volunteering.

## Conclusions local communities

The impact on local communities can be seen on multiple levels:

- The first is the involvement of young people in organizing and promoting new projects and EU opportunities. Secondly, these projects result in more openness of the local community to the different topics of the programmes.

- Furthermore, we see the positive impact in the form of collaboration between organisations through joint projects and network development, which the community can benefit from.
- Non-formal and formal method raised awareness about the importance of peer education.

For 3 out of 12 organisations, the impact in the local reality hasn't happened or was hard to measure. Reasons given for this are they are still waiting for the change to happen or because topics that were dealt with during the programmes were too sensitive for the local community.

## Recommendations

This research has been set up following the principles of non-formal learning, which plays a central role in the work of the youth work organisations involved in this research project. It was the motivation of these organisations to investigate in what way their international non-formal educational programmes have an impact. This was not only initiated by their wish to prove the value of their work, but also to share their lessons learned with other organisations and stakeholders. It is the aim of these organisations to increase the effect of this work. It is part of the important task that youth organisations have in creating an open society in which there is place for everyone. In order to do so, it is important that youth work organisations and youth workers are recognised for the role they have in the positive development and education of young people. For this reason, it has been decided to separately present the recommendations as two independent products.

One set of recommendations focusses on other youth work organisations and aims at increasing the outreach and quality of their international youth work. It has resulted in a set of best practices for future similar projects, helping other youth organizations and stakeholders. This directly contributes to the development of young people, youth workers, youth work organisations and their local communities. These recommendations are presented as webstory with a collection of best practices.

The second set of recommendations is a list of lessons learned to show the impact of non-formal Erasmus+ youth programs in order to gain more support from stakeholders and policymakers. This is made available in an exhibition and corresponding booklet and aims at local, national and European stakeholders and policy makers to gain more knowledge and recognition of international youth work. Each youth work organisation uses the recommendations during dissemination events organised in their local communities.

Both sets of recommendations are published online and will be available for at least five years. They can be used by youth work organisations, stakeholders and policymakers throughout Europe. The recommendations and the full research report are freely available on the QR code in the below:

# SUCCESS FACTORS AND LIMITATIONS

## From participant to researcher

Whereas at the beginning the youth researchers mainly regarded themselves as 'young people doing a research', not as 'youth researchers doing the work', this changed throughout the process. They felt more and more committed to their work and owners over the research. The motivation of the youth researchers to carry out the research has been remarkable. In the end, when the results were handed over to the project managers, it became clear that they had become authentic researchers themselves. It was hard on them 'to let their baby go'. They felt responsible for the outcomes and were worried what would be done with it. This engagement and common responsibility for the research can be written down to a couple of main elements that were part of the process. This paragraph first describes the limitations of the research and ends with an overview of the main elements to which the success of the research can be written down to.

## Limitations

Besides the positive experiences with this research, there are a number of limitations that influence the outcomes of the research. They are mainly related to the way the research has been set up.

- Due to the long commitment (total of ten months) it hasn't been possible for the whole group of youth researchers to stay involved till the end. About one fourth of the initial group of 21 youth researchers dropped out along the way. This was mostly because of personal reasons; people were travelling, found a job or realised it took up more time than expected and needed to focus their energy on other issues. The way each national group has dealt with this is different. Some groups found a replacement; others divided the work over the remaining members. The Spanish team suffered most with this problem; they did not have any youth researchers present at the last training course. The drop-out of youth researchers led to a feeling of distress among the other youth researchers and newcomers requested extra time in order to catch up.
- The research group consisted of an international team coming from six different countries. This meant that in between the training courses it was not possible to meet in person and discuss issues they faced. To avoid misunderstandings as much as possible, during each training course a prospect was made of possible barriers they could face. Based on these foreseen problems, the leading researcher made a couple of 'how to-

documents' to help the researchers in their work. When it happened that, once home, unforeseen problems appeared, the researchers would first deal and discuss these problems in the national groups. This approach has led that in some cases issues have been dealt differently within the various national groups.

- The working language during the research was English. Although all researchers were fluent in English, for all of them (except for the Irish group) it was not their mother tongue. It was therefore decided that all researchers would conduct the interviews in their own language. This meant that all transcripts needed to be translated. It is clear that some nuances got 'lost in translation'.

- In order to ensure cross reviewing, the researchers have worked with each other's material during the labelling process. This had as an advantage that different perspectives were included in the analysis of the results. To ensure conformity in dealing with the data, a 'dictionary' was made for the main terminology that was used in labelling. Though, with a research of this scope, it is possible that the cross reviewing has caused different interpretations of the data. It can be that similar answers from respondents are placed in different categories.

- In a previous stage of the project, a decision had been made to use an art-based research method in combination with interviews. All respondents were asked to make an art piece that represented the impact of their participation in the programmes. It was a conscious choice the youth researchers made, wanting to give possibility to all respondents to express themselves creatively. Also, it was expected that the preparation and making of the art pieces would contribute to reviving their memories. However, for some respondents the request for an art piece led to a rejection to participate in the interviews. They didn't feel comfortable in making 'art'. It is unknown to what extent the loss of these respondents has influenced the results.

- The project was set up with a team of youth researchers that was facilitated by a team of project managers. The project managers are representatives of the organisations involved. An important part of their role is to disseminate the results after the research is finished. The researchers were conducting the research independently under the guidance of the leading researcher and the senior youth worker. The two teams did meet in between, some were even colleagues. It is possible that the exchange of needs, information or thoughts has influenced the results.

## Success factors

The research, as it has been conducted, is unique in itself. Where participatory youth research has its challenges, the international character of this research made it even more challenging. As can be read in this report, the level of participation and decision making of the young people has been to the highest level possible. Within a relative short timeframe (ten months) and with only three physical meetings, the research group has succeeded to collect a large amount of data, label and analyse it. Thanks to group bonding and common goals the research group reached an outstanding result. The following list gives just a couple of elements that contributed to this success.

- In this research non-formal and formal education organisations worked together. The team of youth researchers had a very formal and concrete task: do conduct a research within a period of ten months following research guidelines. Though, the way of cooperating and the process of decision-making throughout the research have been non-formal in nature. The collaboration of these two fields of expertise has been a challenge at times, but in the end it has proven to be a fruitful cooperation. The innovative participatory research method needed both formal and non-formal working styles. The youth work organisations that use non-formal education in their work on the one hand, would not have been able to conduct a research this scope. The research group of Saxion, on the other hand could not have succeeded doing a participatory youth research in an international context without the cooperation of the youth work organisations.

- The youth researchers joined this research with a large intrinsic interest in the topic. From the start they were curious to know, to learn and eager to prove what the impact of the multi-activity programmes is on young people, youth workers, youth organisations and the local communities. Their motivation has been cherished throughout the process. Initiated by the non-formal way of working, there has been continuous trust, confidence and support in the capabilities and qualities of the youth researchers. This encouraged them to take up the task and fulfil it till the end.

- In making this research work, the interpersonal relationships were very important. The bond that the youth researchers had with each other strengthened their motivation and commitment. When the work became harder and deadlines were tight, it was the group spirit that supported the youth researchers to continue and work hard so together they could reach the

outcome. The senior youth worker has intensively invested in this bonding and in proceeding this group dynamics. The equal sharing of the work, together with clear deadlines and personal support were conditions that helped in keeping up the motivation. In difficult moments, when fellow researchers dropped out or the youth researchers did not oversee all the steps of the research, they had to trust the team and that everyone would do their part. The communication and reflection in the national teams strongly helped in overcoming these challenges. The specific attention to group bonding contributed highly to the engagement of the youth researchers.

- The youth researchers had their own say in how to organise the training courses. The non-formal working method created a set of requirements that were supportive in making the youth researchers feel distinctly owner of the whole process and the possible outcomes. Conditions were set in which researchers boosted their confidence and felt comfortable to get out of their comfort zone. Examples of interventions that contribute to this process are: during every training course there has been ample time for discussion. Making the decisions as a group made it easier for individuals to let go of their ego and aim for the common goals. It helped the youth researchers in making the research fully theirs.

Based on the experiences in this research it can be concluded that for participatory youth research to succeed, the attitude of all persons involved is decisive. Emphasis should be placed on personal relations, common goals and mutual dependence in making the project succeed. A big part of the success of this research lies in the mutual trust that all researchers had during the course of the research.

# THE PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONS

## The team of youth researchers

They started off with their individual aspirations, fears and expectations, in the end they became one proud research team that trusted each other in every step of the research. Here they are in alphabetical order:

Razvan Mihai Bacanu, Francisco Barros, Gabrielė Bartkutė, Margriet Braun, Celine Brinkman, Lindi ter Brugge, Nina Buckley, André Costa, Hélder Costa, Eric Cunningham, Jonay García Rodríguez, Ana Maria Gongadze Gongvadze, Andra Iulia Grigore, Esther Haro, Sanne van den Heuvel (leading researcher), Ran Hogeweg, Svajonė Leleikaitė, Mark McMahon, Vika Matuzaite, Veerle Meijer, Lucas Pérez Soto, Beatrice Poti, Enrique Sánchez Ochoa, Elena Selaru, Anita Silva, Manon Vaanholt, Giedrė Valčiukaitė, Carly Weafer.

## Description of the organisations

This project was started by the partnership of 6 youth work organisations that have been working together for a couple of years. Thanks to their involvement and support this project has become possible. The organisations shortly introduce themselves:

- Associata Young Initiative (Romania): What we do can be summarised in 4 words that motivate us every day: empowering people through education. We believe that strong education is the key to an open, more equal and developed society, focusing on 3 main areas of work: Social, Youth and NGO development.

- EuropImpulse (Spain): The EUROPIMPULSE project stems from the need to train civil society organisations on European funding and cooperation. The project coordinates a network of European experts in the fields of education, social innovation, culture and sustainable development. EUROPIMPULSE is developed through 2 complementary axes: EUROPIMPULSE TRAINING: development of methodologies, resources and training tools (both online and in-person) on European projects design and management; and EUROPIMPULSE NETWORK: fostering the collaboration, the exchange of experiences and the incubation of innovative European projects. Since 2018 we are developing the ERASMUS CREATIVE HUB programme with the support of the University of Valencia Science Park.

- Talk About Youth Project (Ireland): St. Andrew's Talk About Youth Project was established in December 1994 and has flourished and developed many youth programmes since it was established. The project has, and continues striving to provide, a caring professional youth service for the young people of the South east inner city area of Dublin (Pearse Street area). We aim to provide a safe, non-threatening environment where young people can meet and socialise, build on their self-esteem, develop their social skills and begin to take responsibility for shaping their own lives. We believe in young people and their ability and that every young person has something to offer. We recognise the importance of listening to the voice of young people and their community in a non-judgemental way.

- Associacao Juventude Vila Fonche (Portugal): The Youth of Vila Fonche is a youth association and social institution that focuses its daily work on children and young people. With this target audience in mind, we are committed to providing them with healthy leisure time that promotes true personal and social development. We have developed several projects under the Erasmus+ programme, among them European Voluntary Service, Youth Exchanges, Youth Worker Training, Seminars and capacity building activities.

- Atviras jaunimo centras (Lithuania): Vilnius Open Youth Center "Mes" is a place where every young person will find a place for himself. The mission of "Mes" is to organize an open and safe space for young people and youth activities. Its functions are to create conditions for young people to acquire new social skills, taking into account the needs and interests of young people, to prevent crime, harmful habits and other psycho-social problems and to advise young people on issues of concern to them.

- Stichting The Youth Company (The Netherlands): The Youth Company offers a platform for young people, where the discovery and development of talents, skills and competencies are key goals. The Youth Company stimulates young people to take the lead in their own learning. Therefore our methods are based on non-formal education. Learning takes place amongst youth in The Netherlands or in international peer groups. This approach offers a valuable supplement to formal education, democratic initiatives and to a variety of youth services. We are happy to encourage young people to take initiative in their personal and professional growth and to increase their impact on society in this way. We offer an international learning environment that challenges young people who are curious, creative, enterprising and engaged.

- Research group Social Work, Saxion University of Applied Sciences (The Netherlands): Within Saxion University of Applied Sciences, the research group Social Work is closely related to the Bachelor and Master program respectively 'Social Work' and 'Healthcare and Social Work'. Research is focused on three lines: 1. Welfare & Society (working in the neighborhood) 2. Care (for people with long-term care needs) 3. Youth (working in the broad youth domain). In each line focus lies on the mode of action for professionals and professionalization of social workers. Beside this focus there are various substantive themes, such as high-conflict divorces, children in poverty, community building, cooperation between professionals and informal caregivers.

# REFERENCES

Berg Powers, C., Allaman, E. (2012). How Participatory Action Research Can Promote Social Change And Help Youth Development. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256044307_How_Participatory_Action_Research_Can_Promote_Social_Change_and_Help_Youth_Development [accessed 10 March 2019]

Brunner, S. (2016). Impact compendium on youth exchange. An overview of scientific research results on the impact of intercultural exchanges. Bern: INTERMUNDO

Bryman, A. (2008). Social research methods. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Dedding, C., Jurrius, K., Moonen, X. and Rutjes, L. (2013). Kinderen en jongeren actief in wetenschappelijk onderzoek: ethiek, methoden en resultaten van onderzoek met en door jeugd. Houten: LannooCampus

Delgado, M. (2006). Designs and Methods for Youth-Led Research. London: Sage Publications, Inc.

EU-CoE Youth Partnership (2011). Pathways 2.0 towards recognition of non-formal learning/education and of youth work in Europe. Strasbourg and Brussels

European Commission (2008). Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - An EU Strategy for Youth: Investing and Empowering - A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities {SEC(2009) 545} {SEC(2009) 546} {SEC(2009) 548} {SEC(2009) 549} /* COM/2009/0200 final */

European Commission (2019) Erasmus+ [Online]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node_en (Accessed 22 January 2019)

Hart, R.A. (1992). Children's participation. From tokenism to citizenship. In: Innocenti Essays, No. 4. Italy: UNICEF International Child Development Centre

Jurrius, K. (2012). Uit de spagaat! Naar een kwaliteitsraamwerk voor Participatief Jongeren Onderzoek. Amsterdam: Ipskamp Drukkers B.V.

Kara, H. (2015). Creative research methods in the social sciences. Bristol: Policy Press

Souto-Otero, M., Ulicna, D., Schaepkens, L., Bognar, V. (2012). Study on the impact of Non-Formal Education in youth organisations on young people's employability. European Youth Forum

Studulski, F., van Velzen, T., Hoogenboom, A. (2018). Leren in de 21e eeuw. gemotiveerd, onderzoekend en actief. Utrecht: Sardes

The Youth Company (2019) Learning the non-formal way [Online]. Available at: https://www.theyouthcompany.nl/en/international-education-programmes/ (Accessed 22 January 2019)

UN General Assembly (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations. Treaty Series, vol. 1577, p. 3. Available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38f0.html [accessed 10 March 2019]

ZonMw (2018). Participatief onderzoek met jongeren en ouders. Hoe creeer je betekenisvolle samenwerking? Available at: https://disabilitystudies.nl/sites/disabilitystudies.nl/files/

zonmw_folder_participatie_ii_web.pdf [accessed 10 March 2019]