



Youth Empowerment through co-creative Activity development

A summary of case studies
based on “One voice” activities

2025



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Building social relations: Insights from activities seeking communal characteristics among different groups

Introduction

Building upon the experiences from the photovoice methodology ([YEA, 2024](#)), where young people from Italy, Belgium and Finland voiced their passions, aspirations, challenges through pictures and words, and expressed how those are meaningful to them for feeling part of the local community, a round of “Defining your group” workshops took place ([YEA, 2024](#)). In this context, youth with different backgrounds and interests, professionals with different expertise and experience met separately to build social bridges among themselves first to then connect with young people at a later stage. Challenges, vulnerabilities and opportunities with regards to engaging with young people were shared by professionals while young people expressed their perceptions on lack of proper leisure activities and safer places where to hang out and feel a sense of belonging.

In the end, a final “One Voice” workshop brought youth and professionals together and this represented a unique exchange opportunity for everyone to hear the other part’s interests and challenges. This set the foundation for a structured co-creation process in which all the target groups will organise together in the name of establishing sustainable safe(r) places, in line with young people’s voices, aspirations and needs.

This report is therefore to be intended as a collection of themes observed and recorded during “One Voice” workshops and conversations as part of the YEA project. This Erasmus+ project aimed to understand what is important when groups within the same community connect with each other. Due to scheduling and engagement challenges, some voices from participants were gathered during formal and informal exchange opportunities offered in different formats, such as individual and small

group conversations as well as workshops, depending on the country-specific characteristics, resources and participant target groups.

Target groups

The main groups targeted during these workshops and conversations were the following:

- Youth
- Professionals working in local youth-centred organisations
- Professionals working in support organisations
- Representatives from municipalities and youth services

In May 2024, “One Voice” workshops and activities took place in Pelt (Belgium), Vantaa (Finland), and Palermo (Italy).

Workshop objectives

These workshops aimed to bring individuals from all target groups together. The workshops facilitated opportunities for exchange and safe(r) spaces where different voices from youth, professionals, and representatives from local institutions could voice their perspectives, needs, and aspirations regarding the challenges and opportunities related to the sense of community.

A focus of these activities was to come up with important aspects of building social relations that could be seen as characteristic of all target groups. Participants highlighted the uniqueness of these spaces offered by the YEA project, where every person was given the opportunity to be heard and share their perspectives on youth engagement, challenges, and opportunities.

Key themes

Needs of the youth

- Young people want to feel heard when proposing activities to youth centres and institutions. Additionally, there is a need for more opportunities offered by the municipality to engage and support youth.

- A common challenge is effectively reaching out to young people, especially those who do not participate in any activities for a wide variety of reasons (such as living far from activities, transportation issues, and language), to ensure they are included and engaged.
- There is a shortage of leisure activities and dedicated public spaces for young people, especially during the summer months. For youth in Pelt (Belgium), green spaces are particularly valued for their benefits, including relaxation, activities, and sports.
- Young people need communities where they can be themselves. They seek diverse and new experiences. Meeting new people is challenging, and it is difficult to go to new places if they do not know anyone.
- Young people also represent a wide age range, from 13 to nearly 30 years old. Some activities are targeted only at specific age groups, such as minors, and there may not be as many activities and meeting places available for young adults.

Networking

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- There is a strong need to develop network activities to enhance collective efforts and effectively reach out to young people. Both large networks and smaller network communities are important.
- Various challenges hinder effective networking and collaboration, including the lack of time due to intensive client work, which limits the space for networking activities. Additionally, the abundance of such networking opportunities and events makes it impractical to participate in all of them. Additionally, the complexity is increased by the turnover of personnel and the short-term, project-based nature of some operations.

Information

- Participants highlighted the challenge of finding necessary information and contacts due to fragmented or incomplete public information about activities. The lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities further complicates reaching the right contact person.

- The timeliness of information is a significant challenge. Municipal operators often publish opportunities for youngsters on institutional pages, but these are not effectively communicated due to hard-to-navigate websites and formal language that is not accessible or appropriate for young people.
- There is a need for appropriate communication between different subgroups. Younger populations communicate differently than older groups, and collaboration is necessary to understand and engage each part of the community. Providing accessible channels and utilizing effective methods are essential for establishing sustainable communication pathways.

Resources

- Youth work often relies on projects to develop new activities. However, the project-based nature poses challenges such as maintaining network information and re-engaging clients in leisure activities after projects end. Continuous involvement in network activities is crucial for helping clients discover and engage in new places.
- The scarcity of financial resources in youth work directly affects staffing levels and the implementation of activities. The significant reduction in funding for the third sector due to current government decisions highlights the need to develop alternative means of supporting youth work.
- Cooperate with volunteers and peers. In Finland, the role of volunteers was particularly highlighted. There was a need for more information on the opportunities for volunteer work and peer support activities.

Recommendations

Develop network collaboration

- Enhance communication and marketing within network activities to improve collective efforts and reach out to young people more effectively.

Strengthen volunteer and peer activities

- Focus on developing volunteer and peer activities to offer more diverse and targeted services to youth. This includes:

- Implement training programs for volunteers, peer workers, and organisations to deepen their understanding and provide better support to clients.
- Provide clear information about the benefits and opportunities of volunteering to promote participation and commitment.
- Encourage volunteers and peer workers to bring forth new ideas and needs, share their skills and interests, and try new forms of activities.

Bridge communication gap

- Propose solutions to improve communication between the municipality and young people, such as:
 - Electing a mediator figure from the municipality to facilitate communication.
 - Creating official social media profiles and/or a Telegram channel to post opportunities in suitable language.

Cooperation with local NGOs

- Develop cooperation between the municipality and local NGOs for example to keep parks and other public spaces in Palermo (Italy) open for longer periods, facilitating networking and engagement.

Integration and diversity

- Concerns were raised about the diversity and adequacy of hobbies and leisure activities aimed at young adults, with regional disparities such as Vantaa (Finland) having the fewest sports clubs per capita. There is a need to ensure that activities meet the diverse needs of young adults.
- The social integration of youth with a migration background was discussed, highlighting the need for more projects targeting both native and migrant youth to foster easier interaction. Support and local organisations should promote activities involving both foreign and native minors.
- When collaborating with diverse groups, especially migrant populations seeking asylum, it is important to consider language, transportation needs, and

cultural differences. Encouraging understanding and learning about different cultures can strengthen community bonds.

Conclusion

These results supplemented the findings of the “Defining your group” activities and were supported by all the YEA resources produced and successful methodologies such as photovoice which gave us access to the complex worlds of youth. The participants had opportunities with other target groups to discuss the results of those conversations and elaborate on ideas around building social bridges between youth, professionals, and institutions at a local level to ensure sustainable networking and collaboration opportunities for the future. Many findings and recommendations mentioned in this report were already known among the groups, but they valued and recognized the opportunity for cooperation. Despite the current challenges in establishing functional connections, participants expressed a desire to continue collaborating in future activities, demonstrating the willingness of different groups to connect and cooperate, marking the beginning of potential change.



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