

research based analysis of **youth in action**

LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF ERASMUS+: YOUTH IN ACTION

DRAFT INTERIM TRANSNATIONAL ANALYSIS 2018

MAIN FINDINGS

FROM INTERVIEWS AND SURVEYS
BETWEEN 2015 AND 2017

Ondřej Bárta
Helmut Fennes
Susanne Gadinger

in cooperation with

Johanna Böhler
Arthur Drexler
Eva Feldmann-Wojtachnia
Martin Mayerl
Barbara Tham

'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 31 countries*.

This RAY study on Long-term Effects of Erasmus+: Youth in Action on Participation and Citizenship (RAY LTE) presents an interim transnational analysis of the results from surveys and interviews between 2015 and 2017 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**, the Czech Republic**, Estonia**, Finland**, Germany**, Hungary, Italy, Malta**, Slovenia** and Sweden. It was co-funded within the Transnational Cooperation Activities (TCA) of E+/YiA.

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Where available, national research reports can be requested from the respective National Agencies and their research partners (see <http://www.researchyouth.eu/network> or –. Further RAY publications can be retrieved from <http://www.researchyouth.eu/results-erasmus-youth-in-action>.

*As of May 2018: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, the United Kingdom.

**Members of the RAY LTE research project working group



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ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

ABBREVIATIONS

- EU** European Union
- E+** European Union Programme Erasmus+ (2014-2020)
- E+/YiA** Erasmus+: Youth in Action (2014-2020)
- YiA** European Union Programme 'Youth in Action' (2007-2013)
- PP** Project participants
- PL** Project leaders/members of project teams: youth workers, youth leaders, trainers or other actors who play a supporting/leading role in preparing and implementing E+/YiA projects together with/for the participants. In general, and depending on the type of project, each project partner is represented in the project team by at least one member.
- RAY** Research-based Analysis of Erasmus+: Youth in Action. The RAY Network consists of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action National Agencies and their research partners involved in the RAY project.
- LGBTQI*** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex or other gender identity
- LTE** RAY research project on Long-term Effects of Erasmus+: Youth in Action on Participation and Citizenship
- NA** National Agency
- Project** This term is used in the text in accordance with the official project lifetime and refers to the whole duration of the financially supported project; this includes all phases and activities during the project lifetime, in particular also preparation and, if applicable, follow-up activities as well as reporting.
- Activity** This term – also referred to as 'core activity' or 'intensive phase' of the project – is used throughout the text in reference to the non-formal learning activities within the aforementioned projects. In particular, it refers to those activities, in which young people, youth workers, youth leaders and other actors come together and work on the project theme(s).

TYPE OF ACTIVITY (ALSO 'ACTIVITY TYPE')

- YE** Youth Exchanges (Key Action 1)
- EVS** European Voluntary Service (Key Action 1)
- SD** Structured Dialogue – meetings between young people and decision-makers in the field of youth (Key Action 3)
- YWM** Mobility of youth workers (Key Action 1)
- TCA** Transnational Cooperation Activities (Key Action 2)
- Residence 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'
- 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 residence country.
- + / ++** Sum of positive responses ('agree' plus 'strongly agree')
- / --** Sum of negative responses ('disagree' plus 'strongly disagree')
- AT** Austria
- CZ** Czech Republic
- EE** Estonia
- FI** Finland
- DE** Germany
- HU** Hungary
- IT** Italy
- MT** Malta
- SI** Slovenia
- SE** Sweden

READERS' NOTES

This RAY LTE Report is, apart from various abbreviations listed above, also using several

terms in very specific contexts, and it is vital to explain these before reading forward.

'SURVEY WAVES'

The research design includes multilingual online surveys addressed to participants at the following stages of their project: before the core activity of the project (e.g. the actual meeting of young people from different countries in case of a youth exchange), two to three months, one year and three years after the end of the core activity. These four surveys are referred to as 'survey waves'. These

surveys included numerous questions, which did not refer to the project and were identical for other survey waves, e.g. 'I am very good at discussing political issues seriously', and which could be answered by ticking between 0 (= does not apply at all) and 5 (= fully applies). The responses were analysed in order to explore changes for each participant over the four survey waves.

'OBJECTIVE' AND 'SUBJECTIVE' MEASUREMENT TECHNIQUES USED IN THE QUESTIONNAIRES

Questions in the questionnaire were constructed in two different ways. The first way constitutes a direct question on the desired topic, e.g. *'I am familiar with the youth policies of my country.'*¹ In this report, this approach is called a 'subjective measurement', since it gives the respondents an opportunity to consciously adjust the answer; it is a self-assessment question for which the purpose is clear to the respondent. Another way to ask a question is to present a series of statements and ask the participants with no obvious or direct link to the measured phenomena in order to receive an assessment, which is not influenced by the subjective opinion of the respondent. For example, asking a series of questions on the preferences of the respondent may provide a sound basis for the examination of the respondent's value system – but without asking the respondent explicitly about his/her values, e.g. *'My respect towards people around me depends on their background.'* or *'I believe that claiming state benefits, which one is not entitled to, can be justified.'*² This approach is called an 'objective

measurement', since these findings can hardly be influenced by the respondents: they do not provide obvious links to what is being scored. Abovementioned questions were specifically designed in order to be used in all survey waves (before the project, two to three months after the project, and one year after the project)³. Therefore, these questions stayed the same in all three questionnaires and were not related directly to the project processes, but aimed at mapping the attitudes, values, knowledge and practice of the project participants. There were also questions, which were only asked during the second and third wave of the survey and which were directly aiming at exploring project-related details and participants' views of the projects as such. An example of such question is *'The following activities, exercises, games and methods were part of the programme of the project in which I participated: Presentations/input by experts/project leaders; Discussions; Role plays, simulations.'*⁴ or *'How did the project affect you in the end? I engage in civil society.'*⁵

¹ The question was introduced as follows: 'Please assess the following statements for yourself by ticking between 0 (= does not apply at all) and 5 (= fully applies).'

² The question was introduced as follows: 'Please assess the following statements for yourself by ticking between 0 (= does not apply at all) and 5 (= fully applies).'

³ For detailed information about the survey waves and further aspects of the methodology see Appendix A – Methodology.

⁴ Respondents were asked to mark all applicable options.

⁵ The question had the following answer options: 'Less than before the project; To the same extent (as before the project); More than before the project.'

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE INDEX AND THE ITEM

There are two fundamental ways in which the questions from the questionnaire are used throughout this report. The first, straightforward way is to analyse and subsequently describe the question as such. In that case, the question is referred to as 'a questionnaire item' or simply 'an item'. In this case, single questions from the questionnaire are analysed.

Secondly, since there are many questions (items) in the questionnaire, some of them were combined in order to provide a wider view of the respondents' opinions; these are

called 'indexes'. Indexes are created as sums of several items (questions) and provide, therefore, a more general information than the items themselves. While an answer to an item *'I am very interested in social issues.'*⁶ provides a very specific information, combining answers to several items, such as *'I am very interested in ... social issues; political issues; economic issues; European issues.'* can provide a broader view of respondents' *Interest in the World*. This way, particular statements of the respondents can be transformed to give us a more general information on values, practices, attitudes, etc.

STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Statistical significance refers to the certainty with which a conclusion based on the data analysis outcomes can be made: A statistically significant result is very likely to be found also in the basic population, not only among the respondents of the survey. In this case, the statistically significant result means that it is applicable to all participants of E+/YiA projects

which are similar to the projects the respondents took part in. In this report, only statistically significant findings are reported, i.e. all changes described below are statistically significant and applicable to all participants of E+/YiA projects similar to those the respondents attended.

FACTUAL SIGNIFICANCE: USE OF THE TERMS 'SMALL', 'MEDIUM' AND 'PROFOUND' CHANGE

Factual significance means that the finding is significant in terms of its content. This means that a difference in, e.g., income is high or low. This is a matter of interpretation and is not dependent on statistical significance described above. Factual significance differs depending on the audience: An income change of € 500 per month would be significant to some people, and at the same time there are millionaires who would not consider it significant at all. In this report, scales are used,

usually ranging from 0 to 10. Changes in the mean or median values are being interpreted by authors of this report based on their understanding of the phenomena in question as follows: A difference smaller than 0.50 is considered a 'small change'; a difference between 0.50 and 0.99 is considered a 'medium change'; and a difference equal to or larger than 1.00 is considered to be a 'profound change'.

⁶ The question was introduced as follows: 'Please assess the following statements for yourself by ticking between 0 (= does not apply at all) and 5 (= fully applies).'

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The promotion of active citizenship and participation in civil society and democratic life is one of the key youth-specific objectives of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. Therefore, the RAY Network is conducting a research project 'Long-term effects of Erasmus+: Youth in Action on participation and active citizenship' (RAY LTE study, 2015-2019), involving RAY Network partners in ten countries. This research project aims to explore how Erasmus+: Youth in Action (E+/YiA) contributes to the development of citizenship competence⁷ and what the long-term effects related to participation and active citizenship are, in particular on participation and citizenship practice.

The research project is designed as a longitudinal study with a mixed-method approach, using quantitative and qualitative social research methods: standardised multilingual online surveys and guideline-based interviews, which are conducted with participants and – in the case of online surveys team members – of E+/YiA projects at various

stages before and after the core activity of the project. In these surveys and interviews, a number of questions on indicators for participation and citizenship competence and practice were asked in the same way at each of these stages in order to measure how the responses vary. In the first survey and interview after the project, participants were also asked about *perceived* effects they considered to be results of the project participation.

This report provides the interim results of this study: 2,403 participants and project leaders/team members of E+/YiA projects were invited to multilingual online surveys starting in 2015; 481 of them completed questionnaires before, two to three months after and one year after their E+/YiA project. Furthermore, 117 participants were interviewed before and one year after their E+/YiA project. A final wave of online surveys and interviews will be conducted during the second half of 2018, and a final research report is scheduled for 2019.

The outcomes of the study suggest that E+/YiA projects do contribute to participation and citizenship competence and practice of participants involved:

- On the one hand, a large majority of participants indicate in the survey after the project that they perceived effects of the project on their participation and citizenship competence and practice.⁸ This is a subjective self-assessment and does not give an indication how strong these perceived effects are.
- On the other hand, a development can actually be measured through the surveys for certain areas of participation and citizenship competence and practice and for certain groups of participants. The measured changes are relatively small – but this could be expected since most E+/YiA projects have a duration of only a few weeks compared to many years of socialisation and education contributing to participation and citizenship competence and practice.
- Furthermore, the interviews confirmed most of these developments, describing them as eye-opening and awareness-raising effects, a better understanding of societal and political processes and interrelations, a deepening, updating and/or strengthening of existing knowledge, skills, attitudes and values as well as stimuli and motivation to participate in civil society and democratic life.
- Finally, the interviews also indicated developments of some areas of participation and citizenship competence and practice, which obviously were too small to be measured with the surveys.

⁷ In this study, competence is understood as a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values (see also Hoskins & Crick 2008a: 4; cf. Crick in Hoskins & Crick 2008b: 313), complemented by identity (Hoskins et. al 2006; Hoskins et. al 2008; Hoskins in Hoskins & Crick 2008b).

⁸ This is also confirmed by the findings of the RAY research project 'Research-based analysis and monitoring of Erasmus+: Youth in Action' (Bammer, Fennes & Karsten 2017)

For some indexes/indicators of participation and citizenship competence and practice, the quantitative data also shows a slight decrease between the first survey (before the core project activity) and the second survey (two to three months after the activity). This can be interpreted as a learning process: the participants learned more about the scope of

the themes they were asked about in the surveys and, therefore, realised that before the project they were relatively less informed, interested or active than they had thought then and that they had rated themselves too high in the first wave. Consequently, they rated themselves more realistically – and lower – in the second survey after the project.⁹

According to the detailed results, participation and citizenship competence is fostered in the following competence areas:

VALUES AND ATTITUDES

Throughout the whole measurement period of the three online surveys, an increase can be observed for 'democracy values'.¹⁰ Furthermore, many interviewees report about a recall or update of their already existing awareness with respect to many single 'democracy values' or values such as the importance of voting, the protection of human

rights or "the principle to always see people in the centre of a democratic state".

Interest in social and political issues is slightly fostered according to the qualitative research strand, partly with a more proactive attitude being the result, especially of the participants who were already interested before the project.

KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge relevant for participation and citizenship was acquired by various sub-groups of participants, e.g. male participants, participants aged 21 to 30, participants in Youth Worker Mobility projects, participants with a tertiary level education etc. Knowledge on how to engage in Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) was acquired by the whole sample in a statistically significant way.

The latter was confirmed by interviewees reporting a fostered knowledge about how to participate, about the functioning of NGOs as well as about the understanding of the terms active citizenship and participation. This is especially the case for interviewees who had participated in projects with a focus on participation and active citizenship or had a respective prior knowledge for other reasons.

SKILLS

According to the qualitative study, the participation in E+/YiA projects made participants more aware of their existing skills related to participation and citizenship – and these skills were developed further. This is especially the case for participants with a

tertiary level education, in particular those whose studies were not related to social or political science or the like. Furthermore, this is the case for participants who had not been abroad very often before the project.

PARTICIPATION AND CITIZENSHIP PRACTICE

Between the surveys before the project activity and a year after it, an increase in *general participation in civil society* can be observed for the whole sample as well as for numerous sub-

groups, such as male participants, participants aged 21 to 25, 'sending' participants (going abroad during their E+/YiA projects), participants who are members of a youth

⁹ It needs to be noted that there could also be influences on the self-assessment through the surveys, which are not linked to the participation in E+/YiA projects. In particular, political events such as the refugee movements in 2015 and beyond as well as personal circumstances such as work- or education-related issues might have affected attitudes, actions or behaviour of the respondents

¹⁰ Values inherent to democracy, such as equal rights, solidarity, freedom of assembly, participation in democratic processes etc.

organisation/association, participants least active in political participation (according to the respective survey responses), and other sub-groups. An enhanced participation in discussions about social and political topics can be seen in quantitative as well as qualitative data.

Furthermore, male participants, EVS participants and participants who were least active before the project in the area of conventional political participation all exhibit a profound increase in engagement in *environmental activities*. A strong engagement in environmental protection and sustainable development can also be found in the qualitative study as well as a positive shift in this area resulting from the project participation.

In the *information gathering* domain, only participants of YWM projects show an increase in the quantitative measurement after the projects. At the same time, interviewees who report about keeping themselves better informed as a result of the projects, are also participants of other than YWM projects.¹¹ If applicable, interviewees are mostly searching more for information on current issues in the country in which their project took place, or on topics their project focused on.

In summary, both research strands show similar results and confirm each other: for some areas of participation and citizenship practice, an increase can be observed a year after the project, in particular for participation in civil society and in environmental activities – and not for conventional or non-conventional political participation. According to the findings from the interviews, the changes happen in many ways, for example, in the form of a greater engagement in the social sector, of a stronger focus on a certain citizenship activity, a reinforcement of a former engagement in the civil society sector, or going abroad again.

The findings also show that active citizenship and participation is fostered for two different groups of young people: for the ones with a

certain prior knowledge of or previous experience with participation and active citizenship (cumulative effect) and for participants who were less active and had little experience and no special education related to participation and active citizenship before the project, who attended such a project for the first time or who had rarely been abroad before the project.

The positive development of participation and citizenship competence and practice of participants who are less active or experienced with participation and active citizenship when entering the project is supported by both research strands. Furthermore, interviewees attending such a project for the first time express a general enthusiasm about the project and experienced it as motivating in terms of participating in civil society or democratic life. This suggests that, with respect to an activation potential, E+/YiA projects are pushing some of those who are rather passive at the beginning of a project to becoming more active afterwards. This demonstrates that these projects contribute to the achievement of key objectives of E+/YiA: the participation of young people with fewer opportunities in civil society and democratic life.

A cumulative effect with respect to participation and citizenship competence and practice can be seen for participants who were already active before the project, had a prior knowledge and previous experience in this field, in particular participants with a tertiary education and/or a specific education in the field of social/political science: they acquired knowledge relevant for participation and citizenship; they became aware of related skills they already had and deepened them; they fostered participation and citizenship practice. This is in line with the 'Mathew effect' frequently appearing in the context of education and human capital. Nevertheless, this contributes to the objectives of E+/YiA and could do so even more if these participants would become multipliers in the youth field.

¹¹ There are only 11 interviewees in the sample of the qualitative study who attended in a youth worker mobility project

2 INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A main objective pursued by the Erasmus+ Programme in the field of youth is the promotion of active citizenship and participation in democratic life in Europe.¹² Therefore, this study aims to explore long-term

effects of participation in E+/YiA on participants and project leaders, in particular with a focus on active citizenship and participation in society and in democratic life.

This research interest flows into two specific research questions:

- How does E+/YiA contribute to the development of citizenship competence and the ability to participate as active citizens?¹³
- 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 has been 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.”¹⁴ In line with the existing body of research on the subject¹⁵ knowledge, skills, values and attitudes as four main areas, complemented by identity¹⁶, were operationalised in concrete indicators. The identity of the individual was also taken into account, specifically looking into the sense of national identity of the respondents¹⁷ as well as of their allegiance to their community, their country and the European Union.

In the area of citizenship practice, habits and activities connected to being an active citizen were explored, such as voting, participating in a peaceful demonstration, signing a petition etc. – representing political participation – but also 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 etc. – representing other ways of participation in society. As for political participation, conventional and non-conventional political participation was taken into account¹⁸. Conventional political participation included voting and running for an office; non-conventional political participation aimed at activities such as signing a petition, participating in demonstrations, making donations etc.¹⁹

The outlined theory helps to capture the very complex phenomenon of active citizenship and citizenship competence. The development of both has to be seen as a life-long and life-wide processes, including a variety of influences playing together. In consequence, the participation in an E+/YiA project has to be taken as one potential influence alongside others.

The research questions were explored by a multi-method approach applying quantitative and qualitative social research methods: standardised multilingual surveys were conducted with the same project participants

¹² 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.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ Hoskins & Crick 2008a: 4; cf. Crick in Hoskins & Crick 2008b: 313

¹⁵ Hoskins et. al 2006; Hoskins et. al 2008; Hoskins in Hoskins & Crick 2008b

¹⁶ Hoskins & Crick 2008a: 8

¹⁷ cf. Hoskins & Crick 2008a: 8

¹⁸ cf. Marquart-Pyatt 2013, Hoskins & Mascherini 2008

¹⁹ Table 1 shows in detail all items of the different main areas as well as the composite indicators created for the quantitative data analysis.

and project leaders²⁰ as well as with a control group²¹ at different stages: before the core activity/the intensive phase of the project²²; two to three months after the end of the activity, and again one year after the end of the activity. At all three stages – called 'survey waves' or 'measurements' in the following text – the participants and the project leaders were asked the same questions (plus other questions related to their profile and previous activities outside the project context) including the same answer items in order to assess their participation/citizenship competences and practices in each survey wave and, thus, the change between the surveys.

Complementary and in parallel, qualitative interviews were conducted at two different stages: before the core activity/the intensive phase of the project and one year after its end. The fact that there were no interviews two to three months after the activity (in parallel to

the second survey wave), was taken into account when looking at the results of the two research approaches together.

The interviews and surveys took place between 2015 and 2017. A fourth online survey wave and a third round of interviews are planned for the second half of 2018. A final report is scheduled for spring 2019. The findings presented in the following chapters, therefore, have to be considered to be preliminary.

The study involving ten RAY partners is to be understood as a deepening of the Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of Youth in Action, the main activity of the RAY Network between 2009 and today.²³ Its results should contribute to practice development, to improving the implementation of E+/YiA and to the development of the next programme generation.²⁴

²⁰ Previous RAY surveys indicate that also project leaders develop citizenship competences through their involvement in YiA projects. They participated in the same surveys as project participants, with some adaptation to their specific role.

²¹ The responses of the control group will be analysed for the final research report.

²² 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.

²³ Bammer, Fennes, & Karsten, 2017

²⁴ For detailed information about the methodology of the study see the Appendix A – Methodology.

3 MAIN CONCLUSIONS

In the following subchapters, the results of the study on the effects of learning in projects funded through E+/YiA on competence and practice development with respect to active citizenship and participation in civil society and in democratic and political life are illustrated. In line with the theoretical background, their presentation refers to the main areas representing participation/citizenship competence (values, attitudes, knowledge and skills) and to participation/citizenship practice, whereas the complexity of the researched phenomena results in various overlaps and strong links of one category to another, especially in the sections dealing with findings from qualitative research. This chapter provides a synopsis of the results of both, the

quantitative and qualitative research strands, for these main areas. Both strands focus on the same subject, share the basic structure with the abovementioned main areas of participation/citizenship competence and practice and were implemented in parallel. Nevertheless, the synopsis has to be done with the required care, presenting synergies or contradictions in possible interpretations, not least because there are surveys at three and interviews at two stages.²⁵

In summary, it can be said that E+/YiA projects do exhibit effects on their participants in certain areas related to active citizenship and participation. Starting with the analysis of data from the qualitative interviews, the following effects can be shown:

- eye-opening and awareness-raising processes;
- a better understanding of societal and political processes and interrelations;
- a deepening and/or updating of existing knowledge, skills, attitudes and values;
- stimuli and motivation to participate in civil society and democratic life.

The quantitative data shows rather high scores in the first wave. For the second and third waves, different developments in the different main areas of participation/citizenship competence and practice appear: slight increases, unchanged scores, or even slight decreases. Rather high scores in the first wave, followed by a slight increase in the second and third wave, go well together with the qualitative findings of 'a better understanding' and 'deepening'. Both effects assume that certain attitudes or knowledge had already been held by the interviewees before the participation in the project and that they deepened and developed them further through the project. In these cases, the respective qualitative data seems to be suitable to confirm the increase which was found in the quantitative study.

This is also the case for items with unchanged scores in the quantitative surveys. The synopsis of those results with the respective qualitative ones brings up slight effects, which

are not visible in the quantitative measurement.

For several items, a slight decrease was found between the first and the second wave of surveys. This might be interpreted as a learning effect of the project, during which the participants learned more about the scope of the themes they were asked about in the surveys and, therefore, realised, that, before the project, they were less informed, interested or active than they had thought then – and potentially also less than other participants – and that they had assessed themselves too high in the first wave. In most cases, the results measured in the third wave match those of the first one or might be even higher.

A further hypothesis is that at the time of the first survey some participants did not know exactly what some items in the questionnaire really represented but learned it during the project. This assumption is supported i.e. by

²⁵ See chapter 2 and Appendix A – Methodology.

the outcome of the first interviews, that it was considerably hard for very young participants to talk about their values and attitudes in general and with respect to their personal preferences. In accordance with this finding, maybe also very young respondents of the surveys had problems to understand clearly the meaning of respective items, i.e. *interest in social, political or European issues*, and rated themselves too high.

The interviews also revealed that participants were concerned about current social and political developments in 2015 and beyond, such as the refugee movements, the Brexit, the growth of extremist parties and movements, etc. This led to confusion, doubts, uncertainties and anxieties with respect to attitudes, values and beliefs in democracy and human rights. This suggests that participants might have been influenced in this respect beyond their project experience and that this

3.1 VALUES AND ATTITUDES

'Democracy values'²⁷

The results of both, the quantitative and qualitative study, show similar tendencies concerning values, which the participants share with respect to democracy values. Firstly, before the project participation (first wave of surveys and first interviews): The respondents score rather highly in the 'democracy values' index, which includes besides others the importance of voting and equality. In accordance with this high score, most interviewees express a high awareness of and appreciation for 'democracy values'. All except a few also vote or have an intention to vote in elections once they become eligible, and they indicate mostly equality, solidarity or freedom as values, which are important to them.

The interviewees live in states with stable democracies, having learned about the rights and obligations linked with democracy while growing up. In most parts of Europe, they got to know democracy as a political system, aimed at creating the greatest possible justice through the principle of equality. The high

might have affected also their responses in the surveys and interviews.

The research question about long-term effects of E+/YiA projects on the development of competences and practice for active citizenship and participation can only be answered when the fourth wave of the quantitative surveys and the third interviews (both two and a half to three years after the project) are finished and analysed.²⁶ The importance, especially of the third interviews, is also based on the fact, that they offer the possibility to present the findings and interpretations of this report to the interview partners, and to ask them for their opinion about it. The conference being held in May 2018 in the European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe, would also be an opportunity to follow up with a considerable portion of interviewees on the interim research findings and on long-term effects on participants.

approval for 'democracy values' before the project has to be seen in this context of democracy being the essence of everyday reality for the interviewees.

One year after the project (third wave of the surveys and second interviews), the quantitative findings suggest that there are changes in 'democracy values' throughout the whole measurement period, with small increases along the way (i.e. between the first and the second, and between the second and the third measurement), and a medium increase in the overall measurement period (i.e. between the first and the third measurement). In the qualitative strand, many interviewees report a recall or update of their already existing awareness with respect to many single 'democracy values' or values such as the protection of human rights or "the principle to always see people in the centre of a democratic state".

Obviously, young people in the sample are highly aware of 'democracy values' and

²⁶ See chapters 2 and Appendix A – Methodology.

²⁷ Values, which are inherent to democracy – in the following referred to as 'democracy values'; see Appendix A – Methodology.

appreciate them (see above). Nevertheless, the danger of getting used to the everyday reality, taking democracy for granted and not worrying about losing it exists. In the projects, the participants become aware (for example by meeting other young people from countries, which do not fully comply with principles of democracy), that democratic achievements are not to be seen as given, as they might have thought until then. The project participation reminds them again – and maybe even more strongly than before – how essential these values are. In other words: The values many young people already shared were strengthened and renewed. This process of renewing and strengthening these values might well correspond with the medium increase measured in the survey data.

Strengthened awareness and medium increase of 'democracy values' – this might be in line with the notion, that values are rather deeply rooted and profound and, therefore, do not change easily or quickly. These changes need triggers – and E+/YiA projects seem to be such triggers and, thus, play an important role in fostering active citizenship and participation of the participants in society and democratic life.

Interest in social, political, economic and European issues

While the respondents of the surveys scored rather high in the areas of *Interest in social, political, economic and European issues* before the project, the answers of the interviewees²⁸ did not show such a consistent picture. Their answers range from very interested to not interested at all. It was also found in the qualitative study that it was considerably hard for the very young participants to talk about their values and attitudes in general and with respect to their personal preferences. In accordance with this finding, maybe also the very young respondents of the surveys had problems to understand clearly the meaning of *Interest in social, political, economic or European issues* and rated themselves too high.

A hypothesis was formulated that they might have thought, that the item *Interest in social*

It was found that EVS participants score higher in the surveys than their counterparts participating in other activity types. The sample of the qualitative study does not allow a synopsis, because only ten out of 117 young people, who were interviewed before and after the project, were EVS participants – and four out of those ten took part in short-term projects of only four weeks.

The abovementioned result, that beside others, the value 'equality' respectively 'equal rights' is very important to most of the interviewees, also corresponds with the measurements in the indexes *Fairness towards the world and Fairness towards the state* (see Appendix A – Methodology) with high median levels around 8 in the general participant population in all measurements²⁸.

There is only one profound increase from median levels of 7 to median levels of 8 in case of the *Fairness towards the world* for those participants, who had taken no specific formal education courses before attending the project. There is no respective finding in the qualitative study, which could support or contradict that.

issues referred to their social life in the sense of meeting friends, going out, etc. This is not unlikely, considering a finding of the qualitative study that most participants were eager to talk and discuss about youth life, youth culture and about youth affairs in general – mostly with references to their own and their friends' everyday lives. This could be an explanation for the rather high scores the respondents gained in the area of interest in the quantitative study on one side and for the heterogeneous findings with respect to interest in the qualitative study on the other side.

Interestingly, a medium decrease of the the interest in the aforementioned issues was observed in the second wave of surveys two to three months after the project. This pattern is not a random error in the data and asks for an

²⁸ Both scales were ranging from 0 (not fair at all) to 10 (highly fair).

²⁹ 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.

explanation. A hypothesis presents itself, that the participants are, during the project, provided with a mirror to reflect upon themselves. This reflection might bring the participants into a state of shaken awareness in which they explore their own attitudes, and revise their own self-image. They ponder on how interested they are in the world around them in comparison to other active young people they have just met. And this reflection process may lead to a lower score on this index after the project is finished, especially given the nature of the questions which are self-assessment questions of which the purpose is clear to the respondents³⁰: The participants could simply mark lower scores for items which explicitly refer to their levels of interest in various areas. The explanations for a decreased interest provided by the qualitative study pertain to the time one year after the project and can therefore not be associated with the results of the second survey (which took place two to three months after the project): Some interviewees reported in the second interview, that they had to focus on school, apprenticeship, work or study after the project, which is of course the main interest of young people because they dedicate their energy to building their future; but school and work are often linked with high pressure – therefore, their interest in social or political issues might in fact have decreased, at least temporarily. Other participants were not aware that their interest in social or political issues might have increased: They described explicitly, that they searched for information about a specific political topic as a consequence of their project participation (for example read about politics in Turkey), but they did not consider this as an interest in politics. The interest measured in the third wave of the surveys matches the results obtained before the activity took place, but they might comprise different components. Trying on the

interpretation presented above, the respondents, who might have scored themselves too high in the first wave and went through a process of reflection throughout the project, giving them a deeper insight into their levels of interest in the given issues, which led them to rating themselves lower in the second measurement and rating in a more conscious manner in the third survey, indicating a more realistic level of interest in a certain topic. This can then lead to similar scores as during the first measurement.

All in all, interest in societal (social and political) matters was supported through the project, especially in case of those participants interested and partially interested in these matters before the project. The synopsis of the quantitative and qualitative results can be summarised as a slightly fostered interest, including an awareness-raising process for rather young interviewees.

With *Interest in European issues* and *Interest in environmental issues*³¹, two single areas should be looked at more closely. The results of the quantitative study show a decrease for *Interest in European issues* (mean of 3.73 to 3.44 and 3.42)³² and no changes in case of the identification with Europe³³; and the interviews tend to show more examples without any change than examples for fostered interest/identification in/with Europe. Also in this case, it can be speculated that the abovementioned reflection process leading to a revised rating of one's own interest might play a role. The influence of the social and political developments in Europe and beyond described in the beginning of chapter 3 might have been stronger than dealing with European issues in the projects. In the interviews, these social and political developments were often indicated as triggers for changes in the perception of Europe, partly in the sense of a declining identification or, more often, encouraging people to fight for

³⁰ See the Readers' Notes chapter above, specifically the subchapter 'Objective' and 'subjective' measurement techniques used in the questionnaires'.

³¹ The item read: 'I am very interested in environmental issues.' The scale was ranging from 0 (not at all) to 5 (fully applies).

³² The item read 'I am very interested in European issues'. The scale was ranging from 0 (not at all) to 5 (fully applies).

³³ The single item analysis shows that there is no difference between the initial and subsequent measurements in case of the following item: 'I strongly feel as European.' The mean values in all three measurements are around 3.5 on a 6-point scale where 0 stands for "does not apply at all" and 5 stands for "fully applies".

Europe and its values. Therefore, the changes measured in the quantitative strand of the research in the area of European issues might have been influenced by the political events rather than by the project as such.

The findings with respect to the interest in the protection of the environment and in a sustainable development seem to be contradictory: There is a clear conviction of increase of interest in these areas by the respondents interviewed in the qualitative research strand of the study; nevertheless, when it comes to the quantitative research strand, there is a decrease in the ratings of both the *Interest in environmental issues* and the *Responsibility to contribute to sustainable development* in Europe. Quantitative ratings of the level of both of those items decrease from the first to the second measurement, and this decrease is subsequently sustained in the third measurement, with the changes between the first and second and first and third measurements being statistically significant. A possible explanation refers to the informal learning context some interviewees indicated for these learning results. Results of informal learning processes are often not as clear to learners as results from formal or non-formal learning processes. The setting of a qualitative

3.2 KNOWLEDGE

The results of both research strands show that for a portion of the participants there is a gain in knowledge related to participation and citizenship.

In the qualitative study, some interviewees report to have profited from the E+/YiA projects in this respect. Furthermore, it showed that projects focusing on 'citizenship' and 'participation' indeed contribute to the knowledge provision, emphasising practical know-how about how to participate, and general information about NGOs; apart from this, those projects strengthen a better understanding of the terms 'citizenship and 'participation'. But in most projects citizenship, participation and politics had not been an explicit subject, and such projects

interview could better reveal those outcomes than completing an online questionnaire.

A similar effect to the one described in the area of "interest" could be interpreted for the participants' attitude towards participation and citizenship. The rating of the index *Responsibility for the world* (see Appendix A - Methodology) declines from around 7.3 to 6.0 and then rises back to 6.7³⁴, in what could be called a medium decrease. A possible interpretation could be that, as in other areas, the respondents ranked this item too high before their participation and learned to rank more realistically after the project. The increase between the second and third measurement could be seen in accordance with the qualitative findings, that the interviewees' attitudes could only be fostered in the projects to a limited extent. Only few participants could be positively influenced by the project and developed towards a more proactive attitude with respect to social and political engagement, regardless of whether, before the project, they had a low, medium or high belief that being active in society is important. It is also important to mention that elections, which resulted in a swing to extreme political positions in different countries, potentially influenced the attitudes of the interviewees.

consequently did not foster knowledge about citizenship and participation. Especially in case of understanding the meaning of the terms 'citizenship' and 'participation', this would have been very important, since especially young participants were not acquainted with the explicit meaning of the respective terms, and either did not know them at all or did not understand them well (similar to the terms 'value' and 'attitude'; see sub-chapter 3.1).

The quantitative research strand shows specific groups of participants, who do gain knowledge in this field: These are male participants, young people over 20 years, university graduates, participants who had experienced specific formal education or specific courses in the area of civic and political

³⁴ On a scale ranging from 0 (no responsibility gain) to 10 (profound responsibility gain).

participation as well as participants of YWM projects. It seems to be rather logical, that all abovementioned groups, except of male participants, indicate a higher knowledge level due to age and education before the project. This is in line with the finding of the qualitative study indicating that those who profit from project participation do this rather by a consolidation, deepening and specialisation of already existing knowledge and rarely by a gain in completely new knowledge. Therefore, the results of both the quantitative and qualitative approach suggest a cumulative advantage for participants possessing prior knowledge related to participation and citizenship: Maybe these participants are better able to utilise the project participation towards their own further knowledge development than others. Supporting this hypothesis, specific cases of interviewees were identified, who chose a project on a topic they already had knowledge about, and in which they were already engaged. They profited from the project participation in terms of the further deepening of their already elaborated knowledge on the project topic – a clear intent in these cases; and evidence suggests, that this mechanism of deepening, and elaborating on an already existent knowledge basis, could be a prevalent mode of knowledge acquisition in E+/YiA projects.

When looking at individual topics, the following can be seen: The interviews indicate almost no knowledge about youth policy (on a national and European level), neither before nor after the project, and in the interviews one year after the activity, there was a tendency to connect youth policy with the E+ programme and life of young people in general. There is a similar picture in the quantitative strand of the study, where the rating of two items focusing on youth policy on a national³⁵ and an international³⁶ level both land on an indecisive middle point³⁷ in all three measurements. Respondents of the interviews, having space to

explain their views, were rather upfront in acknowledging that they do not have much knowledge on youth policy topics; whereas, in questionnaires, the unfavourable option '*No knowledge at all*' could lead the respondents to marking the middle points, which do not explicitly put them into a position of a person who has no knowledge on the topic, but they also avoid indicating that they are knowledgeable on the youth policy topic.

On the other hand, interviews suggest that, for a lot of young people, the participation in the E+/YiA projects contributes to a more differentiated and wider knowledge about Europe and sustainable development/ protection of the environment; a finding which is not corroborated by the quantitative analyses which show no differences between the first and the subsequent measurements in case of knowledge on European affairs³⁸, or understanding the effects of an individual lifestyle on the global environment³⁹. The increase in knowledge about NGOs⁴⁰ was expressed in the qualitative study as well as in the quantitative survey: As for the latter, the rating of the respective single item⁴¹ increases from a mean of 3.03 in the first wave to a mean of 3.44 in the third one. This might be a field in which a gain in knowledge takes place or, alternatively, the gain can be better measured by the participants because NGOs are very likely involved in E+/YiA projects and participants can get to know who they are, what they do and how to get involved in them. On the other hand, the way NGOs are functioning and working is not part of the 'everyday knowledge' of most young people – in contrary to, for example, politics, a topic being much more current and common in society and the respective widespread media. It can be hypothesised that rating oneself in the area of knowledge ubiquitous to everyday life seems to be more difficult than rating oneself with respect to an issue, which is commonly less known.

³⁵ Item reads: 'I am familiar with the youth policies of my country.' The scale was ranging from 0 (not at all) to 5 (fully applies).

³⁶ Item reads: 'I have a solid understanding of the European Youth Strategy.' The scale was ranging from 0 (not at all) to 5 (fully applies).

³⁷ Mean values between 2.5 and 3.0 on a scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 5 (fully applies).

³⁸ Item reads: 'I have up-to-date knowledge of current European affairs.' The scale was ranging from 0 (not at all) to 5 (fully applies).

³⁹ Item reads: 'I understand very well how the way I live has an effect on the global environment.' The scale was ranging from 0 (not at all) to 5 (fully applies).

⁴⁰ Interestingly, the gain in knowledge in the area of NGOs does not correspond to the NGO membership levels.

⁴¹ Item reads: 'I know how I can engage in a non-governmental organisation in my country.' The scale was ranging from 0 (not at all) to 5 (fully applies).

3.3 SKILLS

While a considerable majority of participants indicates in the surveys that they believe they developed participation and citizenship skills as a result of their project participation, these developments can be measured only for some sub-groups of participants and were reported by interviewees only to a limited extent. It is possible, that these skills did not play a vast role in the projects constituting the research sample. In fact, the possibility to practice participation and citizenship and thus to develop the respective skills in an E+/YiA project are restricted to the project settings, which might include settings for participation in society and democratic life only to a limited extent.

Nevertheless, the findings of the qualitative interviews indicate, that the participation in the E+/YiA project made the interviewees more aware of the abilities they already had – to a stronger extent than new skills were developed. Maybe this process is not perceived as a 'development' per se, although it is important as well. Skills one already possessed were also deepened to a stronger extent than new skills were developed and, therefore, the changes might have been simply too subtle to be detected through the questionnaire.

The analyses of survey responses by sub groups unveil a deepening of skills for the group of university students. This could be interpreted in a similar way to the area of knowledge: The ones who already possess notable citizenship and participation skills believe that the project is giving them more than is the case for other participants. Besides this, surprisingly, a development was also detected for participants whose formal education did not cover citizenship and participation issues and for the ones who travelled rather little before the project – so maybe, in the area of skills, participants starting from a lower skills level

profited from project participation as well.

A further coherence in the findings between both research strands can be seen with respect to skills development in the intercultural, social and communication field: respondents score very high when they are directly asked about the perceived effects from their project experience in terms of skills development in the second measurement (e.g. around 90% 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that they developed skills in the abovementioned fields)⁴², and interviewees report a high development with respect to various abilities and skills in exactly the same fields. In addition to this, they mention many examples of skills, not asked for in the questionnaire, such as personal development in general, self-confidence, independence, or empathy. In contrast, the development in *discussing political topics seriously* is rated significantly lower (about 60% of the respondents 'agree' or 'strongly agree') in the quantitative strand and mentioned only rarely by the informants during the qualitative interviews.

The aforementioned findings suggest that it is necessary to further explore the discrepancy between the small development exhibited between the first, second and third measurements and the development as perceived by the participants themselves, which was rather high in the area of skills (rather large enthusiasm on the skills development in the second survey two to three months after the project⁴³).

The way the participants are asked about the development is vital in this case⁴⁴: on one hand, direct questions on self-perceived development through the project; on the other hand, questions on skills levels not referring to the project and not asking about a development', with much less potential for deliberately influencing the outcome by the

⁴² Items read: 'To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Through my participation in this project, I improved my ability...

... to say what I think with conviction in discussions.

... to cooperate in a team.

... to negotiate joint solutions when there are different viewpoints.

... to discuss political topics seriously.

... to get along with people who have a different cultural background.' The answering options were 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'agree' and 'strongly agree'.

⁴³ This phenomenon is also true for RAY Monitoring surveys, and further exploration could be helpful in establishing a viable interpretation framework.

⁴⁴ Please see chapter 'Readers' Notes', in particular the subchapter 'Objective' and 'subjective' measurement techniques used in the questionnaires'.

respondents. It could be the case that the latter type of questions simply could not detect 'subtle changes; at the same time, the changes perceived by the participants themselves and

3.4 PRACTICE

With respect to practice in the participation and active citizenship domain, the findings of the qualitative interviews before the activity show a broad spectrum from not being active at all, through medium activity of the interviewees, up to young people who are very active in the civil society sector. Similarly, in the quantitative study, different levels of active citizenship and participation are found. These analyses also show that basic school⁴⁵ graduates are less active than their university graduate counterparts. A possible interpretation of the difference between basic school and university graduates is the difference between the level of autonomy concerning the free time of the basic school graduates (in most cases young people still living at home with their parents) and the university graduates (usually young adults already starting their working lives and having left the parental nest). Another possible interpretation is connected to the finding that the level of knowledge on participation and citizenship activities one may engage in is different for young people with different educational attainments: As shown above in the chapter on knowledge, younger people tend to have rather limited knowledge on potential activities, while university graduates tend to be rather knowledgeable on the topic. Furthermore, participants of YWM projects are scoring higher than others. As was the case in the previous chapters, the hypothesis stands that the YWM project participants score higher due to the generally different profile of YWM mobility participants who, in the majority of cases, are youth workers and youth leaders of any age and frequently with high educational attainment, contrary to the other project types, which are primarily aimed at young people up

reported back after the project could be overrated due to project experience enthusiasm. This discrepancy needs further research follow-up.

to the age of 25, including those who are less educated.

Both research strands show similar results: There is a development in certain areas of participation and citizenship practice and for certain sub-groups of participants.

Between the surveys before the project activity and a year after it, an increase of *General participation in civil society* (see Appendix A – Methodology) can be observed for the whole sample as well as for numerous sub-groups, such as male participants, participants aged 21 to 25, 'sending' participants (going abroad in their E+/YiA projects), participants being a member of a youth organisation/association, participants belonging to the least active in political participation and other sub-groups.

According to the findings of the interviews, the changes happen in many ways, for example, in a greater engagement in the social sector, in a stronger focus on a certain citizenship activity, in a reinforcement of a former engagement in the civil society sector or in going abroad again. The positive development of participation practice in society and democratic life of participants who are least active when entering the project is supported by both research strands. Also, interviewees attending projects for the first time express a general enthusiasm about the project and a motivation caused by it to engage themselves. This would mean that with respect to the activation potential, the youth projects are pushing some of those who are rather passive when coming into a project to becoming more active afterwards.

Similar to the finding that participation in E+/YiA projects fosters participation and citizenship competence in case of so-called cumulative advantage (i.e. those who already

⁴⁵ Primary and lower secondary formal schooling levels were collapsed in order to represent 'basic school graduates' (16.6% of the sample in the first wave); technical, upper secondary, and upper vocational schools were collapsed in order to represent 'high school graduates' (40% of the sample in the first wave); and university, polytechnic, post-secondary/tertiary schools, and colleges stand for 'university graduates' (43.4% of the sample in the first wave).

come to the project with certain skills or knowledge also tend to grow further in these areas), this might also be the case for citizenship practice of participants whose formal education focused on social and political issues since the quantitative results show these groups to foster their participation practice. Also, the interview data shows a positive influence on being active, especially for those young people who were already active before the project. A fostered participation in discussions about social and political topics can be seen in quantitative as well as qualitative data. Consistent results can also be found for the participation in elections, which is already high before the project and is not strengthened through the project.

The results of the quantitative surveys show a decrease in the participation in social events in the community, in the participation in political events and in the membership in NGOs. This seems to go well together with the qualitative results confirming that several interviewees are less active in issues regarding participation and active citizenship one year after the project because of various obligations with respect to school, apprenticeship, university studies or work.

In the *Information gathering* domain, only participants of the YWM projects show an increase in the quantitative measurement after the projects. At the same time, interviewees who report keeping themselves better informed as a result of the projects are also participants of other than YWM projects⁴⁶. This difference between surveys and interviews may be caused by the YWM projects exhibiting more sizeable and measurable effects (in the quantitative sense) than other project types but generally representing a trend in the E+/YiA project participation outcomes which is not limited to the YWM projects only, applying to other project types as well (as shown in the interviews). If applicable, participants are mostly searching more for information on current issues in the country in

which their project took place or for topics their project focused on.

Before the activity, respondents generally indicate rather high engagement levels in environmental protection and sustainable development areas, with older and better-educated young people scoring higher than their less-educated counterparts. When it comes to project participation influence, male participants, EVS participants and participants who rated low in the area of conventional participation all exhibit a profound increase in engagement in this topic. The trend of younger and less educated participants scoring lower in the area of environmental practice is consistent with general societal trends: more educated people generally tend to care more about environmental issues, and young people still living with their parents are potentially only developing their own understanding of environmental issues. A high engagement in the environmental protection and in a sustainable development can be also found in the qualitative study, as well as a positive shift in this area resulting from the project participation. Differentiations in terms of sub-groups were shown in the quantitative study but cannot be confirmed by the qualitative findings because the qualitative data does not include as detailed information on the background of the interviewees as would be necessary for such an analysis.

From the analysis of the quantitative results one can see that most respondents regularly vote and that the E+/YiA project participation does not have any influence on the conventional political practice of the participants. Both findings are also found in the qualitative study. One needs to keep in mind that this area of interest covers mostly voting behaviour, and elections are held only within certain timelines; with no elections to part in, a respondent might simply reproduce the answer from the first survey wave.

Relatively low general participation levels in the area of non-conventional political participation

⁴⁶ There are only eleven interviewees in the sample of the qualitative study who attended a youth worker mobility project.

are found in the quantitative study and might be connected to the same phenomenon as the general participation low-level results: Respondents were asked directly concerning various activities they do or do not perform in their daily lives, and it might be difficult to incorporate too many of these activities into one's life, given all other areas the respondents

need to devote their time to, such as school, university, working life, etc. The qualitative study also shows that activities like signing online petitions or the participation in demonstrations are almost not strengthened at all through the project participation, or only in single cases.

4 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

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PROJECT LEVEL

Recommendations for the project level

The findings of this research project indicate that participants are frequently not aware of the E+/YiA objectives related explicitly or implicitly to active citizenship and participation, even if their project theme is linked to them. Furthermore, especially younger and less educated participants frequently 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 laid out to them. It is also suggested that 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 active citizenship and participation 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 3: *Establishing project settings which provide for encountering differences as a basis for learning through exchange and discourse, e.g. 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*

also indicate, which factors are likely to be decisive for this competence and practice development, resulting in the following recommendations.

It can be assumed that the project themes of most projects funded through E+/YiA can be linked in some way to the E+/YiA objectives related to active citizenship and participation. These links should be addressed explicitly, wherever possible, in E+/YiA projects. While this might actually be done in the project applications, it is obviously 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 which is comprehensible to participants and project team members.*

These concepts are quite abstract and complex; therefore, they need to be communicated in a way, which takes into account the age, experiences, competences, educational level, socio-political background etc. of the participants.

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, thus, 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 4: *Linking learning spaces in the project environment and social and political*

events and developments at local, regional, national and European levels to the project theme.

This enables participants to experience and understand active citizenship and participation in a practical and, therefore, more sustainable way and provides space for meaningful discussions close to real life.

Recommendation 5: *Providing for adequate preparation and follow-up as part of the project, in particular with respect 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 citizenship and participation can benefit and learn more from a relatively short international experience if they had 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. An adequate follow-up to the project activities is equally important: while participants might be enthusiastic about the project and even highly motivated to transfer their enthusiasm, ideas and what they have learned into practice and their everyday lives, they need guidance and support to do so, e.g. meetings with other project participants to share their experiences in implementing their ideas and what they have learned, and to prepare follow-up activities. They also need support to develop initiatives and projects on their own, engaging in civil society and democratic life, including in relation to issues with a European dimension.

Recommendation 6: *Providing adequate guidance to participants.*

The research findings show that participants were confused and shaken by current social and political developments such as the refugee movements in 2015 and beyond, the

Brexit, the growth of extremist parties and movements etc. This led to concerns, doubts, uncertainties and anxieties with respect to attitudes, values and beliefs in democracy and human rights. Guidance by project teams is essential for participants to be able to cope with these concerns, especially in projects tackling political and civic participation.

Recommendation 7: *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, allowing participants to learn from and with each other, including participants with more advanced citizenship and participation competences acting as multipliers and less experienced participants learning from them, thus creating learning communities, which can continue to exist after the end of the project (see also recommendation 3 and 5). This can also increase the motivation of participants to pursue further activities related to participation and citizenship. 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 8: *Providing time and space for reflection, individually and in groups, of experiences and learning related to participation and active citizenship.*

In fact, reflection is an indispensable part of any E+/YiA project in order for participants to become aware of what they experienced and learned in the project. This is especially important for learning related to participation and citizenship, which requires reflected thinking and action. For many participants interviewed within this research project, the interview itself initiated reflection processes on project experiences resulting 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 to reflect on their learning but also to 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 5 and 6).

Recommendation 9: *Fostering participation and active citizenship by involving the hosting community.*

RAY research suggests that E+/YiA projects can have an effect on the communities hosting

PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

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

Recommendation 10: *Explicitly communicating the concepts of 'active citizenship' and 'participation in civil society and democratic life' in a language, phrasing and terminology which 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, e.g. through respective targeted publications (e.g. on project methodologies etc.), websites, webinars etc.

PROGRAMME LEVEL

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 12: *Providing sufficient/additional funding explicitly for project elements and measures as recommended above or for new activity types, in particular 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*

them, also in the areas of participation and citizenship. Through a stronger involvement 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. In particular, within long-term EVS projects such an approach is likely to be effective in terms of multiplying the effects of the project and fostering the sustainability of projects.

Recommendation 11: *Providing special training activities for project organisers and project team members developing their competences to organise E+/YiA projects which foster active citizenship and participation.*

Such training activities would be aimed at understanding citizenship and participation concepts (see recommendation 10) and developing competences to design and implement projects in line with the recommendations 1 to 9 at the project level. Good practices, e.g. of the Partnership on Youth between the Council of Europe and the European Union as well as of other actors in the youth field, could be adapted and further developed in line with this recommendation.

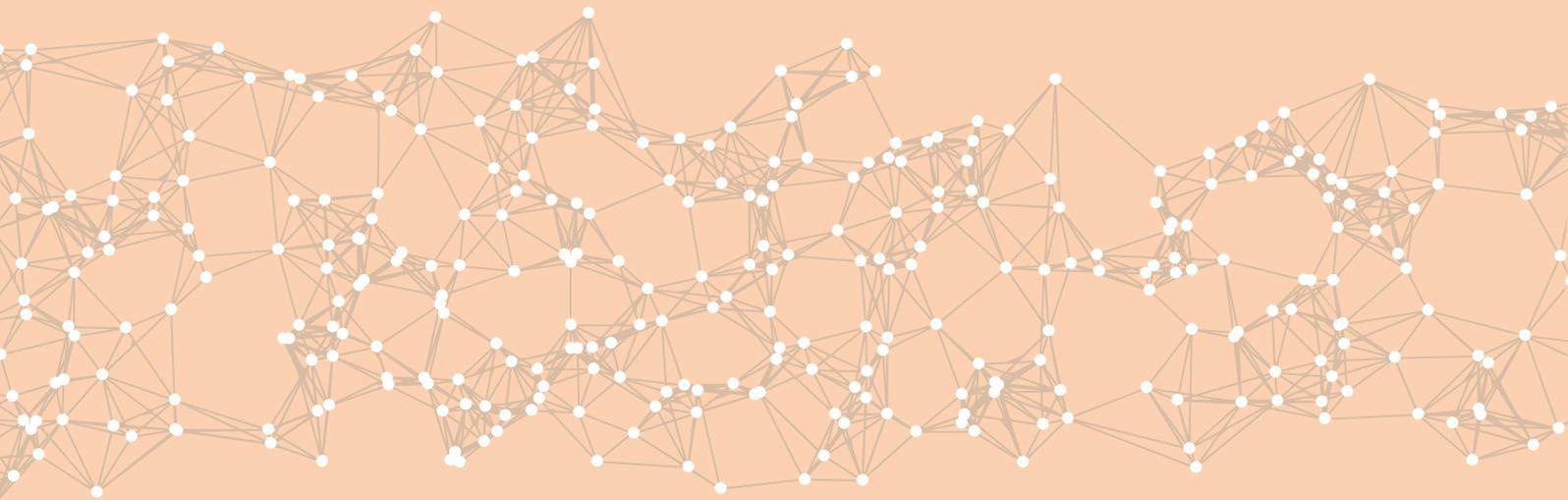
recommended to provide additional funding for preparation and follow-up activities within the project in line with the recommendations above and meeting minimum standards to be defined. Furthermore, it is recommended to develop activity types eligible for funding, which allow participants – individually 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.

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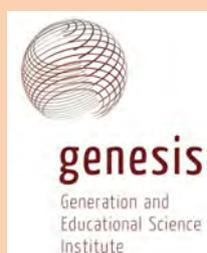
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