

RAY Triangular Summit

Vienna, 5 September 2018

Main findings of Research-based Analysis of Erasmus+ Youth in Action (RAY): Conclusions for Policy Development and Programme Implementation

The RAY findings on Erasmus+ Youth in Action (E+/YiA) are multifaceted and complex, asking also for a multifaceted and complex policy development process. The discussions on these findings resulted in the following conclusions focussing on policy development and the programme implementation as well as on youth work in general.

The political dimension of Erasmus+ Youth in Action

As the MEPs Othmar Karas and Milan Zver pointed out in their video messages, Europe is confronted with many challenges, e.g. an increasing re-nationalisation, xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism, paired with threats to human rights, the rule of law, independence of media and even democracy as such by increasingly authoritarian political systems.

Erasmus+ Youth in Action can counteract these developments by fostering active citizenship and participation in civil society and democratic life, thus strengthening democracy and human rights, and contributing to social cohesion in Europe and beyond. In particular, Erasmus+ Youth in Action can contribute to core objectives of the European Union, to a European identity, to inclusive societies and to living together in diversity.

In this respect, a wish for (re-)politisation of Erasmus+ Youth in Action (E+/YiA) was expressed, in particular in the practice of E+/YiA projects but also in the programme implementation itself.

A European Youth Programme for 2021

Erasmus+ Youth in Action should be developed further in order to address the challenges for Europe. Founded 30 years ago as a programme for groups of young people aimed at promoting a shared Europe and a better understanding of young people in Europe, it has partly shifted towards a programme for individuals who join a project and then frequently are left on their own. Therefore, it is suggested to provide for adequate measures and project-follow-up activities for empowering young people to become active citizens and actors for social change as groups and networks at all levels, thus ensuring the sustainability of E+/YiA projects and, therefore, contributing to a systemic change.

Still to be tackled: inclusion

While there had been ongoing efforts to foster inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities and special needs in E+/YiA – also as a model for society at large – and while the programme is able to involve a certain portion of young people with fewer opportunities and special needs, it is also obvious that there are many young people with fewer opportunities and special needs who do not or

are not able to access E+/YiA. It needs to be explored, which obstacles prevent them from participating in E+/YiA, how these obstacles can be overcome and which project formats and conditions for participating in the programme would foster their inclusion. Furthermore, this approach needs to be extended to the organisational level, taking an inclusive approach also towards organisations, groups and other structures who do not or are not able to access E+/YiA.

Still to be tackled: participation and active citizenship

Research shows that the concept of participation and active citizenship is difficult to be grasped and understood by participants in E+/YiA and that youth workers and youth leaders are struggling with fostering participation and citizenship in their projects. It is suggested to explore new project formats for fostering participation and active citizenship, and to promote the professionalisation of youth workers, youth leaders and organisations in this respect.

Taking this a step further, youth work itself implies participation in civil society, thus is political. Therefore, youth workers need respective training and support in order to include the political dimension in their work. This is especially important in order to overcome a frequent dilemma of youth work: while on the one hand, youth work should contribute to participation and active citizenship – thus also to critical thinking and action of young people – such a critical thinking might not always be appreciated by institutions funding youth work, because it might also be directed towards them. Therefore, youth organisations, centres and associations might have to cope with reduced funding and, subsequently, might rather act “well-behaved” than critical. In this respect, E+/YiA and the next Erasmus(+) programme could play an important role in supporting the development of independent civil society organisations at all levels, from local to European.

Professionalisation of youth work

There is a need for further professionalisation of youth work in order to cope with the challenges it is confronted with. This would imply respective education and training programmes for youth workers and youth leaders, including youth work studies at tertiary education level. Taking this a step further, youth work policies would need to be developed complementing and in coherence with youth policies.

Development of youth work organisations

Research shows that the transfer from individual learning experiences of youth workers, in particular in Youth Worker Mobility projects and Transnational Cooperation Activities (TCA), to their organisations is still weak and incidental. Therefore, E+/YiA and the next Erasmus(+) programme should put more focus on organisational learning and development, e.g. through empowering youth workers and youth leaders for applying what they have learned in their organisations. This would contribute to organisational learning and development, thus ensuring the sustainability of E+/YiA projects with youth workers/leaders and, therefore, contributing to a systemic change. Furthermore, this development process could also be supported by fostering groups and networks of youth workers and youth leaders at all levels in order to provide for exchange and peer learning.

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