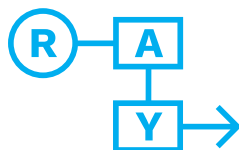


**2015
–
2018**



**Research-based
analysis of European
youth programmes**

Policy Report

Written by
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**RAY-
LTE**

**Long-term
effects of
Erasmus+
Youth in Action
on participation
and citizenship**

**Main
findings**

'Erasmus+ Youth in Action' (E+/YiA) is part of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union supporting international projects in the youth field. The 'Research-based Analysis of Erasmus+ Youth in Action' (RAY) is a research programme conducted by the RAY Network, which includes the National Agencies of Erasmus+ Youth in Action and their research partners in currently 34 countries*.

This RAY policy report on long-term effects of Erasmus+ Youth in Action on participation and citizenship (RAY LTE) is based on the final transnational analysis of the results from surveys and interviews between 2015 and 2018 with project participants and project leaders/team members involved in E+/YiA projects.

The study was designed and implemented by the Institute of Educational Science at the University of Innsbruck and the Generation and Educational Science Institute in Austria in cooperation with the RAY Network partners in Austria^o, Czechia^o, Estonia^o, Finland^o, Germany^o, Hungary^o, Italy, Malta^o, Slovenia^o and Sweden. It was co-funded within the Transnational Cooperation Activities (TCA) of E+/YiA.

* As of September 2019: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom.

^o Members of the RAY LTE research project working group



Where available, national research reports can be requested from the respective National Agencies and their research partners



www.researchyouth.net/network

Further RAY publications can be retrieved from



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Design by Mursal Nasr and Paula Klattenhoff



Policy Report



Long-term effects of
Erasmus+ Youth in
Action on participation
and citizenship

Main findings from
interviews and surveys
between 2015 and 2018

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

1 – INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2 – MAIN FINDINGS

2.1 Values and attitudes

2.2 Knowledge

2.3 Skills

2.4 Practice

2.5 Learning for participation and active citizenship

3 – RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Recommendations for project level

3.2 Recommendations for programme level

TRENT

..... **8**

..... **11**

14

21

25

29

35

..... **39**

39

45

ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATIONS

E+	European Union Programme Erasmus+ (2014-2020)
E+/YiA	Erasmus+ Youth in Action (2014-2020)
EU	European Union
FE	Formal education
FL	Formal learning
NA	National Agency
NFE	Non-formal education
NFL	Non-formal learning
ICL	Intercultural learning
LGBTQI*	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex or other gender identity
LTE	RAY research project on long-term effects of E+/YiA on participation and citizenship
PL	Project leaders/members of project teams: Youth workers, youth leaders, trainers or other actors who prepared and implemented YiA projects for/with young people or youth workers/leaders, at least in an education/socio-pedagogic function, but frequently also with an organisational function; normally, in particular in the case of projects with participants from two or more different countries, these projects are prepared and implemented by project teams with two or more project leaders.
PP	Project participants: Youth workers, youth leaders, teachers or other actors who attended projects/training/activity within E+/YiA for/with youth workers/leaders, at least in an education/socio-pedagogic function, but frequently also with an organisational function.
RAY	Research-based Analysis of Erasmus+ Youth in Action. The RAY Network consists of the Youth in Action National Agencies and their research partners involved in the RAY project.
YiA	European Union Programme ‘Youth in Action’ (2007-2013) – the predecessor of Erasmus+
YPFO	Young people with fewer opportunities
YPSN	Young people with special needs

DEFINITIONS

DEFINITIONS

Activity start/end	The dates when, within a funded project, the core activity starts/ends, for example a youth worker mobility (when youth workers from different countries meet in one country), a seminar, a training course, etc.
Project start/end	The dates when a funded project starts/ends; the duration of a project is normally much longer than that of the core activity (see activity start/end) – the project also includes the preparation of and the follow-up to the core activity.
Residence/home country	Country of residence at the beginning of the project (the country of the partner organisation who the participant was part of)
Funding country	Country in which a project was funded through the respective National Agency of E+/YiA
Venue country	Country in which one or more core activities within a project – in particular meetings of young people or of youth workers/leaders (in most cases from different countries of origin) – took place; also referred to as ‘hosting country’
Hosting country	Country in which one or more core activities within a project – in particular meetings of young people or of youth workers/leaders (in most cases from different countries of origin) – took place; also referred to as ‘venue country’
Sending	This refers to PP or PL who came from a ‘sending’ partner, i.e., they went to another country for their project.
Hosting	This refers to PP or PL who came from a ‘hosting’ partner, i.e., they were involved in a project taking place in their country of residence.
+ / ++	Sum of positive responses (‘agree’ plus ‘strongly agree’)
- / --	Sum of negative responses (‘disagree’ plus ‘strongly disagree’)

1 – INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

A main objective of the Erasmus+ Programme in the field of youth is the promotion of active citizenship and participation in democratic life in Europe.¹ “Young people and their ability to participate actively in society, in line with the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty”², should be empowered. Mobility projects should “support learners in the acquisition of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences) with a view to improving ... their involvement as considerate and active citizens in society”.³ Therefore, this study aims to explore long-term effects of participation in E+/YiA on participants and project leaders, with a particular focus on active citizenship and participation in society and in democratic life.

This aim is underpinned by two specific research questions:

- How does E+/YiA contribute to the development of citizenship competence and the ability to participate as active citizens?⁴
- What are long-term effects related to participation and active citizenship on participants and project leaders resulting from their involvement in E+/YiA?

In accordance with Hoskins and others, competence is defined as a “complex combination of knowledge, skills, understanding, values, attitudes and desire which lead to effective, embodied human action in the world, in a particular domain.”⁵ In line with the existing body of research on the subject⁶, knowledge, skills, values and attitudes as four main areas and complemented by identity⁷, are operationalised in concrete indicators. The identity of the individual is also taken into account, specifically looking into the sense of national identity of the respondents⁸ as well as of their allegiance to their community, their country, the European Union, Europe and beyond.

1 Furthermore, a number of other specific objectives of E+/YiA can also be linked to active citizenship and participation in civil society and democratic life, e.g. fostering solidarity, respect for cultural diversity or inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities or special needs as well as working against discrimination, intolerance, racism and xenophobia. Indirectly, such links can also be found for objectives related to capacity building, quality development and European cooperation in the youth field as well as for objectives related to education and work.

2 Erasmus+ Programme Guide, Version 2 (2019): 15/01/2019: 5

3 op. cit.: 31

4 In particular in the framework of youth exchanges, European voluntary service projects, structured dialogue projects (only projects funded in a decentralised way by National Agencies) and youth worker mobility projects.

5 Hoskins & Crick 2008a: 4; cf. Crick in Hoskins & Crick 2008b: 313

6 Hoskins et. al 2006; Hoskins et. al 2008; Hoskins in Hoskins & Crick 2008b

7 Hoskins & Crick 2008a: 8

8 cf. Hoskins & Crick 2008a: 8

In the area of citizenship practice, habits and activities connected to being an active citizen are explored, such as voting, participating in a peaceful demonstration, signing a petition etc. represents political participation. Keeping oneself informed about social and political affairs, discussing social and political issues, living in an environmentally friendly way, volunteering in the interest of the community, engaging in civil society organisations or acting as citizen responsibly in the closer or wider communities they feel being part of etc. represents other ways of participation in society. As for political participation, conventional and non-conventional political participation are taken into account⁹. Conventional political participation includes voting and running for an office. Non-conventional political participation aims at activities such as signing a petition, participating in demonstrations, making donations etc.¹⁰

The outlined theory helps to capture the very complex phenomena of participation, active citizenship and citizenship competence. The development of these has to be seen as a life-long and life-wide process,

which include a variety of influences at play. Therefore, the participation in an E+/YiA project has to be taken as one potential influence alongside others.

The research questions are addressed through a mixed method approach using quantitative and qualitative social research methods. Standardised multilingual online surveys were conducted with project participants and project leaders/team members¹¹ as well as with a control group¹² at four stages: before the core activity/the intensive phase of the project¹³, two to three months after the end of the activity, one year after the end of the activity and again two to three years after the end of the activity. At each of the four stages ('survey waves' or 'measurements'), participants and project leaders were asked the same questions, including the same answer items in order to assess their participation/citizenship competences and practices in each survey wave and,

9 cf. Marquart-Pyatt 2013, Hoskins & Mascherini 2008

10 Tables 3 and 4 in the LTE Research Report (2019) show all items of the different main areas as well as the indexes created for the quantitative data analysis.

11 Previous RAY surveys indicate that also project leaders/team members develop citizenship competences through their involvement in YiA projects. They participated in the same surveys as project PP, with some adaptation to their specific role.

12 The control group was composed of young people with characteristics as similar as possible to those of the test group, but NOT going through an experience similar to a E+/YiA project during the study.

13 In the case of a youth exchange, the 'activity'/'intensive phase' is the international encounter; in the case of an EVS, this would be the stay abroad; in the case of a training activity, this would be a seminar/workshop; etc.

thus, the change between the surveys. In addition, questions related to their profile and previous activities outside the project context were also addressed.

In parallel, complimentary qualitative interviews were conducted at three different stages: before the core activity/the intensive phase of the project, one year after its end and again two to three years after its end. There were no interviews two to three months after the activity (in parallel to the second survey wave) and this was taken into account when looking at the results of the two research approaches together.

In addition, a conference was held in Strasbourg in May 2018 that brought together project participants who had been interviewed, project leaders/team members of projects as well as researchers and representatives of E+/YiA National Agencies involved in this study. In total around 90 people attended the conference, in which interim findings of the study were presented and discussed. The conference also provided a space for dialogue between researchers and the actors involved in the projects explored through this study, thus becoming part of the research process and contributing to the research findings.

Interviews and surveys took place between 2015 and 2018. Before the fourth survey and the third interview

were implemented in autumn and winter 2018, an interim report was published in May 2018. The interim report presented the results of the first, second and third survey waves as well as of the first and second interviews.

This study involving ten RAY partners is complementary to and intended to be a thematic deepening of the Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of Youth in Action, which is the main activity of the RAY Network from 2009 to present.¹⁴ These results aim to contribute to practice development, improve the implementation of E+/YiA and the development of the next programme generation.¹⁵

¹⁴ Bammer, Fennes & Karsten 2017.

¹⁵ For detailed information about the methodology of the study see Appendix A – Methodology of the LTE Research Report (2019).

2 – MAIN FINDINGS

This policy report presents conclusions that address the effects of projects funded through E+/YiA on competence and practice development with respect to active citizenship and participation in civil society and democratic and political life. In line with the background outlined above, the report addresses key elements of participation and citizenship competence (values, attitudes, knowledge and skills) and participation and citizenship practice, which are interrelated and overlapping due to the complexity of the researched phenomena.

In this report, we provide a synopsis of the results of both quantitative and qualitative research strands. Both strands focus on the same subject; they share the basic structure with the abovementioned main areas of participation and citizenship competence and practice and were implemented in parallel. The synopsis has been carried out with the required care, which presents synergies or contradictions in possible interpretations, not least because there are surveys at four stages and interviews at three stages.¹⁶

In summary, E+/YiA projects do exhibit effects on their participants in certain areas related to participation and active citizenship. This is elaborated below in more detail.

Before diving in, the RAY transnational research team and the authors of this report would like to express their appreciation to everyone who contributed to the successful implementation of this research project. In particular, many thanks to the research project partners and those who contributed to the research and the reports at national level: Adele Tinaburri, Airi-Alina Allaste, Arthur Drexler, Barbara Tham, Emma Pulkkinen, Eva Feldmann-Wojtachnia Lars Norqvist, Marti Taru, Maurizio Merico, Miha Zimšek, Nadia Crescenzo, Nina Vombergar, Serena Quarta, Siru Korkkala, Suzanne Gatt, Szilvia Szombathely and Tomasž Deželan.

Synopsis of the findings from qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys

The responses to the surveys and interviews before the project show relatively high levels for most areas of participation and citizenship competence and practice, partly higher than the control group. This suggests that participants in E+/YiA projects are already quite competent and engaged in civil society and democratic life before the project.

¹⁶ See chapter 1 and Appendix A – Methodology of the LTE Research Report (2019).

An increased knowledge relevant for participation and active citizenship resulting from project participation can be observed, in particular on how to engage in civil society as well as environmental protection and sustainable development. Furthermore, an increased knowledge is visible for various groups of participants.

Development of participation and citizenship skills resulting from the project participation can also be observed, in particular communication, negotiation and cooperation skills, which are relevant for participation and active citizenship. There are indications that these skills are developed mutually with the increased knowledge outlined above.

The three interview waves also indicate a development of various values inherent to democracy and the attitudes relevant for participation and citizenship, in particular through an increased willingness to contribute to society, an increased interest for social and political issues, as well as protection of the environment and sustainable development.

The three interview waves also show that the projects result in an increased participation in civil society and democratic life for various groups of participants.

For most areas of participation and citizenship competence and practice, which show an increase as outlined above, the respective developments are observed mostly for participants in projects focussing on or explicitly addressing participation and citizenship.

For some areas of participation and citizenship competence and practice, an increase resulting from the project can be observed for various sub-groups. On the one hand, these sub-groups include participants who have a higher educational achievement or are more experienced with participation and citizenship. This could be interpreted as a ‘Matthew effect’ – those who are already competent are able to increase their competences more than others. On the other hand, these sub-groups also include participants who are less experienced, they did not attend any special courses on this subject or they participated in E+/YiA for the first time. This indicates that young people with fewer opportunities also benefit from E+/YiA projects.

There is strong evidence for these findings described above, which show an increase of levels for some areas of participation and citizenship competence between the surveys before and two to three months after the project. These findings do not appear for the control group and are

persistent throughout the surveys waves. This indicates participants' self-perceptions of their competences have increased through their project participation. This is verified through some questions of the RAY LTE surveys, as well as other RAY research projects, which take a cross-sectional research approach (i.e. RAY Monitoring surveys).

For some areas of participation and citizenship competence and practice, the qualitative interviews show a sustainable increase. In most cases, the increase is still present two to three years after the project, however it is not confirmed by the analysis of the surveys, at least not through a statistically significant increase. This is the case, for example, for participation and citizenship values and attitudes as well as for participation and citizenship practice. A possible explanation is that the changes observed in the interviews are too small or did not apply to enough participants to be measured through the surveys. Another possible explanation is that the self-assessment of the participants was already very high before the project for a number of areas (see above) and could hardly be increased.

There are some examples in the interviews of participants who were able to apply acquired new skills or knowledge when back at home or

started to engage in civil society because their respective attitude was fostered through the project. However, there are also statements of participants who were not able to follow up on what they had learnt and experienced in the project. This was due to their social environment at home (friends, colleagues in their organisation or at work etc.) whom did not understand their interest in becoming more engaged in society and democratic life, or the participants simply did not find like-minded people. The empowerment and the self-perception to be able to be an active citizen gained through the project were lost in this way.

Whilst some participants in the interviews report an increased engagement in participation and citizenship, there are also participants who engaged less in civil society two to three years after the project. This was due to a transition into a new phase of their lives, in particular focusing on education, training, work etc. or giving priority to their children, family or partners. In the case of general participation in civil society, this decrease of engagement becomes visible also in the analysis of the surveys. This might of course also be the case for young people not participating in E+/YiA, but collecting the respective data was beyond the scope of this project.

This is just one example of influences external to the E+/YiA projects, which participants are experiencing. During the up to three years between the first and last interview, participants simply became older. Over time, they most likely had other powerful experiences and developed their identity, attitudes, interests, competences, knowledge, skills and their way of living. All of these factors can influence the engagement of the interviewees in civil society and democratic life. Additionally, the interviews also show that social and political developments play a role. Interview partners repeatedly mention refugee movement, Brexit as well as the growth of extremist parties and movements. These topics influence their attitude with respect to participation and active citizenship, sometimes towards increased motivation and engagement, and sometimes towards resignation.

With regard to approaches, contexts, settings, learning methods and activities that contributed to the development of participation and citizenship competence and practice, participants indicate that the learning through experiences in and related to the projects was stronger than the learning through experiences after and with no link to the E+/YiA project, such as studies, work, activities with peers and other projects. This suggests that the measured ef-

fects are likely to be caused by the E+/YiA projects. The responses also show that non-formal and informal learning played a prominent role in developing participation and citizenship competence and practice. In particular, peer learning in informal settings, the participatory approach applied in the projects, experiential learning and learning by doing, applying competences developed during and after the project, and reflection on the project experience were indicated in responses.

In the following sections, the research findings with respect to values and attitudes, knowledge, skills and practice are elaborated in more detail.

2.1 VALUES AND ATTITUDES

‘Democracy values’¹⁷

The quantitative and qualitative study both show similar tendencies and can be interpreted similarly with respect to democracy values shared by the participants.

In the first wave of surveys before project participation, respondents score rather high in the ‘democracy values’ index¹⁸, which includes

¹⁷ Values, which are inherent to democracy – in the following referred to as ‘democracy values’; see Appendix A – Methodology.

¹⁸ The responses show rather high median levels around 8 on an eleven-point scale between 0 and 10.

among others, the importance of voting, freedom of assembly, gender equality, equal rights, solidarity etc.¹⁹ Most interviewees express a high awareness and appreciation of democracy in their first interviews, they mostly indicate the importance of voting, equality, solidarity or freedom as values that are relevant to them. The high level of democracy and values inherent in the responses could be explained by the socialisation of the participants in states with stable democracies and thus, the respective values that are learnt through the obligations and rights linked with democracy. Likewise, attendees of the Strasbourg Conference (see chapter 2) referred to the profile of ‘typical’ E+/YiA participants as strongly convinced democrats and informed active citizens whom take part in projects in order to follow up on their social and political interest and/or engagement. As can be seen from the interviews, this type of participant indeed exists. However there are also young people who exhibit other motivations for participating in E+/YiA projects, such as getting to know new people, going abroad, gaining new inspirations or bridging time until their studies commence. As shown below, the interest of participants in social and political issues

ranges from ‘very interested’ to ‘not interested at all’. Therefore, a mixture of young people can be assumed to be part of the participant sample, and mostly share a basic approval of democracy and ‘democracy values’ due to their background as citizens of democratic states.

Throughout the entire measurement period, the results for ‘democracy values’ were the same. Due to the low numbers of units of analysis, it is not possible to calculate ‘democracy values’ scores for the control group. In contrast, a comparison can be presented with project leaders, who are involved in the projects not only in different roles than the participants, but also (as can be seen in Figure 9) during later stages of their lives. Yet the levels of ‘democracy values’, as measured by the index in this study, do not differ between the participant and project leader samples across any of the survey waves. In other words, the participants are just as developed in terms of the ‘democracy values’ as the project leaders who take up the role as their educators.

The analysis of the second interviews, around one year after the project, shows that many interviewees report a revival or renewal of their previous or existing awareness with respect to many single ‘democracy values’, such as the protection of human rights or the principle to always see

¹⁹ Similarly, the indexes ‘fairness towards the state’ and ‘fairness towards the world’ show rather high median levels around 8 on an eleven-point scale between 0 and 10.

people in the centre of a democratic state. This happens by discussing or applying these values in the project. Additionally, practical experiences contribute to the awareness-raising process. Some participants report of their experiences in project venue countries that do not fully comply to democratic achievements; some participants meet people in their project who come from such countries and others get to know minorities, for whom democratic rights have only a limited meaning in their everyday life.

There is no visible effect in the third interviews with regard to the slightly stronger awareness of democracy and ‘democracy values’ found in the second interviews. Nevertheless, it can be stated that the interviewees are still aware that the project showed them how essential ‘democracy values’ are.

From the synopsis of the results of quantitative and qualitative research with respect to ‘democracy values’, it could be assumed that the effects found in the interviews are too small to appear in the instrument of a survey. ‘Small’ in this context refers to the fact that existing values are taken up and are renewed, but no new values are developed. Furthermore, the appreciation of ‘democracy values’ is already high before the project participation, a further increase

seems to be less likely than in cases where the values would have been at a lower level before the project. Within this context, values are deeply rooted and profound and therefore, rather stable. As can be seen in the interviews, even impressive events such as radical political developments or refugee movements during the research project period leads to a fostered awareness of democracy values only in a few cases. Finally, the interviews before the activity show that very young participants in particular have problems articulating values that are important to them. The term or concept of values is too abstract for them, and respectively they have not yet reflected on this question from a meta-level. Also, rather young respondents of the online surveys perhaps had similar problems answering the value-related questions. Whilst in conversation with the interviewer the meaning of terms could potentially be clarified, the respondents of the online survey only had the text of the questionnaire itself to rely on.

Attitudes related to participation and citizenship

In the quantitative study, an index ‘Responsibility for the world’ combined items referring to attitudes with respect to participation and citizenship. In general, the measured median levels of the ‘responsibility for the world’ index are again rath-

er high in the participant sample, around 7.0²⁰ in all four survey waves with constant levels across gender, age, education and other background variables. The control group exhibits the same characteristic.

In the first interview, almost all interviewees express their conviction, that it is important and desirable that everyone feels responsible for and contributes to society and politics, regardless of whether they practice it or not. According to the interviewees, a relatively small number of projects explicitly addressed the topics of participation and citizenship. In the second interview, participants primarily from these project report that they were influenced positively by their project with respect to their attitude towards participation and active citizenship. This indicates that these attitudes are primarily developed in projects with a focus on participation and citizenship. The reported positive effects include a fostered willingness to give something back to society, a strengthened appreciation of being informed and bringing facts into debates. Two to three years after the project, and in accordance with the results of the second interview, small effects of the E+/YiA projects on the understanding and appreciation of

participation and active citizenship become apparent. A few interviewees report in the third interview, that as a result of the project, they started to think more about what it means to be an active citizen. The effects of the project on several interviewees on their appreciation of participation and citizenship described in the second interview are confirmed by several of them in the third interview. They are encouraged to have a more proactive attitude towards society and the community.

Concerning attitude towards participation and active citizenship, the quantitative findings could be interpreted that participants of E+/YiA projects are not dissimilar to other young people in terms of levels or development of this particular attitude area. However, the synopsis of the findings of the qualitative research shows effects for some participants and offers a more detailed picture, which is similar to that in 'democracy values'. The qualitative findings might be too subtle or limited within a too small number of participants to be detected via the objective questions in the surveys. Furthermore, and as indicated above, it is rather difficult to influence attitudes and values, particularly within a comparatively short project.

As seen in the second and third interviews, E+/YiA projects can convey

20 On an eleven-point scale between 0 and 10.

an idea of what participation and active citizenship mean, whereby (additionally) a learning effect through being asked about this in three interviews must be assumed.

The project leader sample shows rather high median levels between 8.0 and 8.7 across all survey waves both in general and in detailed analyses of subgroups. No effect could be observed through the quantitative surveys.

Interest in social, political, economic and European issues

Whilst the respondents of the survey scored rather high in the area of ‘Interest in social, political, economic and European issues’ (as index named ‘Interest in the world’) before the project, the answers of the interviewees²¹ did not show such a consistent picture. Their answers range from ‘very interested’ to ‘not interested at all’. Findings in the qualitative study show that it was considerably hard for very young participants to talk about their values and attitudes with respect to their personal preferences and in general. According to these findings, perhaps very young respondents of the surveys had problems to clearly understand the meaning of ‘Interest

in social, political, economic and European issues’ and rated themselves too high. Similarly, it could also be assumed that they may have thought the item ‘Interest in social issues’ referred to their social life in the sense of meeting friends, going out etc. This is not unlikely since a finding of the qualitative study reveals that most participants are eager to talk about and discuss youth life, youth culture and youth affairs in general, but mostly with references to their own and their friends’ everyday lives. This could be an explanation on the one hand, for the rather high scores the respondents gave in the area of ‘interest in the world’ in the quantitative study, and on the other hand for the heterogeneous findings with regard to respective interests in the qualitative study.

The quantitative analysis shows no change between the four waves for participants in general, the subgroups (e.g. age groups, gender, etc.), the control group or the project leader sample. Project leaders exhibit higher median scores in ‘interest in the world’ in comparison to participants. Furthermore the analysis of the single items about ‘interest in social issues’ and ‘interest in political issues’ of participants, project lead-

²¹ According to the guidelines for the qualitative interviews, the interviewees were not asked about their interest in economic issues but in social, political and European issues.

ers and respondents in the control group²² show consistent results.

The qualitative findings show that there are very interested and well informed participants. Whilst many of them say the project had no effect on their interest in social, political and European issues, some of them clearly report in the second interview that their participation in the project resulted in an interest for new topics in the area of social, political and European issues. In particular, interest increased concerning the venue country of their project as well as current developments in their countries and in Europe. The latter applies especially to interviewees with interest in social, political and European issues before the project. All in all, interest in both social and political issues is supported through the project. As a result, a more conscious attitude and higher awareness is gained of a wider range of social issues such as equality, racism, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBTQI*) persons and topics in public discourse. Interviewees also acknowledge the need to learn more about such issues, develop a stronger desire to dig deeper into public matters and to explore these issues in more detail.

Some interviewees report in the second interview they had to focus on school, apprenticeship, work or study after the project. This is a main interest of young people and they dedicate their energy to building their future. At the same time, school and work are often linked with high pressure and therefore, the interest in social or political issues of some interview partners might in fact have decreased, at least temporarily. Other participants are not aware that their interest in social or political issues might have increased. They describe explicitly that they searched for information about a specific political topic as a consequence of their project participation (for example about politics in Turkey), however they do not consider this as an interest in politics. There are also young people with no interest in social or political issues, neither before nor after the project. All in all, interest in social (and political) issues was supported through the project, especially in the case of those participants who were interested and partially interested in these matters before the project.

The results of the quantitative study show no shift for ‘Interest in European issues’²³ and for the identifica-

22 The tested items are ‘interest in social issues’, ‘interest in political issues’, and ‘interest in European issues’.

23 The analysis of the item ‘I am very interested in European issues.’ shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the initial and subsequent measurements: The median in all four waves are

tion with Europe²⁴. At the same time, around one third of the interviews show examples of a fostered interest/identification in/with Europe. With regard to interest in European issues and identification with Europe, social and political developments in Europe and beyond described in the introduction to this chapter might have had a stronger influence on participants than the projects. In fact, these social and political developments are often indicated in the interviews as triggers for encouraging people to fight for Europe and its values or, less often, also for a declining identification. According to the third interview, these reported effects seem to be very persistent.

Almost all interviewees say that the perceived effects of the project are not only still present, but also still valid. This seems to underline the strong influence of getting in contact with people from different countries and their specific backgrounds, as well as becoming acquainted with these countries and their social and political issues. As a consequence of this fostered interest, a fostered mo-

bility within Europe can be observed in the third interviews.

There is a clearly expressed increase of interest of the interviewees in the protection of the environment and in a sustainable development. This is more than confirmed in the third interview. In addition to the interview partners who reported an increased interest due to the project in the second interview, more interviewees are reporting this in the third interview. Some participants at the Strasbourg Conference also confirm the general high interest of young people in this topic. Even in projects not focussing on this issue, it emerges again and again. Nevertheless, within the quantitative research strand, the ratings of both the 'Interest in environmental issues'²⁵ and the 'Responsibility for contributing to sustainable development of Europe'²⁶ stay at the same level.

Conclusions

The responses to the surveys and the interviews before the project

stable at 4.0 (N=66) on a 6-point scale where 0 stands for 'does not apply at all' and 5 stands for 'fully applies'.

24 The analysis of the item 'I strongly feel as European' shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the initial and subsequent measurements: The median values in all four measurements are stable at 4.0 (N=63) on a 6-point scale where 0 stands for 'does not apply at all' and 5 stands for 'fully applies'.

25 The analysis of the item 'I am very interested in environmental issues' shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the initial and subsequent measurements: The median values in all four measurements stay consistently at 4.0 (N=67) on a 6-point scale where 0 stands for 'does not apply at all' and 5 stands for 'fully applies'.

26 The analysis of the item: 'I strongly feel responsible for contributing to a sustainable development of Europe' shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the initial and subsequent measurements. The median values in all four measurements are between 3.0 and 4.0 (N=67) on a 6-point scale where 0 stands for 'does not apply at all' and 5 stands for 'fully applies'.

show a relatively high level of values and attitudes related to participation and citizenship for both the participants and the project leaders. Obviously, participants in E+/YiA projects are already quite aware of and agree to values related to democracy and have attitudes reflecting that they are, in a certain way, active citizens participating in civil society and democratic life.

The three waves of qualitative interviews indicate effects of the project on various values and attitudes of different groups of project participants:

- The awareness of values inherent to democracy is renewed, which could also result in strengthening these values.
- The projects contribute to the understanding and appreciation of participation and active citizenship, as well as to a willingness to contribute to society.
- The participants develop interest for new topics in the area of social, political and European issues, in particular in their own countries and in the countries they visited within the project, and they become aware of a wider range of social issues.
- The interest in the protection of the environment and sustainable development increased considerably.

As mentioned previously, these values and attitudes are primarily developed in projects explicitly addressing participation and citizenship.

Conversely, the quantitative research strand did not show any significant changes over the four survey waves, and the changes observed in the interviews are too small to be measured through the surveys. To account for this, values and attitudes related to participation and citizenship were already quite developed before the project, leaving less room for further development. Furthermore, values are deeply rooted and therefore, cannot be changed easily through a rather short-term experience.

2.2 KNOWLEDGE

The results of both research strands show that for some of the participants there is an increase of knowledge related to participation and citizenship through E+/YiA projects.

Whilst E+/YiA projects can be an excellent platform for acquiring knowledge on a variety of topics (e.g. knowledge important for the every-day lives of the young people), some interviewees report to have gained knowledge important for participation and active citizenship mostly through projects focusing on these topics. Gained knowledge, be-

sides others, includes learning how to engage as an active citizen, plan (long-term) projects, establish and run a group or learning more about Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) (i.e. general information, way of functioning, job opportunities or founding an NGO). Furthermore, more experienced participants²⁷ (who choose a project related to a social or political topic they are already informed about and/or engaged in) as well as ‘newcomers’²⁸ (who often do not participate in E+/YiA projects with the aim to learn something about a certain topic) deepen their already existing knowledge (cumulative advantage). Both experienced participants and newcomers return from the project with a generally fostered curiosity and the urge to follow up on social or political topics (project functioning as ‘eye-opener’). In the third interviews, there is strong evidence for the persistency of this gained knowledge.

The increase of knowledge about NGOs expressed in the qualitative study does not become visible in the surveys, and the values stay constant

across all survey waves²⁹. Seemingly, participants did not increase their knowledge on how to engage in an NGO because they were already engaged in one before or they got involved in one for the project prior to the first survey. This is supported by the fact that the median value for this item was 4 on a scale between 0 and 5.

In the first survey of the quantitative study, responses of participants in general and of specific subgroups indicate that they are rather knowledgeable in the field of participation and citizenship, exhibiting the same levels as the young people in the control group. Whilst the levels for the control group stay the same over the following waves of surveys, a medium positive change occurs for participants, in particular between the survey before their project participation and a year after it. In the fourth survey two to three years after the project, the increased knowledge levels of the participants are roughly the same as in the survey one year after the project.³⁰ A positive change

27 In this study, participants with prior experience with participation and active citizenship are referred to as ‘experienced participants’ or ‘more experienced participants’. Vice-versa, those with no or little experience with experience with participation and active citizenship are referred to as ‘participants with less experience’.

28 In this study, young people taking part in an E+/YiA project are referred to as ‘newcomers’.

29 The analysis of the item: ‘I know how I can engage in a non-governmental organisation in my country’ shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the initial and subsequent measurements. The median values in all four measurements stay constant at 4.0 (N=58) on a 6-point scale where 0 stands for ‘does not apply at all’ and 5 stands for ‘fully applies’.

30 PP median levels in knowledge: 1st survey: 6.4; 2nd survey: 6.9; 3rd survey: 7.2; 4th survey: 7.1 (on a 11-point scale between 0 and 10).

is also detected for those participants who participated in projects with a specific focus on participation and citizenship. This suggests that such projects make a difference in the area of knowledge related to participation and citizenship.

The quantitative analysis also revealed an increased knowledge for some subgroups of participants, for instance participants with university degrees and participants who speak two foreign languages. This could be in accordance with the knowledge gain of more experienced participants who engaged in a project to deepen their knowledge in a certain field. On the other side, the knowledge gain of ‘newcomers’ could be linked to the knowledge gain of those participants who took no specific course in the field of social or political science. Furthermore, the surveys revealed a knowledge gain for the participants who went abroad for their project. This is likely linked to the fact that projects taking place in a different social, political and cultural framework than the one participants are used to may have a larger potential to stimulate reflection and, therefore, learning processes of an individual. This could be seen in line with the result of the qualitative study, which the knowledge about Europe is clearly fostered through – besides other reasons – participation in projects taking place abroad. According

to the quantitative research, male participants acquired more knowledge than female participants, which might be caused by a greater interest or engagement of male participants in these topics. Unfortunately, the findings of the interview study do not provide any other evidence for a better understanding of this effect.

The second and third interviews suggest that for many young people participation in the E+/YiA projects contributes to a knowledge gain on sustainable development/protection of the environment. The quantitative data does not support this finding as median levels are constant across all four survey waves. However the data confirms a rather high level of knowledge³¹ in the participant sample on this issue as medians reach the highest possible ranking in all survey waves.

The surveys and interviews indicate that the level of knowledge of youth policy (at national and European level) was fairly low before the project and did not increase much through the project³². With regard to termi-

31 The analysis of the item ‘I understand very well how the way I live has an effect on the global environment.’ shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the initial and subsequent measurements: The median values in all four measurements stay consistently at 4.0 (N=57) on a 6-point scale where 0 stands for ‘does not apply at all’ and 5 stands for ‘fully applies’.

32 For the surveys, the analysis of the item ‘I am familiar with the youth policies of my country.’ shows that

nology used in the questions of the surveys and interviews, most participants had a limited understanding of what was meant by youth policy. Having space to explain their views in interviews, respondents were rather upfront in acknowledging they have little knowledge on youth policy topics. Whereas in questionnaires, the unfavourable option of ‘No knowledge at all’ could lead the respondents to marking the middle points, they do not explicitly indicate they have no knowledge, but they also avoid indicating they are knowledgeable on youth policy topics. As an outcome, the research approach and instruments need to be developed further in order to tackle this challenge. In any case, these findings indicate that youth policy at national and/or European level do not play an important role in the projects.

Project leaders also show increasing levels of knowledge on participation and citizenship over time. Those involved in E+/YiA projects (participants and project leaders) show an increase of knowledge of participa-

tion and active citizenship compared with those who do not have a similar experience (members of control group). This indicates a positive effect of E+/YiA projects on an increase of respective knowledge.

Conclusions

The responses of participants to the surveys before the project display a relatively high level of knowledge for a number of areas related to participation and citizenship. Nevertheless, both the surveys and the interviews show an increase of participation and citizenship knowledge for different groups of participants:

- For both more experienced and less experienced participants, the projects function as ‘eye-openers’ and contribute to new knowledge. The projects deepen existing knowledge on participation and citizenship and encourage follow up on social or political topics.
- Some participants learnt how to engage as active citizens, e.g. in NGOs or how to organise projects.
- For many participants, the projects contributed to knowledge of sustainable development and environmental protection.
- An increased knowledge linked to participation and citizenship could also be observed for certain sub-groups of participants, e.g. participants with a univer-

there is no statistically significant difference between the initial and subsequent measurements. The median values in all four measurements stay consistently at 3.0 (N=57) on a 6-point scale where 0 stands for ‘does not apply at all’ and 5 stands for ‘fully applies’. The analysis of the item: ‘I have a solid understanding of the European Youth Strategy’ shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the initial and subsequent measurements. The median values in all four measurements reach between 2.0 and 3.0 (N=57) on a 6-point scale where 0 stands for ‘does not apply at all’ and 5 stands for ‘fully applies’.

sity degree, male participants, participants who went abroad for their project etc.

Conversely, knowledge related to youth policies at national and European level is relatively limited before the project and does not change over the research period. Additionally, knowledge on participation and citizenship is primarily developed in projects explicitly addressing these topics.

Some of these findings are confirmed by the analysis of the control group, which show no changes for knowledge on participation and citizenship over all survey waves.

2.3 SKILLS

The results of both research strands provide evidence that E+/YiA projects contribute to the development of skills important for participation and active citizenship, and that these developments are persistent.

Several results of the online survey study suggest a gain in participation and citizenship skills of participants. There is a small positive shift between the first and the second survey waves in the self-assessment of the participants (median levels change from 7.3 to 7.7; in the third and fourth

survey waves the levels reach 7.6)³³. In contrast, the control group sample does not exhibit any changes in between the measurements. The same is the case for detailed subgroup analyses, whilst in the participant sample there are several subgroups that indicate an increase between measurements, this does not apply to the control group sample. The primary increase between the first survey (before the project) and second survey (after the project) and a rather constant median level for the second, third and fourth survey suggests strong evidence that this increase of skills is actually caused by the project, in particular because the self-assessment of the control group does not change over all four survey waves.

Furthermore, the participants themselves indicate rather high skill gains as an effect of the project when asked about this during the second, third and fourth survey wave. The median scores are rather high between 6.7 and 7.3³⁴. These median

33 On a 11-point scale between 0 and 10.

34 In this case, participants were asked 'To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Through my participation in the project I increased my ability to ...' (complemented with skills such as 'discuss political topics seriously') and the answering options were 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'agree' and 'strongly agree' The way of asking seems to be crucial: participants are likely to give high scores when they are explicitly asked about changes as result of their project participation (as described above) – in contrast to asking them to assess their skills level without reference to the project.

scores do not exhibit any statistically significant difference, in other words participants consistently report the same skills gain through the project two to three months, around one year, as well as two to three years after the project.

According to the interview study, participants benefit from the project in the first instance by becoming aware of participation and citizenship skills they already possess, and by developing and deepening them through application in the project. To a smaller extent, interviewees also acquire new skills important for participation and active citizenship. The difference between acquiring new skills on one side and becoming aware and deepening already existing skills on the other side cannot be distinguished exactly. The interviews show a learning effect for the ability of individuals to negotiate successfully with other people (e.g. to cooperate, to communicate, to come to a compromise). The strongest effect can be seen for project management skills, whilst there is little evidence in the interviews that ‘discussing political issues seriously’, ‘keeping up with changes’ and ‘forming independent opinions’ are fostered through project participation. The quantitative analysis of these three items also shows consistent results in all four waves. Furthermore, interviewees state they became more self-confident through

their project participation, which might well be linked to the development of their skills in communicating, negotiating and cooperating with others, and also to the development of their knowledge as outlined in the previous section.

The acquired and/or deepened skills seem to be largely persistent. Two to three years after the project the interviewees partly still attribute the same importance to them as around one year after the project. Some even became more aware of them in the meantime and/or developed them further from other various learning environments. In some cases, the mentioned skills cannot be recalled or are not seen as an effect of the project any longer. This may be because they are not seen to be important for the respective interviewee or perhaps because over time the reflection on them was overlaid by other experiences and influences after the project.

Between the first and the second survey waves, female participants show a medium increase of participation and citizenship skills (median levels of 7.0 and 7.6) and participants who speak two foreign languages show a small increase (median levels of 7.2 and 7.6). These results might have to do with the specific participatory and international character of an E+/YiA project. For instance dur-

ing the project, participants try out and apply (new) skills, whereby they learn, improve and deepen skills. This application and trying out has rather noticeable effects, e.g. a participant succeeded to motivate others during a group work. This could perhaps be the reason why women, who generally tend to score themselves low respectively lower than their male counterparts³⁵, indicate to benefit more than male participants. In the qualitative study, the greatest learning effect is reported for cooperating in a team, communicating and coming to a compromise. Females tend to be team players and are perhaps more interested in acquiring group work skills. The setting of E+/YiA projects, with a strong focus on group work, may also play a role in this explanation. Another explanation might be the different motivations of female and male participants for taking part in projects, which are then reflected in different changes or developments, i.e. greater value for communication and cooperation skills than knowledge or vice-versa.

Due to the strong international dimension of E+/YiA projects, taking part frequently implies communicating with people speaking a different language. Those participants who are

skilled in foreign languages, e.g. who speak two foreign languages, might benefit more from the project activities as they are better equipped. At the same time, participating in E+/YiA projects clearly contributes to foreign language proficiency of many participants in general. This result of the interview study is also confirmed by the RAY Monitoring study.³⁶

Further skills increases for subgroups are appearing in connection to the project participation itself, as was the case for the ‘knowledge’ area. Those participants who exhibit signs of project ownership, i.e. participants who feel well integrated into the project and feel engaged throughout the process, show positive developments in the ‘skills’ area. At the same time, the ‘skills’ development is visible also for those participants who indicate they developed knowledge relevant for participation and citizenship during the project itself. Both of the findings support the hypothesis that the project participation in itself may have positive effects on participants with respect to participation and citizenship skills. Especially projects that foster the development of participation and citizenship knowledge of participants and involve and engage participants in an effective way.

35 See Sieverding 2003.

36 Bammer, Fennes, Karsten 2017.

As is the case of knowledge, positive shifts in skills are also detected for participants having completed upper secondary education and participants who participated in no specific courses in the social or political domain. Perhaps again, as is the case for knowledge, those effects have to be seen in the context of the profile of the more experienced participants respectively of less experienced participants. In line with the knowledge findings, participants are also exhibiting positive shifts of participation and citizenship skills in cases of projects that had also a focus on participation and citizenship.

The links between the development of knowledge and of skills outlined above suggest that they result in similar sub-groups developing both knowledge and skills simultaneously for participation and citizenship, mutually fostering their development.

As mentioned previously, participants exhibit median levels between 7.3 and 7.7 in the four survey waves. In comparison, the project leader sample exhibits median levels of 8.2 to 8.4 across all four survey waves, as well as consistent results in the case of subgroups (e.g. gender and age groups, etc.). The difference between these two samples is not clear in statistical terms, but presumably may be occurring (a confidence interval analysis sug-

gests such an option in some survey waves). This would mean that project leaders show higher levels of participation and citizenship skills than the participants. This result is consistent with the different roles and profiles of the two samples. The control group shows median levels of 6.1 to 7.2 across the four survey waves, with an insufficient number of units of analysis for more detailed comparisons within the sample. Confidence intervals do not prove statistical differences between the control group and the participant or project leader samples. Nevertheless, the low number of units of analysis is apparently influencing the width of the confidence interval in the case of the control group, and therefore potentially distorts results.

Conclusions

Both the surveys and the interviews provide evidence that participation and citizenship skills are developed through E+/YiA projects and this development is persistent. This is confirmed by the analysis of the control group, which shows no changes for skills relevant for participation and citizenship. In particular, communication, negotiation and cooperation skills are developed, which are relevant for participation and active citizenship. There is a wide range of sub-groups of participants who also show this skills development: female participants, participants having

completed upper secondary school, participants speaking two foreign languages, more experienced as well as less experienced participants and participants who did not attend a special course in the social political domain.

Interestingly, there is an overlap between participants who developed skills as well as knowledge relevant for participation and citizenship. This suggests that knowledge and skills are developed mutually and reinforce each other.

As is the case with the findings for effects of projects on values, attitudes, and knowledge, participants of projects explicitly addressing these topics mostly develop skills relevant for participation and citizenship.

2.4 PRACTICE

General participation in civil society

The actual engagement in civil society and democratic life, referred to also as ‘participation and citizenship practice’ or simply as ‘practice’, was researched in three survey waves and in three interviews at the same stages: before the project, one year as well as two to three years after the project. The activity-related questions were not asked in the second survey, since the time difference

between the first and second survey suggested that practice would not change much so soon after the project.

In the first interview, almost all participants describe themselves as active in personal areas such as friends, sports and hobbies. With regard to participation and active citizenship, the whole spectrum is represented as not being active at all, to medium level of activity, up to very active young people in civil society. In the quantitative study, the participant sample reaches median levels between 3.6 and 4.0³⁷ in all three measurements with constant results across subgroups (e.g. age, gender, etc.) in the general participation practice index. These results are lower than the ones in indexes covering other areas. This is likely due to the nature of the questions, which asked about specific activities and their frequency. Therefore, any median values must be read with regard to what is realistically possible for an individual to engage in, since a lot of time is consumed by other activities such as work, study, or private life.

A small decrease is visible in the participant sample in the area of ‘general participation in civil society’. The levels fall from the median of 4.0 to 3.6

37 On a 11-point scale between 0 and 10.

between the third and fourth survey wave (in contrast, the increase between the first and third survey wave from a median of 3.6 to 4.0 is not significant). The majority of the sub-groups show the same pattern, even though the significant results are sporadically distributed between the negative and positive developments. Against this background, the following two hypotheses can be assumed.

Firstly, it can be assumed that the participation of the project participants in civil society and democratic life increases in a period following the project participation, whilst after a certain period (in this case two to three years after the project), the practice levels drop³⁸. An increase of the actual participation of the participants after their project participation is also indicated by the second interviews. Whilst many participants are not more active, some interviewees report a concrete positive influence on their participation, such as engaging more in the social sector, doing something for their community or region, focusing more on their political activities, working more systematically in the public arena, and even engaging in areas that are completely new for them. In particular, young people already active be-

fore the project become more active, they become more involved in different organisations at the same time and initiate civil society action themselves. Furthermore, interviewees participating in a E+/YiA project for the first time often report a general enthusiasm about the project and as a result they are motivated to engage more often in further projects or in civil society. Finally, for many interviewees, going abroad again is of great importance because they are curious and partly feel as European citizens.

Conversely, the abovementioned drop seems to be visible also in the qualitative study. Many interview partners, who start or intensify their engagement due to the project, are still active at the time of the third interview. They report numerous and various developments within their engagement two to three years after the project. For instance, they offer trainings, take over more responsibility in the committees of their organisation, they are charged to coordinate the volunteers, support the formation of a nationwide head association for voluntary work, organise and implement summer camps for the younger members, start initiatives and much more. However, some of these interviewees report to engage less. In their argumentation, a decreasing motivation is rarely mentioned. They mainly argue to have

³⁸ Since the control group was only asked about these activities in the 1st survey wave no comparison is possible.

come into a phase of life in which they invest more time in their private and professional life. For example, they concentrate on school or university, are confronted with unemployment and need to search a new job or spend time with their partner and/or start a family. These life trajectory-related changes are supported by the demographic data collected through the online surveys. The percentage of participants who live in partnerships or are married increase rather rapidly over the observed period of three years, an increase from about 24% before participating in the project to about 41% three years later. These developments are plausible because the sample includes young people who want to shape their lives. The life trajectory-related changes can also be observed for participants who are already engaged in civil society and/or democratic life before the project. A similar decrease of participation and active citizenship also applies to other young people not participating in E+/YiA. Unfortunately, the respective data was not collected from the control group and therefore this cannot be verified.

Secondly, an alternative hypothesis is that the overall societal and political situation during the period between the first and last interviews included impressive events, which might have led to an increased participation of project participants in civil

society and political life, and hence influenced the results of the surveys. Once the events and the subsequent situation causing the increased levels of practice in civil society and political life came to an end, the practice levels dropped. Interviewees repeatedly mention developments like refugee movement, Brexit, as well as the growth of populist and extremist parties and movements. They tend to result in an increased awareness, e.g. for democracy and the values inherent to democracy, but influence only a few of the interviewees towards a stronger engagement. Therefore, the hypothesis does not seem to be supported by the qualitative results, and perhaps only plays a marginal role.

Whilst in the project leader sample, the median values are between 3.9 and 4.6 in all three measurements, the confidence interval analyses do not indicate statistically significant differences between the participant and the project leader sample results. A small increase for project leaders is measured with a median value of 4.2 in the first survey wave and 4.6 in the third survey wave. Further subgroup analyses are shown in chapter 5.4.1.

Information gathering

After the project, several participants look for information about the country in which their project took place, or for topics related to their project.

As an effect of the project, a few interviewees intensify their efforts to keep themselves informed on social and political issues, and a few question the agenda setting of media, consume media more critically, try to follow as many different sources as possible and discuss the veracity of news. Whilst discussions during the project are much appreciated, there are very few examples for a fostered discussion activity after the project. Both effects seem to be persistent since the examples also appear again in the third interview, however they are subtle.

Initially, the results in keeping oneself informed seem to correspond with the findings of the quantitative study in gathering information, which exhibit rather average results with median values of 6.0 across all three survey waves and show no shifts across the survey waves, including subgroups. Nevertheless, it must be taken into account that the respective question in the questionnaires referred only to traditional media (newspaper, radio and television), and did not ask for web-based media, which young people use most and is confirmed in the interview study.

The small decrease between the first and third survey in the project leader sample (median values of 7.7 and 7.3) does not reflect as much of a

tendency to gather less information than several years ago, but perhaps a switch to other types of media and information sources, most likely web-based.

Engagement in environmental protection and sustainable development

According to both the quantitative and qualitative study, the engagement in environmental protection and sustainable development is already high before the project, with a median value of 7.5 on a scale between 0 and 10 in the survey responses. Whilst the interviews contain some examples for a positive and persistent shift caused by the project (still mentioned in the third interviews), there are no statistically significant differences across the survey waves or between the subgroups. Possibly the shift found in the qualitative strand is too small to be detected in the survey. Since the respondents had assessed themselves already high before the project, it is possible that they did not increase their scores (even if they improved their practice) perhaps because they think that one can always do more for the protection of the environment.

Conventional political participation

The clear majority of interviewees take part in elections on a regular

basis, and respectively they express their intention to vote once they are eligible. In contrast, most interviewees did not or do not run for office and/or engage in a political party. According to the second and third interviews, taking part in elections and running for office is not fostered through the projects. These three results of the qualitative study are confirmed by the findings of the quantitative strand.

The index focusing on practices and activities within a ‘conventional participation’ domain, such as voting or running for an office, shows that the participant sample scores above average, reaching median values of 6.0 to 8.0. At the same time, the analysis of the confidence intervals does not show any statistically significant differences between the participants’ median values in any of the survey waves.

‘Conventional participation’ is an area mostly covered by media, as well as by the formal educational system and other educational opportunities. Participants are experienced with these practices and engage in them continuously and long-term. In scores as high as exhibited by the participant sample in this respect, effects are apparently less likely, since most of the respondents already engage to a large extent in ‘conventional participation practice’.

Additionally, almost all of the few interviewees who had run for office or who are engaged in a committee did not and do not do this in the political sphere, but rather in the organisations they’re member of or at university in the student council or parliament.

Non-conventional political participation

In the first interview around half of the interviewees discuss signing on-line petitions and/or taking part in demonstrations. There are almost no indications in the second and third interviews that these forms of participation are fostered.

The index depicting practice levels in the area of non-conventional political participation, such as signing a petition or donating money to a particular cause, shows under average median scores for participants, with results across all survey waves reaching median levels of 2.5. This result is in line with further analyses, which indicate differences neither between the participant sample across the survey waves nor in sub-groups (e.g. gender etc.).

This suggests that both the participants and the project leaders are engaged in these activities to a lower extent than is the case in conventional participation practice. Again, what needs to be taken into account

are the activities the questions ask about: signing a petition, donating to a certain cause, etc. These are, to some extent, one-time activities that may not occur often even though the individual is active in other ways in a given time period; whilst the conventional participation practices are state-regulated in terms of frequency and timing. This self-regulated and state-regulated framework may influence the frequency in which individuals engage in given practices. It cannot be demonstrated that the project participation has a visible influence in this respect, as these practices cannot necessarily be conducted very often due to a lack of opportunities. The time frame ('how often during the past 12 months') may have been too short for exploring changes.

Further results of the qualitative study

According to the interviews, E+/YiA projects frequently result in establishing networks, which are important for initiating and designing follow-up activities beyond the individual level with new partners or even organisations in other countries. In fact, this could be considered as 'general participation in civil society' but goes also beyond because it implies the development of structures, even if informal they can foster participation and citizenship. This topic was not addressed in the surveys and should

be included in future research on participation and citizenship.

The second and third interviews show that the so called 'experienced participants' apply their deepened knowledge in their citizenship engagement in the organisations they have been already involved in before the project or they start a new initiative. In consequence, it can be concluded that there are E+/YiA projects with high-quality content, otherwise they would not be attractive for the interviewees with a respective foreknowledge and engagement.

Some young men and women were inspired in their professional career through their project participation. They realise they want to contribute to society and politics professionally in their everyday life and start a respective apprenticeship, study or even dare a change.

Conclusions

The responses of participants to the surveys and interviews before the project display a relatively high level of participation and active citizenship for a number of areas, i.e. engagement in environmental protection and sustainable development, conventional political participation and gathering information on current issues. This indicates that participants in E+/YiA projects tend to

already be active citizens before the project, at least in certain areas.

The interviews show that the projects result in an increased participation in civil society and democratic life for different groups of participants, e.g. those who participated in an E+/YiA project for the first time, but also those who were already active before the project (and then apply in their engagement what they had learnt through project). This increased participation can take different forms and different levels of intensity, but shows to be persistent in many cases.

At the same time, there are also participants who engage less in civil society because they moved into new phases of their lives, in particular having to focus on education, training, work etc. or giving priority to their children, family or partners. This could also be the case for young people not participating in E+/YiA, but unfortunately respective data was not collected from the control group.

The surveys do not show a significant increase of participation in civil society and democratic life. This could be caused by the fact that levels of participation were already high before the project and could hardly be increased. Another possibility is that the increase observed in the inter-

views was too small or did not apply to enough participants to be measured through the surveys.

2.5 LEARNING FOR PARTICIPATION AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

The research project did not only explore the development of participation and citizenship competence and practice through E+/YiA projects, but also approaches, methods, contexts and settings that contributed to the learning processes and outcomes such as, what was learnt, what were the changes in practice, and how this learning happened. In this respect, the surveys also included questions in the second and fourth survey that asked about project settings, activities and learning methods, as well as perceptions of participants, settings, activities and methods that contributed to their development of participation competence and practice. A question in the fourth survey also refers to experiences after the project, (studies, work, activities with peers, other projects etc.), thus also allowing to compare how experiences during the project and after the project contributed to the development of participation and citizenship competence and practice. Furthermore, participants were also asked about what contributed, if applicable, to the development of their

competences and practice related to participation and citizenship, which came naturally together with when they were asked about the effects of their project participation.

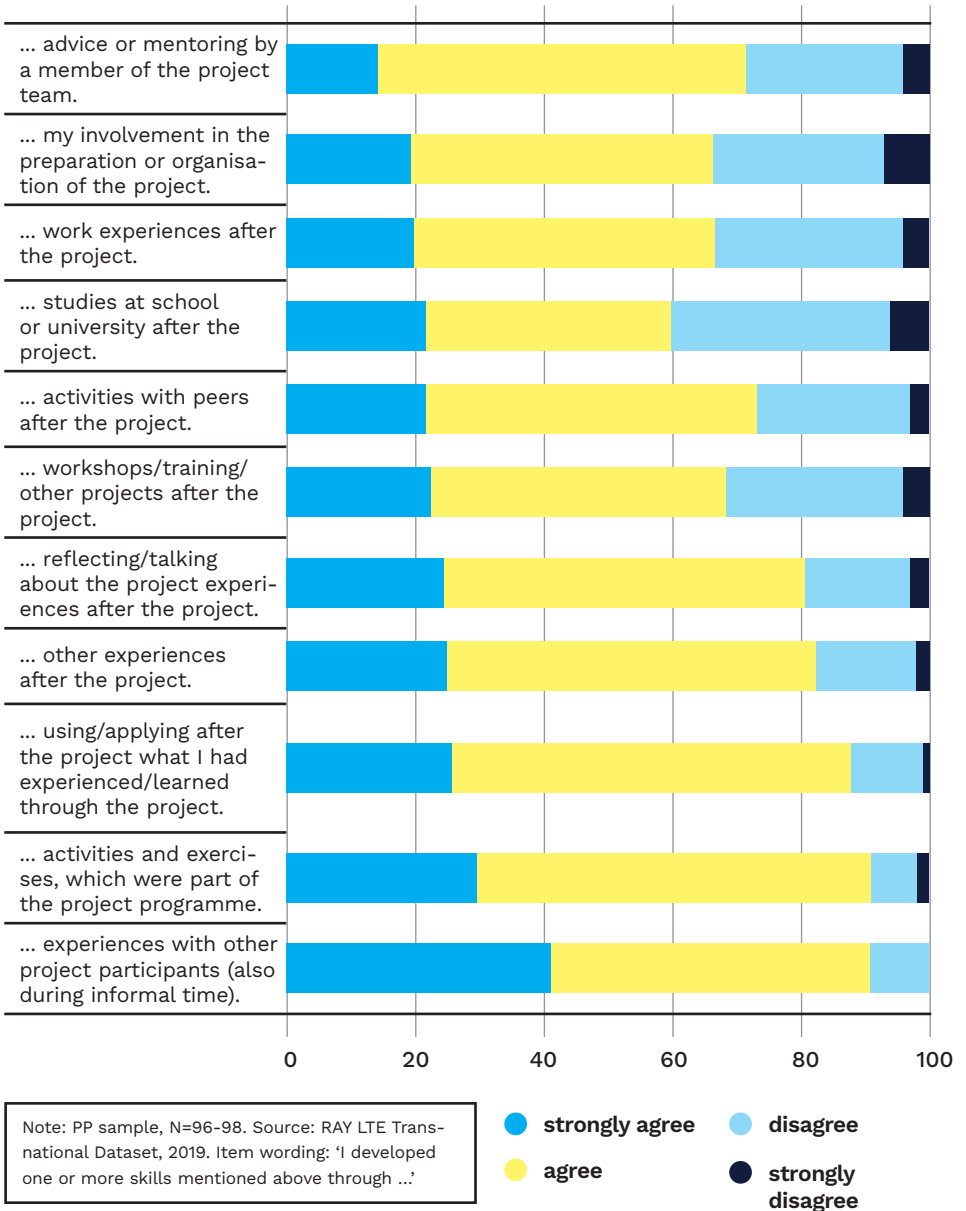
In the surveys, the participants indicate that their experiences related to the project, the project participation itself, but also reflection on it afterwards and using what they had learnt through the project, had a stronger effect on the development of their participation and citizenship skills than the experiences after the project (which had no link to the project). Around 85% to 95% of the participants indicate that experiences with other participants in the project (including informal time), activities within the project programme, the application of the skills developed through the project and reflection about the project experience contributed to the development of participation and citizenship skills. This suggests, that non-formal learning and informal learning, including experiential learning/learning by doing, peer learning (learning from and with

peers) and reflection are effective educational approaches and features for developing participation and active citizenship (see Figure 1).³⁹

The responses to the surveys show that the projects included a broad scope of different activities, settings and learning methods, each of them appearing in between 40% and 70% of the projects, which indicates a large variety within the project. On average, around two thirds of the project time were dedicated to planned activities that were part of the project programme, most of it to non-formal education activities, and more than 20% to activities that were not part of the programme, which included informal time. This indicates that the projects provided for sufficient time and settings for informal and non-formal learning as outlined above.

³⁹ Interestingly, there are no systematic statistically significant differences in the perception of different PP subgroups towards the activities which helped them in skills acquisition. No gender, education or project focus related differences are discovered; therefore, Figure 1 seems to provide consistent information on PP in general as well as for specific PP subgroups.

FIGURE 1 Agreement rates of project participants (PP) with the statements concerning learning contexts.



Furthermore, more than 85% of participants indicate that they have used skills learnt through the projects, as well found them useful in their public engagements. This finding suggests that participants not only consider applying their newly developed skills as a valuable learning experience, but also that applying these skills contributes to the scope of their public engagement and strengthens their learning.

The qualitative interviews, as well as statements of participants in the Strasbourg conference, confirm the findings from the surveys. In particular, they indicate that peer learning in E+/YiA projects is of great importance within the various forms of gaining knowledge and skills, and supported exchanging values and attitudes as well as being motivated to engage (more) in the civil society and democratic life.

Statements of participants illustrate the value of the informal exchange between the participants in free time, which is essential for non-formal learning settings and in which everyday life situations cannot offer to this extent. The coming-together of young people from different countries allows cross-country comparisons and, in case of national projects, cross-regional comparisons. The influence of this motivation through diversity is reported from both the

influencers and the influenced. Another important aspect is that young people meet ‘experts’ in their main area of interest. As reported, this helps and highly motivates participants to see so many other people also engaged in the same topic and the many solutions or approaches to a single challenge. All Strasbourg participants believe that participants with similar interests find each other very quickly and develop further ideas. They also express the wish to meet more like-minded people through E+/YiA projects.

Peer learning also includes attention for others, the perception of their motivations and the awareness to be responsible for others in some way. These important aspects are strengthened in the E+/YiA projects. The positive impact on other young people does not only take place in the projects but also after returning home to the different spheres of life such as family, school, job or in free time. Many interviewees report to have transported their project enthusiasm to their friends.

Regardless of whether the interviewees became aware of an existing skill or acquired new skills, they state that these results were achieved due to the participatory approach applied in the projects. Skills need to be gained, especially through learning by doing, and the E+/YiA projects

offered a wealth of respective possibilities, which corresponds with the criteria of non-formal and informal learning and are at the core of E+/YiA projects.

Respondents recall that they appreciated the non-formal education and learning methods in the projects, especially playful methods suitable for the content. Several participants considered voluntary work or travelling to foreign countries, which they had considered already before the project and their improved skills encouraged them to put this into practice.

3 – RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this research project show that E+/YiA projects contribute to the development of participation and citizenship competence and practice and in which way. The findings also indicate factors that are likely to be decisive for this competence and practice development, which result in the following recommendations.

3.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PROJECT LEVEL

E+/YiA objectives related to participation and active citizenship

The findings of this research project indicate that participants are frequently not aware of the E+/YiA objectives related explicitly or implicitly to participation and active citizenship, even if linked to their project theme. Furthermore, younger and less educated participants often have difficulties understanding the rather abstract notion and concept of ‘active citizenship’ and translating it into their real lives. In particular, they are hardly aware of the term or concept of ‘youth policies’, no matter if at a local, regional, national or European level. The research findings show that the participants do understand the concept better if it is

clearly made explicit to them. Specifically addressing issues related to these E+/YiA objectives contributes to more conscious and effective learning processes of the participants.

Recommendation 1: Emphasising E+/YiA objectives related to participation and active citizenship in E+/YiA projects.

Generally, project themes of most projects funded through E+/YiA can be linked in some way to the E+/YiA objectives related to participation and active citizenship. These links should be addressed explicitly wherever possible in E+/YiA projects. Whilst this might actually be done in the project applications, it is not always transferred into the project implementation.

Recommendation 2: Explicitly communicating the concepts of ‘active citizenship’ and ‘participation in civil society and democratic life’ in a language, phrasing and terminology that is comprehensible and close

to the reality of participants and project team members.

These concepts can often be abstract, technical and complex. Therefore, they need to be revised and communicated in a language adapted to young people, which takes into account the age, experiences, competences, educational level, socio-political background etc. of the participants.

Recommendation 3: Highlighting environmental protection and sustainable development as topics included in E+/YiA objectives related to participation and active citizenship.

Participation and democratic citizenship imply solidarity with future generations as well as with people suffering from pollution and from an unfair distribution of resources. Therefore, environmental protection and sustainable development are clearly topics to be addressed in E+/YiA projects in line with the programme objectives, even more since these topics are high on the agenda of young people. This awareness, interest and engagement should be captured and followed-up in E+/YiA projects.

Project design and implementation: the project as citizenship practice

The findings of this research project suggest that certain project settings, educational approaches, methodologies and methods contribute effectively to the development of citizenship and participation competence and practice. This leads to the following recommendations.

Recommendation 4: Establishing a project design and project settings that provide for encountering differences as a basis for learning through exchange and discourse.

This includes differences between participants with respect to age, experience, education, socio-political and cultural backgrounds, values, being less or more active as citizens etc., or differences between countries involved in the project, e.g. non-EU and EU member states, countries with different political systems etc. These settings provide for effective peer learning, enabling participants to learn from each other and with each other, and to explore democratic values together. In particular, participants can become aware of their own realities and compare them with

those of their peers. Furthermore, more experienced and more active participants can take on the role of multipliers and role models for other participants.

Recommendation 5: Linking social and political events and developments at local, regional, national, European and global levels to the project theme and to learning spaces in the environment of the project.

Addressing current social and political developments, which are interesting, relevant and of concern for young people, in E+/YiA projects enables participants to experience and understand participation in society and democratic life in a practical way that is close to real life and therefore in a more sustainable way.

Recommendation 6: Using adequate non-formal education and learning methods.

Methods used in the project need to foster learning participation and citizenship, i.e. through interaction within the project as well as with the

project environment. In particular, non-formal education and learning methods provide for practicing participation and citizenship as an integral element of the project. In this respect, peer learning is one effective approach to be fostered, which allows participants to learn from and with each other and includes participants with more advanced citizenship and participation competences acting as multipliers and less experienced participants learning from them. This approach creates learning communities, which can continue to exist after the end of the project (see also recommendation 4 and 12). This can also increase the motivation of participants to pursue further activities related to participation and citizenship. Additionally, a participatory approach in the projects as well as experiential learning are effective features of non-formal learning to foster participation and citizenship competence. Furthermore, methods used in the project need to be adequate for the content, project settings and participants, as for the latter with respect to their age, prior experience, education, socio-political and cultural backgrounds etc.

Recommendation 7: Providing time and space for informal learning.

Relevant and effective learning processes also take place outside structured settings and when individuals or groups organise their learning by themselves. In fact, informal, non-formal and formal learning complement each other and are interlinked. Non-formal learning activities in E+/YiA projects are likely to stimulate learning processes outside planned activities, which need adequate time for participants to engage in them.

Recommendation 8: Providing for adequate preparation as part of the project, in particular with re- spect to the development of participation and citizenship competence and practice, as well as to the European dimension of the project.

A good preparation involving the participants in the project theme(s) at an early stage of the project and starting well before an eventual international encounter, contributes to effective and intensive learning processes in the course of the project. Participants who have already acquired some basic understanding of participation and citizenship can benefit and learn more from a rela-

tively short international experience if they have a proper preparation. Preparatory activities also allow participants to get to know each other, since they are learning from each other, knowing each other's background can be vital to enhance the learning processes.

Recommendation 9: Providing adequate guidance to participants.

Current social and political events and developments can result in concerns, doubts, uncertainties and anxieties of participants with respect to their social and political life and their future. Adequate guidance by project teams is essential for participants to be able to cope with these concerns, especially in projects tackling issues related to participation and active citizenship.

Recommendation 10: Fostering participation and active citizenship by involv- ing the hosting community.

RAY research suggests that E+/YiA projects can have an effect on the communities hosting them, also in the areas of participation and citizenship. Through a stronger involve-

ment of the hosting community in the project these effects can be strengthened, in particular by fostering interaction between the project and the hosting community, e.g. as part of community events or through special project activities. This provides for opportunities through which members of the hosting community and project participants could jointly develop citizenship and participation competence and practice. In particular, within long-term volunteering projects such an approach is likely to be effective in terms of multiplying the effects of the projects and fostering the sustainability of projects.

Recommendation 11: Providing adequate time, space and guidance for re- flection, individually and in groups, of experiences and learning related to participa- tion and active citizenship.

Reflection is an indispensable part of any E+/YiA project in order for participants to become aware of what they experienced and learnt in the project. This is especially important for learning related to participation and citizenship, as the study shows the interview itself initiated a process of reflection for the interviewees on project experiences, which

resulted in deeper insights the participants had not had before. This suggests that reflection, as part of the project, needs to go deeper and enable participants not only reflect on their learning but also link their own learning experience with broader concepts of participation and citizenship. This is also related to the activities prior to and following the main project activity, which might be crucial reflection points (see recommendation 9 and 12). In this respect, it is recommended to develop learning instruments showing a similar effect as the interviews in this research project.

Recommendation 12: Providing for adequate follow-up as part of the project, in particular to the development of participation and citizenship competence and practice, as well as to the European dimension of the project.

An adequate follow-up to the project activities is equally important as a good preparation. As the study shows, participants are enthusiastic about the project and even highly motivated to transfer their enthusiasm, ideas and what they have learnt

into practice and their everyday lives. At the same time, the research results also reveal that some participants do not succeed at this because they do not find like-minded people at home, feel lost and eventually give up. Therefore, follow-up to the projects needs to be ensured and participants need support after the main activity of the project, e.g. through meetings with other project participants to share their experiences in implementing their ideas and what they have learnt, and to prepare follow-up activities. They also need support to develop initiatives and projects on their own and to engage in civil society and democratic life, including in relation to issues with a European dimension, e.g. through a mentoring programme involving the members of the project team.

3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PROGRAMME LEVEL

The recommendations for the project level outlined above imply the following recommendations for the programme implementation level.

Recommendation 13: Promoting participation and active citizenship as project themes.

Research shows that projects explicitly addressing participation and citizenship are more successful in fostering participation and citizenship competence and practice than projects without such a focus. Since the latter is an objective of E+/YiA, projects on these topics should be promoted to applicant organisations.

Recommendation 14: Explicitly communicating the concepts of ‘active citizenship’ and ‘participation in civil society and democratic life’ in a language, phrasing and terminology that is comprehensible to beneficiaries, project organisers and project team members,

in order to be operationalised in their projects (see recommendation 2).

This can be done, for example through respective targeted publications (e.g. on project methodologies etc.), workshops, websites, webinars etc.

Recommendation 15: Providing special training activities for project organisers and project team members developing their competences to organise E+/YiA projects that foster participation and active citizenship.

Such training activities would be aimed at understanding participation and citizenship concepts (see recommendation 14) and developing competences to design and implement projects in line with recommendations 1 to 12 at the project level. Good practices, such as the Partnership on Youth between the Council of Europe and the European Union as well as other actors in the youth field, could be adapted and further developed in line with this recommendation. Some recommendations at the project and implementation level also imply the following recommendation

at the level of the E+/YiA Programme and future EU Youth Programme(s).

Recommendation 16: Providing sufficient/additional funding explicitly for project elements and measures as recommended above or for new activity types.

In particular, funding for preparation, guidance, assessment and follow-up in order to strengthen the development of participation and citizenship competence and practice during or after funded projects, and to ensure their quality and sustainability. It is recommended to provide additional funding for preparation and follow-up activities within the project in line with the recommendations above and meeting minimum standards to be defined. Furthermore, it is recommended to develop activity types eligible for funding, which allow participants, either individually or in groups, to develop further activities, initiatives or projects of flexible formats aimed at fostering participation and citizenship. This could be similar to or a further development of ‘future capital’ projects funded in a prior EU-Youth Programme.

4 — RESEARCH PROJECT PARTNERS

This study was designed and implemented by the Institute of Educational Science at the University of Innsbruck and the Generation and Educational Science Institute in Austria in cooperation with the National Agencies of Erasmus+ Youth in Action and their research

partners in Austria, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Slovenia, Sweden. National research reports can be requested from the respective National Agencies and their research partners listed below.

A AUSTRIA

- **IZ - Verein zur Förderung von Vielfalt, Dialog und Bildung**
Österreichische Nationalagentur Erasmus+ Jugend in Aktion & Europäisches Solidaritätskorps
Dresdner Straße 82/12
A-1200 Vienna
www.iz.or.at
- **Institut für Erziehungswissenschaft der Universität Innsbruck**
Institute of Educational Science, University of Innsbruck
Liebeneggstraße 8
A-6020 Innsbruck
www.uibk.ac.at/bgI/index.html.en
- **Generation and Educational Science Institute – GENESIS**
Institut für Generationen und Bildungsforschung
Lilienbrunnngasse 18/2/9
A-1020 Wien
www.genesis-institute.org

C CZECHIA

- **Dum zahraniční spolupráce (DZS)**
Centre for International Cooperation in Education (NAEP)
Na Poříčí 1035/4
110 00 Praha
Czech Republic
www.dzs.cz

E ESTONIA

- **Foundation Archimedes**
Koidula 13A
10125 Tallin
Estonia
www.erasmuspluss.ee

F FINLAND

- **Unit for Advisory services for internationalisation Finnish National Agency for Education – EDUFI**
Hakaniemenranta 6, P.O.Box 380
00531, Helsinki
Finland
www.cimo.fi

G GERMANY

- **JUGEND für Europa (JfE)**
Nationale Agentur Erasmus+ JUGEND IN AKTION
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53175 Bonn
www.jugendfuereuropa.de
www.jugend-in-aktion.de
 - **Forschungsgruppe Jugend und Europa am Centrum für angewandte Politikforschung CAP**
Ludwig Maximilians Universität München
Maria-Theresia-Str. 21
81675 München
www.cap-lmu.de
-

H HUNGARY

- **Tempus Közalapítvány / Tempus Public Foundation**
Kéthly Anna tér 1.
1077 Budapest
www.eplusifjusag.hu

I ITALY

- **Agenzia nazionale per i giovani (YIA-IT)**
Via Sabotino, 4
00195 Roma
Italy
www.agenziagiogiovani.it
- **Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche, Sociali e della Comunicazione, Università di Salerno**
Department of Political, Social and Communication Sciences, University of Salerno
Via Giovanni Paolo II, 132
I-84048 Fisciano (Sa)
www.spssc.unisa.it/index

M MALTA

- **European Union Programmes Agency (EUPA)**
Triq I-Imtarfa
Imtarfa MTF 1140
Malta
<http://www.eupa.org.mt>

S SLOVENIA

- **Zavod Movit na Mladina (YIA-SI)**
Dunajska cesta, 5
1000 Ljubljana
www.movit.si
- **University of Ljubljana**
Faculty of Social Sciences
Kardeljeva ploščad 5
1000 Ljubljana
www.fdv.uni-lj.si/en

SWEDEN

- **Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (YIA-SE)**
Box 17 801
SE-118 94 Stockholm
<http://www.mucf.se>
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RAY RESEARCH PROJECTS

RAY-CAP

A research project on competence development and capacity building of youth workers and youth leaders involved in training and support activities in Erasmus+ Youth in Action. 17 RAY Network members have been involved in this project.

RAY-INNO

A research project on the impact, role and potential of strategic partnerships in Erasmus+ Youth in Action (a format under Key Action 2) as instruments to foster innovation and exchange of good practices. 16 RAY Network members are involved in this project.

RAY-LEARN

A research project on strategies and practices for organisational development and learning of organisations and networks in the European youth sector. 15 RAY Network members are involved in this project.

RAY-LTE

A research project on the long-term effects of Erasmus+ Youth in Action on participation and citizenship of young people and youth leaders. 10 RAY Network members have been involved in this project.

RAY-MON

Research-based analysis and monitoring of Erasmus+ Youth in Action contributes to the monitoring and development of Erasmus+ Youth in Action and the quality of projects supported by it. This research strand is a joint core activity of all RAY Network members.

RAY-PART

A research project on approaches to participation and citizenship education and learning in the European youth programmes, and the competences necessary to implement such educational approaches. 9 RAY Network members are involved in this project.

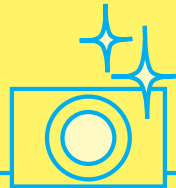
RAY-SOC

Research-based analysis and monitoring of the European Solidarity Corps contributes to the monitoring and development of the European Solidarity Corps and the quality of projects supported by it. This research strand is a joint core activity of all RAY Network members.

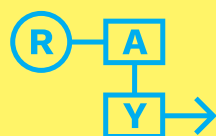
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