

FRANK STEVENS

ANALYSIS OF ERASMUS+: YOUTH IN ACTION

Results of the 2015 - 2016 questionnaire of participants and project
leaders

Analysis for Belgium (Flemish Community)

Executive summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a summary of the main results of a questionnaire of participants and project leaders who have participated in an Erasmus+: Youth in Action project. The respondents in this research are participants in an Erasmus+: Youth in Action project that took place between February 1st 2015 and January 31st of 2016. Two invitations were used to reach these respondents. One invitation was sent out in November 2015 and the other in February 2016. The project leaders were contacted in March 2016 and were involved in a project that took place in the year preceding the invitation. This research is executed by the RAY-research network. This is a network of national agencies involved in the implementation of Erasmus+: Youth in Action at a national level and their research partners. The Flemish partners in this research network are Jint vzw and the University College of West-Flanders, Department of Social Work and Social Care. The aim of this research network is to reinforce Erasmus+: Youth in Action scientifically by studying non-formal and informal learning in a project.

This is the fourth time the Flemish Community of Belgium is participating in the standard survey of the RAY network. For the first time, all national agencies of Belgium (Jint vzw, BIJ and Jugendbüro) are taking part in the survey. The result is a Belgian sample of 720 participants and 139 project leaders. This dataset has been subdivided to construct a Flemish sample. Similar to the transnational approach, the Flemish sample consists out of all participants who participated in a project financed through Jint vzw. This is supplemented by all people who live in the Dutch region of Belgium and who have participated in a project subsidized by another national agency. Furthermore, people who live in the capital region of Brussels and who have filled in the questionnaire using the Dutch language have also been included in the Flemish sample. The result is a sample of 469 participants and 94 project leaders. There are three groups in this sample. First, there are the inhabitants of Belgium who have participated in a Jint project. 128 participants and 29 project leaders belong to this group. A second group is formed by residents of another country who have participated in a project subsidized through Jint. This group constitutes out of 290 participants and 51 project leaders in the sample. The third group are inhabitants of the Flemish region or the capital region of Brussels who have participated in a project that was financed by another national agency. 51 participants and 14 project leaders fit this description. Of the 219 participants who belong to the Flemish community in the sample, 174 live in the Flemish region and 39 in the capital region of Brussels. The percentage of participants from the capital region of Brussels (18%) is therefore higher than in previous waves of the RAY research in which the Flemish community participated. In these samples only 10% of the participants lived in the Brussels region. Of the 43 project leaders who live in Belgium, 38 (88%) live in the Flemish region and 5 (12%) live in Brussels.

1. THE PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The largest group of participants (47%) is involved in a project promoting the mobility of youth workers, closely followed by participants of youth exchanges (42%). Nineteen participants (4%) participate in the European Volunteer System and 27 of them (6%) take part in the structured dialogue. Only six of them (1%) are involved in a TCA-project.

The majority of the participants (61%) are women. This doesn't mean necessarily that more women are reached by the programme. It is an indication that female respondents participate more in research than male respondents. This could be an explanation why women are overrepresented in the sample. The average age of the participants is 26 years old. The largest age category among participants is the age category between 18 and 25 years old (44%), then follows the age group of twenty-six and older (40%). Only 16% of the participants are younger than 18 years. Participants of youth exchanges are on average the youngest age group (average age is 20 years). Participants of EVS projects and the structured dialogue are on average 22 years old. The average age of participants of projects of mobility of youth workers is 31 years and the six participants of TCA have an average age of 37 years old.

57% of participants live in an urban or a metropolitan area. One in four live in a rural area of a small town. Therefore, people living in an urban and metropolitan area are overrepresented in the sample. Yet, the percentage of people living in a rural area or a small town is comparable to that in previous waves of the RAY research.

The participants who filled in the online questionnaire are highly educated. 58% of them have already a tertiary degree. More than one in four is still in secondary education and have not yet begun their higher education. It is safe to conclude that the final educational attainment of the participants will be even higher than the current data suggest. The highest educational attainment can be found among the TCA-participants, participants in youth worker mobility and structured dialogue where more than 70% of the participants have a tertiary degree. The educational degree of participants of youth exchanges is the lowest. Only 35% of them have a higher degree, but that is because a lot of these participants are still in secondary education. If we compare the 14 till 30 years who live in the Flemish or Brussels region of our sample with a representative research of the Youth Research Platform (JOP), than the participants in an Erasmus+: Youth in Action project have a higher educational attainment than the Flemish youth of 14 till 30 years old. Among the participants of Erasmus+: Youth in Action, there is a larger proportion of students than in the sample of the Youth Research Platform. The participants of Erasmus+: Youth in Action also live more in a higher educated family. More than half of them have a higher educated father and/or mother.

More than half of the participants are still in education. Those participants who are already in employment, are mostly full-time employed. Six percent of the participants are unemployed. A significant deal of them (30%) are at least twelve months unemployed.

Eleven percent of the participants consider themselves to be belonging to a cultural, ethnic or religious minority. The most important minority is a religious minority, followed by minorities issued by migration. Six percent of the participants speak at home a language that is not recognized by the state where they reside. Among the participants living in the Flemish region this group represents 6% of the participants. In the Brussels region 14% do not speak an officially recognized language at home.

Participants in an Erasmus+: Youth in Action have travelled abroad a lot. For only 4% of them, the project is their first international experience. Most participants have been abroad for a holiday, as a school trip or as part of a youth exchange.

Young people with fewer opportunities are involved in an Erasmus+: Youth in Action project. One in five participants, who had to pay a fee to participate in the project, have difficulties to pay for it. 17% of the participants agree that they get less or even a lot less of their fair share in life compared to their peers. The same amount of participants report to have obstacles in their access to education, mobility or their social and political participation. 28% of them even report to have difficulties to find a place on the job market. The main reasons why participants meet obstacles in life are lack of money, their social background or family duties. If we use the definition of young people with fewer opportunities from the Erasmus+ programme guide, than 45% of the participants would be eligible as a young person with fewer opportunities. Since 2013 a more strict definition is used in the Flemish studies. Participants who meet at least three obstacles in life or meet two obstacles and have a lower educated mother and/or get less than a fair share out of life are considered to have fewer opportunities. This results in 18% of the participants to be a young person with fewer opportunities. According to 62% of the project leaders there were young people with fewer opportunities involved in the project. The main reasons why these young people are confronted with problems have to do with the fact that they belong to a disadvantaged group, because of their social background and because of lack of money.

2. THE PROFILE OF THE PROJECT LEADERS

The gender distribution of project leaders is more balanced. Although there are also more women than men among the project leaders, the distribution approaches 50% women and 50% men. According to sub-action of the programme (youth exchanges versus youth workers mobility), the gender distribution is quite even in both sub-actions. On average the project leaders are older than the participants. Their average age is 33 and the largest age category is the category older than 36 years old (31%). There is no significant difference in average age according to sub-action of the programme.

76 of the 88 project leaders (88%) have ended their studies. More than eight out of ten (84%) of the project leaders have a tertiary degree. More than half of the project leaders are full time or half time employed in another organisation. One in eight is self-employed. Sixty percent of the project leaders are involved in the project on a voluntarily basis. This is the highest degree of voluntarily involvement ever measured in the Flemish sample.

Eleven percent of the project leaders consider themselves to be a member of an ethnic, cultural or religious minority group. Also this resembles findings of earlier research. There are no differences in minority status of project leaders according to sub-action of the programme. Almost half of the project leaders have already been involved in a previous project as project leader. Four out of ten project leaders have been a participant in a similar project. For 29% of the project leaders it is their first involvement in a project subsidized by the EU. More than half of the project leaders take up an organisational and educational role in the project. More than eight out of ten are involved in the project during the whole running period of the project.

3. REPORTED EFFECTS OF THE PROJECT

According to the largest group of participants and project leaders, there are three skills that they have developed in the project. These are speaking a foreign language, dealing with people with a different cultural background, learn to work in a team and negotiating a solution when there is a disagreement in the group. These skills refer to the key competences of multilingual competence, intercultural competence and social competences. The participants and project leaders agree the least that they have learned to make media content on their own. This is a digital competence.

The agreement with the further development of youth work competences among participants and project leaders is massive. More than nine out of ten participants agree that they now understand non-formal learning better, that they have learned to develop an international project and that in the future, when relevant, they will add an international dimension to their work with young people. More than eight of ten project leaders agree that they have developed all 18 youth work skills included in the questionnaire. The only skill that is less developed by participants and project leaders is to find financial resources to set up projects for young people. The large interest in the international dimension of youth work can also be seen in their intention to keep in contact with the people of the project and seven out of ten claim that they are interested in developing a project with the people they have met in the project.

Concerning the development of knowledge and values, seven out of ten participants claim to have learned something new about cultural diversity, more than half of them have discovered something new about themselves and a similar amount has learned something new about young people and youth work. For six out of ten participants and project leaders cultural diversity has become even more important after participating in the project. Four out of ten participants feel more European. The same amount of participants is interested in developing youth policies and engaging in the struggle against racism and xenophobia. Four out of ten project leaders have become more interested in European current affairs, are more inclined to support people with fewer opportunities, are more interested in youth policies and want to engage more in the struggle against racism. An overwhelming majority of participants think that young people should engage in political and social affairs.

Furthermore, are more than half of the participants convinced that self-development, solidarity, tolerance and equality have become more important to them.

Participants and project leaders agree to a large extent that they have learned something about themselves and have developed themselves. More than three in four participants claim that they can better deal with people who are different from them and that they are better prepared to handle unexpected and ambiguous situations when working with young people. Seven out of ten have a clearer view of their professional career options and which competences they can improve. Six out of ten participants have a clearer view of their future educational plans. Eight out of ten have the intention to improve their foreign language skills. Nine out of ten project leaders have got a better picture of their strengths and weaknesses. Eight out of ten know better which competences can be improved and have a clearer view of their future professional career. The intention to study is lower among project leaders, but a larger proportion of them are already working full-time.

For half of the participants, their image of the EU has not changed. The image of the EU has improved the most among the participants of youth exchanges. Nine out of ten participants think though that it is important to involve young people in European politics. Almost half of them feel more European after their participation in a project and a third of them have become more interested in European topics. Seven out of ten claim to have learned something new about European youth policy.

There are also positive consequences of the project for the organisation/group in which participants and project leaders are involved. More than nine out of ten of them agree to a larger integration of good practices in the organisation and eight out of ten of them agree to a larger use of non-formal learning methods in the daily operation of the organisation. Nine out of ten suggest that there is more attention and respect for cultural diversity in the organisation. The project also influenced the larger, local community of the organisation. According to more than nine out of ten participants and project leaders, the local community considers the project favourably and are interested to have similar projects in the near future. Also the European dimension of the project is highly appreciated. Yet, a quarter of the participants and project leaders claim that the local community was not actively involved in the project and according to only one third of participants and project leaders, the local community became more interested to involve young people with fewer opportunities.

4. INVOLVEMENT AND MOTIVATION

Participants are involved in an Erasmus+: Youth in Action project through a youth organisation, through friends and acquaintances and through an organisation that is not a youth organisation. Also for project leaders youth organisations are the most important gateway into the project. Information from the national agency and colleagues are also important channels for them to get involved.

The motivations to participate in a project of the participants testify of a great appetite for learning. Almost three quarters of them participate to have new experiences, more than half of them want to learn something new and are attracted by the topic of the project. Also the possibility of intercultural experiences is appealing for two thirds of the participants. A little bit less than half of them participate because they want to learn something about a different country. The reason that is the least mentioned is an external motivation: they were encouraged by others to do so. Only 1% mentions this motivation. It is therefore safe to conclude that the participants are foremost intrinsically motivated to participate in a project.

It is well known among participants that Erasmus+: Youth in Action is subsidized by the EU. More than half of them claim to own a Youth pass. Two thirds of the project leaders claim to have used Youth pass in the project. Two thirds of the participants say that Youth pass was integrated in the project and was used as a tool for reflection and self-evaluation. Only one in five participants have already used their Youth pass. The ones who have used

Youth pass (e.g. for a job interview), have the impression that the mentioning of Youth pass was appreciated by the other party and was helpful.

Only one in three participants knows the structured dialogue. This is low, but still it is the highest percentage of participants who know structured dialogue ever measured in the Flemish sample since Flanders first participated in the RAY research in 2011. Only 13% of participants have ever been involved in an activity of the structured dialogue.

5. DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A PROJECT

Three themes have a prominent place in the projects according to the project leaders: cultural diversity, youth and youth work and personal development. There is a difference in content between youth worker mobility and youth exchanges. The structures and policies of the EU, active citizenship, youth and youth work, youth policy and the development of youth policy, education, non-formal and informal learning, professional career development and project management are more prominent topics in youth worker mobility. Youth exchanges feature more topics such as cultural diversity, discrimination, environment, sustainability and health.

On average, a project has 15,5 project goals. One in three project leaders even claim that all 18 project goals mentioned in the questionnaire are goals as well in their project. Three out of four claim that cultural diversity is a goal of their project. According to seven out of ten project leaders the key competences of participants are improved and the intercultural dialogue is stimulated in the project. More than half of them agree that the project contributes to European cooperation in the youth sector, that it improves the international dimension of the youth sector and that one of the goals of the projects is to demonstrate how different forms of learning are interconnected. The project leaders agree to a lesser extent that the project aims to better the future career options of participants. According to sub-action, there is one clear difference in project goals. Project leaders of youth worker mobility agree more than project leaders of youth exchanges that the project encourages the organisations in the youth sector to strengthen their capacity building.

The information to apply for a project is for the majority of the project leaders easy to find and easily to understand. The financing criteria are clear and transparent and the subsidy is fitting. Although reporting is easy for the majority of the project leaders, still a third of the project leaders finds reporting not easy. More than half of the project leaders agree that the application and the management of a project is difficult. The available digital tools get a mixed review. The tool of Youth pass is easy to use for the majority of the project leaders: three project leaders are negative, but twenty-one of them are positive about this tool. The tool for applying and reporting are less easy to use: ten project leaders have difficulties using these tools, fifteen have not.

The majority of the project leaders is satisfied of the preparation and cooperation with the project partners during the project. Most project leaders think that the partners cooperate respectively with each other. Belgian project leaders who were involved in a project financed by another national agency than Jint vzw are less satisfied of the cooperation, general approach and sustainability of the project than the other project leaders. There is a clear trend to use more digital tools (e.g. Skype) to organize preparatory meetings. The digital tool to search for a partner, Otlas, is less used. Only one quarter of the project leaders use it and it is mainly used by project leaders who do not live in Belgium.

Ten percent of the participants meet language obstacles in their participation in a project. This is the largest percentage ever found in the Flemish sample since 2011. Participants are overcoming language barriers by using digital tools, but foremost by using the help of other participants in the project.

The satisfaction with a project is high among the participants. As good as every participant would encourage others to participate in a similar project. Almost everybody agrees that their participation is a personal enrichment. Participation stimulates participation, because nine out of ten want to take part in a new project.