



# REPORT

**WP2: Youth engagement and advocacy**

**Task 2.1: Networking of youth organisations**

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND PARTICIPATION – YEP

Project no.101051412 – YEP – Erasmus-Youth – 2021 – YOUTH – TOG



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## Project presentation

Youth Empowerment and Participation-YEP is an Erasmus+ project which aims at giving European socially marginalized youth increased opportunities to participate and shape society. We will do so by laying the foundations for transnational cooperation, educating young community leaders and developing digital communication tools and platforms. The background is that many young people in today's Europe are left out of society due to exclusion, difficulties in entering the labor market and intergenerational poverty. This applies not least to young migrants and other young people in structural exclusion. Today's generation of young people is the first in several generations to be poorer than the parent generation and they also face unprecedented challenges in terms of climate change.

The project activities are complementary to the promotion and implementation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 and pursue the Youth Goals of "Sustainable and Green Europe" and "Space and Participation for All". Indeed, the awareness and workshops, as well as the permanent discussions, will be characterized by a focus on Environmental protection, sustainability, and intergenerational equity.

### 1. Objectives WP2

The project set up the following specific objectives:

- increase the transnational cooperation between youth organizations;
- promote EU Youth Goals;
- improve participation of young people in local and regional life by organizing workshops and awareness events;
- empower youth organizations in dealing with Covid-19 aftermaths by organizing permanent discussion groups with the local authorities.

Regarding the objectives set for WP2, it is very important to stimulate young people to participate in the social and civic life of the community they come from, to make their voices heard through different channels: the student league, NGOs, non-formal organizations, so that stakeholders to be aware of the needs of the young generation.

Furthermore, by organizing discussions and workshops between young people and public institutions, bringing them to the same table, the needs of both sides are known, additional explanations are provided and a fruitful future collaboration can begin. In Romania, it is known



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that only 7% of the employees of public institutions are young people from the new generation, which is a little worrying.

### Online Workshops: description

Each of the partners organized the workshops for YEP - Empowerment and Participations, with representatives of youth organizations, but also representatives of other institutions and organizations, so as to cover the 4 major themes of the project:

- digitization / digital transformation;
- green practices and sustainability principles;
- young people's participation in democratic and civic life;
- the post-Covid period and the impact on young people.

**Sinergie (Italy)** implemented its online consultations on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of November. They were realized in two different days: the first day was on digital and sustainability; the second one on social inclusion and civic participation. We invited some public representatives, a ngo representative, young students and activists. Our meetings followed the methodology of the debate: we asked questions and we gave 2/3 minutes to each participant to answer. Through this approach we had the possibility to investigate a single issue from different points of view. In many cases, they corresponded.

**Solidaritet for Ungdomens Framtid (Sweden)** organized the round table on October 22, 2022 and it had 2 objectives, namely: encourage young people with an immigrant background to participate in the social and political life of Sweden; involve young people in the promotion of environmental protection and the practice of ecological transport. According to the social class of the young people who participate in the dissemination of the project, it is practically impossible to mobilize them for an online meeting. The beneficiaries of the YEP-project in Sweden are young people with an immigrant background, most of them are students and work at the same time. Another very important factor is the lack of interest in activities that do not directly target their immediate needs. In addition to all these reasons, today's young people spend most of their free time playing games with phones, and also spend more time following posts on social networks.

**In Varietate Concordia (Romania)** organized 2 workshops on 25<sup>th</sup> of October and 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, each of the workshops had 2 themes, with different guests, experts in their field





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of activity. As the methodology approached, it was to offer the guest the opportunity of a short presentation on the topic chosen from his field of expertise, so that then each of the participants could ask questions and have a discussion and exchange of ideas.

**Artifex (Spain)** implemented its online consultations on 16-17th of November. They covered two areas: one on sustainability and adaptation to IA, robotization, algorithms ; the second on inclusion and participation. We invited public servants, ngo's, young students and activists. Our meeting reconfirmed well known causes and issues, but also opened inevitable new angles in a rapidly changing world.

### **1st Theme: digitization / digital transformation**

#### **ITALY**

*Question: what are the obstacles for the digitalization in the education system?*

In the education system there is no awareness on digital, on its importance. More specifically: Teachers and education staff are not engaged towards the digital transition, they don't understand why the digital device arrives in the schools, what its value is;

The digital dimension is interdisciplinary and could not be easy to integrate all these levels; Teachers and educational staff ignore how the digital can help them to do what they already do but better, faster.

In Italy, there are economic resources, especially after the NRRP; at the same time, teachers are able to use digital devices. The digital culture is missing.

The introduction of the digital dimension should happen slowly, it should begin in the schools, from the initial phases, in order to make pupils aware of the potential, the risks and the limits of the digital devices.

Basing on another opinion, vice versa, teachers and students are not well equipped and a process of digital alphabetization is necessary.

All these steps, however, are very important to make the education system based on a democratic, horizontal structure and no longer on a vertical one. In conclusion, digital education can contribute to the democratization of education.

*Question: can digital tools trigger change?*

Digital tools could be very useful to bridge the gap between the real problems in the world and the people in society or in the local context. For example, a digital content can inform and



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push the change in the habits: a concrete case is the dietary transition that many people are going through, switching from an omnivorous diet to a vegetarian or vegan diet. The change of a single person can have an impact on the whole society.

Similarly, a digital tool can spread values and can create communities of values. A participant shared her experience on an event that she organized in her city. It was an environmental retake event: many citizens joined it because they wanted to clean the city but some of them learnt about the urban recovery movements in all Europe and values and started to participate in new events. The digital dimension has a great importance in changing minds, ideas, values; it allows problems to emerge and to create answers. It organizes communities.

*Question: how can digital devices and techniques help the sustainable transition in the education and institutional spaces?*

This question provides two main points of view: the one of the education experts and the one of the students/young people.

According to the expert, digital tools can make spaces more sustainable because they make it possible to map them, to verify the problems and needs and, consequently, to design the most suitable solution in both education and institutional organizations. In a context where a digital device is missing, a participant suggested to create a group of citizens and to organize a walk in the neighborhoods, to explore and know the city; this could be a first step to know the place where you live, its necessities and, then, to transmit them on digital device, to stimulate a transition.

The students share their experience in using digital devices for the university: they are very useful to keep their notes safe and anytime accessible; at the same time, they make the communication with teachers faster. They can acquire all the info they need easily.

*Question: do you think that social media are contributing to a new way of being citizens compared to the way our parents were?*

Social media can help in raising people's awareness of certain issues, but the transition to action is often missing. For example, it can happen that an awareness-raising campaign could lead to no change in people's daily lives. This can sometimes be due to cultural and socio-economic inequality: people do not have the means either to understand or to act.

*Question: which digital tools allow one's voice to be heard the most?*



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Social media: for example, a post may be published by one person but shared physically and ideally by many; Google meet, Zoom... allow meetings, consultations between people far away from each other; they break down geographical obstacles.

Apps where opinions are entered: institutions can consult these tools to get an idea ex ante of a political decision; this would allow young people and people in general to be effectively heard.

*Question: what is the biggest obstacle to environmental awareness today?*

In Italy the biggest problem is represented by the bureaucracy, both on high and low field: too many structures, levels and people to be consulted, the transition goes slow, it has many obstacles and the spread of sustainable innovation is difficult.

In general, however, great indifference also contributes. Many people do not believe or understand what is happening, they have no interest in getting informed.

*Question: are the obstacles also European?*

Actually, the obstacles are, first and foremost, international. There are too many socio-economic mismatches for all people to adequately develop skills and knowledge to make proposals and trigger change. At the European level, however, there are many differences because, on the one hand, there are countries that invest a lot in the digital and environmental transition and others less. Moreover, some do it autonomously, with their own funds (like Germany), others (like Italy) without substantial European aid, fail.

*Question: how can an online campaign have as much effect on young people as on institutions?*

A participant affirms that a campaign can be effective if it impacts positively on people who generally ignore problems or are not aware of them. Another suggests that a campaign can be fruitful if really activates people.

Young people are overstimulated: they have a huge quantity of content to be consumed, a lot of choices and sometimes this is translated into a “passivation” of their minds, actions, personal attitudes and personalities. So, the first step to take is to train people to be active, to understand that they can have a real impact in the world, that they already have one. Basically: we should teach people to be active, to empower their awareness on the impact they can have. Consequently, a digital campaign can be a “call to arms”.





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## ROMANIA

*Radu Puchiu*, Director of Technology & Society Program at Aspen Institute Romania and Co-Founder of the NGO H.appy Cities was the speaker for the workshop named “Digital transformation and young people's access to public institutions”.

Radu developed his intervention in two segments: the access of young people to Romanian public institutions and the digital transformation of public authorities in Romania.

Related to the first topic, he spoke about the Internship Program from the Romanian Government, initiated by him 11 years ago and developed for 4 years. He spoke about the positive results for young people of this type of experience, where they have contact with all departments within the Government, but also initiation sessions at various ministries. Annually, around 800-900 young people follow this type of training for 2 months, during the summer. Radu also emphasized the fact that through this program young people begin to understand public administration and see beyond Romanian stereotypes.

There is a question: how could someone practice in a ministry if he fails to be admitted to the program organized by the Romanian Government? As a personal recommendation, it was to try to apply for this program, and if they do not succeed, to contact the institution/ministry of interest directly and ask. moreover, the educational institution can make a direct request to the public institution, because the legislation allows it.

Regarding the digitization of public institutions in Romania, Radu emphasized the importance of the experience that the citizen/young person has with the public institution. He argued that everything should not be digitized for the sake of the process, but the problem should be approached systematically. Thus, first of all, the citizen of the respective city/community must be asked whether or not he has access to the Internet, whether or not he knows how to use a platform (to pay, upload documents, etc.), and whether he relies more on direct contact. As an example, take the Republic of Moldova, where a very good team of specialists has digitized almost 90% of public institutions, but the citizens do not use even 50%, because they do not know or cannot.

Then there is the matter of bureaucracy. The Romanian administration is very bureaucratic and if we move this bureaucracy online, in fact, nothing has been resolved, the citizen's experience being a negative one.

The bureaucracy must be simplified and only then comes the digital transformation. Another impediment, apart from bureaucracy, is the thick and incoherent legislation. In the same way,



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moving online without simplifying the legislation does not help, but rather complicates the processes.

Digitization is not an easy process, but it must be done gradually, depending on the needs of society and the experience of the citizen.

## SPAIN

*Question: what are the obstacles for the digitalization in the education system?*

The educational system was developed to train people to work on a line of production and therefore individuality, spontaneity and creativity were not fostered. Ironically, there are precisely now the exact tools that we need to mutate and evolve in a rapidly changing world. So the educational system is not ready to extract most of the huge potential that the digital world offers. More specifically:

- Teachers are not digital natives, while their students are. This fact leaves little room to the old teaching scheme, since teachers have not the authority that comes with knowledge and expertise: the students feel that the teachings they receive are just poor intents of pretending that the educators are really proficient on the matter, so they do not really pay any attention or respect the teachings;
- The digital dimension cannot therefore be effectively integrated;
- Teachers and educational staff do not have the energy, time or motivation to recycle themselves into the digital world. The teachers collective leads the depression ranking in all jobs and they do not receive much help or guidance from our government.

As a whole, the Spanish teachers, whether secondary or university level, mostly lack a solid digital culture. Only the younger generations, most of them young primary teachers, have a better understanding of the digital world.

As a result, the digitalization happens basically outside the school in a no-formal education scheme, where the market shapes and defines the prevailing mentality of present and future. This leaves the student defenseless marketing, sales and mindset-modulations designed and broadcasted by private companies whose objectives are not really educate but sell and commercialize products instead.

The introduction of the digital dimension is happening very fast, but without any educational control or supervision, with virtually every student walking in the street while reading his/her



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mobile, hardly aware of the physical world around them, as we can verify at any zebra crossing or traffic light.

This is basically an irreversible situation where a whole generation is being modulated not by an educational formal system but by a mix of an informal market-driven platform of multinationals/big trademarks and frequently biased or poorly educated “influencers” talking on virtually any subject regardless of their own personal qualification.

All these elements are basic to understand the impact and size of the digital transformation of our society. Our educational system has a dwindling influence in creating men and women with a solid background on democratic values, ethics and fair distribution. The “Market” that it is, capitalism and the influencers exert a disproportionate influence on the young generations while the older generations are too busy to see the importance of this shift.

*Question: how can digital devices and techniques help the sustainable transition in the education and institutional spaces?*

Digital tools provide clear, understandable data (maps, geolocation, diagrams, stats...!) in short, tools to verify and diagnose problems. On the other side, a simple cut in the electric grid can cause the immediate fall of the whole system. For example, an electricity problem may block the whole system of a shop since both stock and payments are absolutely dependent on the grid.

In the population there's a clear gap between the older and the young digital generation. The non-very-friendly interfaces makes it very difficult for an old person to use an automatic cashier, for example, or to fill his tax documents.

The heavy use of digital devices for the students have changed education. For example, at the university everybody has a laptop and writes furiously while they listen to the professor, trying to not miss a single word and then digest the information afterwards.

This acts like an extended memory device and this is very good except in one dimension: the memory is not trained and the notes cannot include diagrams or drawings, something that could be done when using paper and pencil. Communication is being accelerated but with a shallower imprint. They are used to instantly search and find any information but at the same time they have an excessive exposure: around 4,5 hours/day of phone use as an average. Before the digital era, those hours were used to interact at the bar, with a group of friends or searching information at the library. The digital shift has some implications still to be identified and evaluated in the next few years.



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## 2nd Theme: green practices and sustainability principles

### ITALY

*Question: what is the most effective strategy to ensure the involvement of young people in the topic of sustainability?*

Many interesting points of view emerged during the debate. The involvement can happen showing to people the link between their behaviors and the effects of these behaviors, inviting them to act to change the causes. However, this aim looks hard to be reached because the sustainable awareness is poorly disseminated in the community, in the society. For example, a participant suggests to develop specific contents in the social platforms used especially by children, to instill environmental awareness in them. Moreover, not all citizens have the cognitive and cultural tools and economic means to make appropriate green choices.

*Question: is the knowledge on green and environmental European strategies and measures well disseminated among young people?*

The participants share the idea that Europe and its policies are far and too much formal. Some of them affirm that the EU is not able to communicate, to spread outside in an innovative way its values, events, proposals and so on. The problem is not only on an objective level, but also on a subjective level: in some countries, some digital instruments are preferred to others. For example, in Italy, Instagram is used a lot, also for information. In France, on the other hand, Snapchat is much more popular, which is not a medium where information circulates easily, it is not a platform born for this. Therefore, Europe should also work on communication means, as well as on content.

At the same time, there aren't European associations that implement common actions, regardless the national borders, to inform the population or to implement new and interactive initiatives. Actually, there are some European centers where the values and the strategies are promoted, but the impact is generally local (EU Direct centers). However, in the opinion of some, the new NRRP opened the eyes of European citizens: many of them learnt something new on the Union.

It's also true that a personal and curious attitude has a role in this: not all people use to read or to look for information and they ignore the green policies because they are not interested in these topics.





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## SWEDEN

The second part of the round table concerned a theme centered on the protection of the environment. *Mr Thaddée NZIGENDAKO* developed a subject entitled “Green promoters”. He first defined the causes that contribute to environmental degradation. Then he highlighted the consequences of environmental degradation on biodiversity. In his presentation, the facilitator explained the causes of climate changes and how young people can get involved for contributing to the promotion of environmental protection and the practice of ecological transport.

## ROMANIA

*Roxana Buzetelu*, Mastermind Facilitator for Leaders for Climate Action and founder of the NGO “Micile Bucurii” (The Little Joys), was the guest for the “Green Promoters: how to be sustainable and ecological” workshop.

Micile Bucurii is an NGO that aims to encourage people to return to a life lived consciously, to be able to respect the nature that surrounds us and understand the vital role it plays. Understanding interdependence will enable us to see it as a whole of which we are a part. Beyond the relationship we have with the environment, we nurture in those who are with us the importance of inner discipline, of a constant practice of awareness of everything that happens in us and how it is reflected in the choices we make.

Roxana focused primarily on explaining the terms in general language about what climate change means, greenwashing, selective waste collection, and reducing consumption and food waste. For each of the concerns addressed, the guest gave concrete examples from everyday life. Thus, for greenwashing, he talked about the campaigns of those from Coca-Cola who, although they say that they use plastic bottles made of recyclable material, are still plastic and are recycled too little or not at all. Another example was with the campaign from HM who said that if you bring certain old clothes, you get a shopping voucher from them, actually encouraging consumption, and the clothes (many of which are combinations of different types of materials), cannot actually be recycled. A better example in this direction was that of those from Auchan who receive good second-hand clothes, sanitize them, and put them on sale at a very low price.

Then, for the selective recycling of waste, she spoke about the fact that although we have the impression that this process is starting in Romania, it is a very difficult and arduous one



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because the Romanians are not taught to clean the packaging and then take them to the recycling points so that any contamination leads to reduced recycling. A concrete example was that of the coffee cups that all the participants were told were recyclable. In fact, the reality is that no, they are not recyclable because the cardboard to keep the liquid in it, has a plastic film over it, and because those glasses are contaminated. So, most of the time they end up either at the incineration (at best) or at the landfill.

A participant asked what is her advice for the water and coffee's choice. For water, Roxana proposed using her own glass bottles and refilling them at home, using either a Brita water filter mug or a water filtration system installed at everyone's sink (this is because in Bucharest, for example, the water is not potable).

She, then, explained, answering the questions, that being more sustainable does not necessarily mean more expensive. Indeed, it is advisable to buy clothes of a higher quality (which cost more), but which can be used for a long time, thus reducing the consumption of clothes. Regarding the reduction of food waste, he gave some examples of using seasonal fruits and vegetables from the market (less so from the supermarket), taking into account strictly necessary purchases and not excessive consumption.

## SPAIN

*Question: what is the most effective strategy to ensure the involvement of young people in the topic of sustainability?*

A lot of opinions and a general obvious confusion among symptoms, problems and causes could be a good resume of the meeting: In order to educate conscious citizens, we lack the social elements that helped us in the past to relate our behavior and decisions and the effects of these behavior/decisions.

Suggestions and proposals were not really very elaborated, but rather a confirmation that those issues do not have a space in the collective mind and therefore not many people really have done some homework and reflect on these matters. Some students suggested that somebody" should start digital educational projects, specifically aimed to address talent identification (since you are a good graffiti artist, you could pursue a career in comics, graphic designer...). But when asked how you could make career recommendations to a total stranger through the internet they reckon that this is more a wish than a possibility. An interesting point was that the realization that their suggestions may not address the point in the first



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place, increased the pessimistic cloud that the students already had above their heads, making them even less participative.

*Question: what green and environmental European strategies are you aware of?*

Only a couple of students mention that the UE has a 2030 agenda that includes green objectives but could not specifically tell any particular law, policy or action.

The general impression is that Europe is ruled from Brussels, with little contact with the local facts of each country and less about the regions. Some of them were aware that most European funding goes to corporations or big land owners instead of small and medium enterprise or small farmers. Some say that there's an excel of bureaucracy and a very little window of opportunity to reach the CE institutions. Some had a little experience diving into CE websites and they say that it is almost impossible to find answers to specific topics (too many long pdf documents) so after a while, they simply give up and stop searching.

They basically to to Instagram, which has evolved from a space where to publish photos to a marketplace where you can offer goods and services and meet clients and suppliers.

The huge difference between Instagram and CE in finding an answer or a solution is the agil Instagram design, in comparison with the the huge CE websites and ineffective search machines. They feel quite disconnected, by language, by design, by performance.

Also, sustainability or adaptation are not really a priority on the students mind. Work, profession, trending topics and fashion absorb most of their attention and there is little interest in changing the world. Rather the very idea of "changing the world" is not in their vocabulary. Those consuming ecological food or aware of green trends is because their parents are interested in healthy food and a strong immune system, a more ego than eco approach to change.

### 3rd Theme: young people's participation in democratic and civic life

#### ITALY

*Question: what mistakes should an institution absolutely not make when communicating with young people, if the goal is youth participation itself?*

Basically, two main mistakes emerged:

- Lack of active listening and empathy by public institutions. Young people participate in public life: they create movements, groups, events in order to protect their values and interests, to spread their voices, but they are not considered. Young people perceive



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their initiatives as an illusion: even if they are willing and active, their actions do not have any impact because the public institutions do not listen to them. Consequently, some participants say that the policy makers do not have empathy with their needs and fears.

- Lack of communication. Public bodies are not able to communicate with young people; often, they talk about young people but not to or for them, despite their interests are transversal and concern also the oldest generations. The communication is unilateral and makes the institutions distant. These elements enlarge the gap between young people and public bodies, it creates disaffection and lack of participation.

*Question: who finds it most difficult to be included within the university social world?*

A participant reported his experience as a member of the National Council of University Students. He described the problems faced by some students with disabilities. Since they were systematically excluded by university activities and initiatives, he founded a committee to organize trips or lunches for and with them. So, he affirmed that social exclusion affects mainly people with disabilities.

Other participants highlighted obstacles related to the university fees which, in many cases in Italy, are high and do not allow everyone access to education, or internal barriers linked to the political alignments inherent in academic structures (it may happen that there are politically aligned university associations or committees). Consequently, those who may find it more difficult to be included in the university social world are people with limited economic resources or those who, because of culture or will, do not want to be affiliated to any university organization.

*Question: can conscious information be sufficient to generate a drive to action in young people? Can it be a concept that also applies to the dynamics of inclusion?*

Informing oneself is necessary to gain awareness on certain issues, so it can push young people into acting.

Basing on the opinion of some participants, education can have a real role in this.

Both information and education can help people in developing their critical thinking and in acquiring the certainty to be protagonists of their lives, in their communities. However, other participants affirmed that they are not sufficient to act because of external factors (political





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influences, fake news, lack of economic possibilities to access to education, lack of knowledge in readers...).

*Question: do you think that associationism is a good tool to encourage social participation or are there difficulties too?*

Associationism has many positive aspects.

It is an excellent tool to participate in civic life because it aggregates: through it, people can see how many things they can do together that they would not otherwise do alone. Associationism is an engine for inclusion and civic participation at the same time.

In addition, it makes people able to discover and valorise their passions, skills and values and, in some cases, pushes them to act at a higher level. For example, many people start volunteering and then move on to political activities.

It could be not easy to join a volunteering or a civic association because of lack of time, but how a participant suggested, once approached, an individual use to shape his or her commitments to activities because he or she understands that his or her interests and passions can be turned into something concrete and can have a real impact in the world.

*Question: digitalisation is becoming more and more prevalent in the life of administrations, and we are not only talking about social, but also about all the tools that can foster social participation, such as SPID (Italian Public Digital Identity System), online petitions, and so on... In your opinion, which tools of this kind should institutions invest in to increase the social participation of citizens?*

These kinds of tools are very useful to destroy the geographical and physical barriers, allowing everyone without distinction to use state services. However, many steps are still to be taken. A participant suggested to follow the example of Estonia where the whole bureaucracy is completely digital. On the other side, the bureaucratic bodies should be more attractive to young people. In Italy, administrative officials are often older people who lack digital skills or are inflexible towards innovation. Therefore, proposals include encouraging the recruitment of young people in public bodies or creating mentoring systems in municipalities, universities and so on. For example, a young student could implement his or her traineeship in assisting a university secretary in dealing with academic paperwork using digital tools. In Italy, administrative staff in universities are sometimes skeptical about digitisation and this slows down a necessary and unstoppable process of inclusion also through the digital devices.



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Another participant cited some important initiatives that should be promoted more: Carta Giovani Nazionale (National Young Card) and Erasmus+. The first one allows young Italian citizens access to national goods and services at reduced prices; the second increases the sense of belonging not only to one's own nation, but to Europe as a whole.

This intervention raised an observation: even if there are opportunities like these, not all young people are informed. On a hand, the institutions give opportunities but do not communicate them adequately; on the other one, young people seem to be unable to catch these opportunities, perhaps out of fear, ignorance, disinterest.

*Question: have you ever been subjected to or witnessed an incident of discrimination or non-inclusion?*

The young people present at the meeting reported examples of discrimination they had witnessed. The first one was in the university: a professor said to an Erasmus student that she would have had to learn Italian to take the exam, otherwise she would not have been graded in the session.

The other participant, as a referee, described some racist episodes on the field by both players and the coach towards a black athlete.

*Question: what would be the ideal action for you, on the part of the institutions, to make you feel included in today's society?*

A summary of the answer follows:

- consultations between young people and public institutions: young people would have the opportunity to express themselves freely and policy makers to actively listen ex ante and implement specific measures ex post;
- provide young people with city spaces (e.g. recovery of an old library) where youth and/or city associations can meet and debate, propose, create;
- creation of youth committees in the cities, at local level for them to make proposals to improve their places of origin;
- implementation of working workshops during which concrete proposals or initiatives could be produced for the attention of the institutions;
- changes in political participation, namely:
  - reduction of the age for candidature and election to government bodies
  - elimination of “youth” and “adult” sections within parties



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- reduction of the voting age
- greater flexibility in welcoming young people into public bodies

An emblematic sentence during the consultation was “what needs to be stimulated is the active participation of institutions in youth issues”.

*Question: which content formats generate more active participation by young people?*

Digital has changed our minds: nowadays, people prefer short, concise, but not poor-quality content. Therefore, the ideal format is represented by news or articles with neutral, valuable information that provides essential data in a short time. One participant suggested the dissemination of numbers, data and percentages because they give immediate information about a phenomenon, for example, and its quantity. In some cases, TikTok or Instagram can have an informative role in this sense, some creators are able to produce contents like these. However, if, on a side, social and digital tools give us the perception to access anytime and whenever we want to a huge quantity of information, on the other one, this is an illusion. Just consider the fake news around us: they could be dangerous if a person doesn't have competences to understand. In addition, people can lose connection with reality: if someone signs an online petition, it doesn't mean that he or she is really participating.

## SWEDEN

The first part was centered on the theme entitled “Active citizenship”. The facilitator established the difference between citizenship and nationality. Then he informed the participants about the rights and duties of citizenship. During this seminar, the facilitator also insisted on the importance of the participation of young people in social and political life.

## ROMANIA

The guest of the first panel in the first workshop was *Răzvan Orășanu*, former Executive Director of the Institute of Popular Studies (2014 – 2016), Kokkalis Fellow at Harvard University – John F. Kennedy School of Government (2012), Local Consultant for the World Bank (2010), Cabinet Director of the President of the Competition Council (2009), graduate of the Financial Programming and Policies course - International Monetary Fund (2009), State Advisor to the Prime Minister on economic issues (2005 and 2007-2009).



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He is also the president of the NGO “Tine de noi”(It’s up to us), which aims to create active communities in the field of public economic, educational, and energy policies and the establishment of a space for debate in society related to the problems of Romania's governance.

The discussion started by co-opting the participants to get involved in a dialogue with the guest, so they were asked to write in the chat or to intervene with examples of civic actions that they know or have heard of. Some of the examples given were: greening actions carried out under the umbrella of Let's Do It, Romania! Clean up the lake! Microcredits gave to needy families, etc.

Răzvan Orășanu also explained what a catalyst of a civic action means, who is actually the one who initiates the action and has a minimum of courage to develop it, to co-opt other volunteers in what he believes. Another element of a civic action is visibility: that is, a daring idea to which marketing principles are applied, so that it stands out and shocks, most of the time. The example given was The Headington Shark, a rooftop sculpture located at 2 New High Street, Headington, Oxford, England, depicting a large shark embedded head-first in the roof of a house. It was protest art, put up without permission, to be symbolic of bombs crashing into buildings. Thus, this more original message attracted the attention of both the authorities and the population. Later, the authorities took measures for this house to be preserved as a museum, thus they passed the other side of the coin.

Another element of civic action that should be done by volunteers is an accessible database that will grow day by day with new people so that the information is disseminated as widely as possible. The last element discussed by the speaker and the guests was of the knowledge of citizenship rights, and the initiative to approach and request information from public institutions. Much has been discussed about law 544 regarding free access to information of public interest, a petition that should be used by as many volunteers from NGOs as possible, but also by citizens.

The main conclusion was that to be active citizens you need a dram of courage.

## SPAIN

*Question: How big is the impact on citizenship of social media compared to the way our parents were?*

Social media is a powerful broadcasting emitter, but the gap between theory and practice is everytime bigger: in a tik-tok world of very short messages, there’s virtually no chance to





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expose complex issues that need a contextual explanation. The result is an increasing impatience of the user, and a constant zapping among different themes, provoking an epidemic “Paralysis by Analysis” effect. Everybody wants the world to change but not many are ready to experience little personal changes in their daily lives. This offset between expectations and reality is greatly exacerbated by the culture of tik-tok videos of less than one minute. Many people get hooked into a cascade of these 1 minute videos and, three hours later, they are unable to remember but a tiny percentage of the stream of information indented. No time to process or reflect.

*Question: what is the biggest obstacle to environmental awareness today?*

In Spain, Bureaucracy as the main issue. Por example, a lot of CE Horizon 2020 subsidies will have to be returned to Brussels because we the people cannot enter our proposals into the system, totally overwhelmed with projects. In Agriculture the PAC (Agrarian Policies) discourages the young to start an agricultural project, (need a minimum of 2 Ha because the norm is based on Kg produced instead of Kg/square meter: a small regenerative agriculture plot can produce more food per square meter that a bigger plot run by conventional agriculture) or absurd rules like that a retired person cannot start a business because receives a pension, thus blocking a lot of potential initiatives from people that usually have some financial assets in store after a lifetime of hard work.

In general, young people are not interested in finances. Most of them still dream of finding a “good job” , that is, being rather a public servant or employee than an entrepreneur. Any of the students could clearly explain the difference between an entrepreneur from a social entrepreneur, by the way, a confirmation that equality and re-distribution are also outside their radar.

*Question: are the obstacles also European?*

Main obstacle is globalization. Different parts being fabricated in different countries and assembled in another country to produce something to be sold in another country. Basically any of the students were aware of the energy crisis. They did not know about the tight relationship between food and petrol, for example (to produce 1 calorie of food, we need 10 calories of fossil fuel) In our Balearic Islands, we import around 85% of all what we consume and our food system could not even resist one week without imports. Therefore, globalization means fragility, a dynamic balance as long as somebody rides the bicycle.



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*Question: who finds it most difficult to be included within the university social world?*

Increasingly the young ones are slowly starting to realize that a University Degree does not guarantee a good job. In fact, a survey shows that the university only provides around 30% of the skills needed for the job, the other 70% had to be taught while working. Therefore,  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the skills needed for a job are non-formal. The experience of older brothers being forced to emigrate if they want to work in the fields that they graduated from, also discourages them from studying 3-4 years only to realize that the firms ask for “experience” too.

University fees are every time more expensive, and grants are only for the best students, so an increasing proportion of high-class students enter the university. The irony being that the wealthier ones are the ones that receive more benefits from the public funds.

*Question: can conscious information be sufficient to generate a drive to action in young people? Can it be a concept that also applies to the dynamics of inclusion?*

This is a tricky question: how can a person not, especially, interested in being informed, be informed or motivated about actions?

Our system does not encourage critical thinking. There’s a saying that “in elementary school kits ask a lot, all the time...and in secondary school...they do not ask anymore...”

The covid era and the difficult economic problems that many families suffer have had a huge impact on the spirits of the young ones. Many openly admit that their future will not be brighter than their present, something that the old generations never had to consider: every year was slightly better than the previous one. So a shade of pessimism and inaction is heavily impacting most of our youth.

*Question: do you think that associationism is a good tool to encourage social participation or are there difficulties too?*

Associationism is something diametrically opposite to the ego culture that has permeated in the last decades. Beyond being a follower of a football team, most students do not collectively share projects or dreams, only gather during spare time. Most have found a space with videogames, playing with their friends, but each in his house instead of being at the same room. There’s no mainstream culture of association or of conflict resolution so the few that try to start communal projects lack the specific skills needed to navigate through the process of creation-consolidation of the group...before they start to work on any specific project...



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Luckily, some still join existing projects as volunteers, so at least they have a very first hand experience on how a civil organization works, and can bring this knowledge to the creation of a new group.

*Question: digitalisation is becoming more and more prevalent in the life of administrations, and we are not only talking about social, but also about all the tools that can foster social participation, such as crowdfunding, online petitions, and so on...Which tools should institutions use to increase social participation of citizens?*

Europe has created some tools with the intention of making us Europeans feel like one: the Erasmus+ program or Eurorail (Train) being some examples. Now a lot of students have friends abroad and can travel to visit them or receive their visit, something that is a major change in comparison with older generations.

Some complaints were raised because they learned too late of without virtually time to apply for learning or job opportunities, so there's also a communication between institutions and students, even when 100% of them bring a mobile divide on them all the time.

#### 4th Theme: the post-Covid period and the impact on young people

### ROMANIA

With the subject "Looking for a job in the post-pandemic period: the challenges of young people", Irina Filip, Business Development Manager within Lugera the People Republic and Founder of the Back in Business Support Community was the guest for the last workshop organized in Romania

Irina's presentation focused on 4 lines: how to find your passion, how to set your objective, how to build a CV, and how to search a job.

How to find your passion: it is very important for each of us to go to work happy, not to be stressed, and to do what we like or what we are good at. Thus, right from the beginning, it is very important, to be honest, and to choose what we like to do, and what skills we have.

He also spoke about the Survey made by Scoala de HR, called "Meaningful Work", which shows that 60% of Generation Z wants to be happy and live according to its values, while only 4% consider the financial situation a priority and career.



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How to set your objective: Irina did an imagination exercise of how everyone would see themselves in 10 years if they could choose a job according to everyone's passions. Her advice was that everyone should make a list of what each participant can/knows to get to where they proposed or imagined in 10 years, then develop a plan to achieve the goal.

How to build a CV: a CV must be simple and concise, with a maximum of 2 pages, it must contain contact details and be professional, and it must contain the candidate's profile, skills, studies, and experience. In the experience section, since we are talking about young people with no experience, the focus was on the inclusion in the CV of internships, internships, volunteering, projects, and courses outside the faculty. There is a question from a participant: if the software (applicant tracking system) is still used in recruitment? The explanation was that they actually make the work of a recruiter easier and it is very important that the information in the CV is real, coherent, and relevant.

How to search for a job: there are two types of searches, online and offline. On the offline side, they look for job fairs, HR events, recommendations of some people, and online social media, emails, networking events, and specialized platforms such as EJobs, Best Jobs, and LinkedIn Jobs. Looking for a job focuses on two lines: personal branding and a direct approach. The participants showed interest in their own promotion and which channels are the most requested to be used. There were also questions related to the direct approach to a potential employer, without specifically targeting a job, and Irina showed them an example of an email with which she personally engaged.

## SPAIN

*Question: what would be the ideal action for you, on the part of the institutions, to make you feel included in today's society?*

Some suggestions: Spaces and specific skills for group building.

*Participation of youth committees in public projects, specially at local level, where you can see some results after a proposal is implemented*

Awards for the best projects, some kind of incentives.

*Question: which content formats generate more active participation by young people?*

There's a clear tendency towards short formats. For example, TedTalks started with their proven 20 min presentations, but some years after started to include 15 min, then 9 min, then 3 min presentations. Tik-Tok is the reference, to the extent to include sections of films, drastically cut and that theoretically shouldn't work, but somehow they do.





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The metaverse and online gaming are just two examples of the progressive detachment from reality. It is a culture of superficiality: instead of physically acting on some issue, click on virtually sign / vote on a screen.

## 2. Participants

### ITALY

*15th of November: digital and environment*

- Dr. Lorenzo Micheli - Education Policy Specialist
- Dr. Silvia Panini - Non-executive Board Member of Volt in Italy
- Angelo Riccio – Ge.Co. Founder and General Manager
- Chiara Castaldo – Student and Legambiente (Acerra Section) activist
- Raffaele di Muccio – Student

*16th of November: social inclusion and civic participation*

- Dr. Silvia Panini - Non-executive Board Member of Volt in Italy
- Angelo Riccio – Ge.Co. Founder and General Manager
- Leonardo Pagano Jr. – Member of National Council of University Students
- Tobia Angelino - President of the Students Confederation
- Giuseppe Carbone – Student
- Maria Margherita Santullo – Student

### SWEDEN

The participants in this round table were 30-40 people. These young people are of immigrant background and are all under the age of 30. During the organization of this round table, we asked other organizations based in our region to send young people who wanted to participate in this workshop. Also, present were the leaders and project managers of youth organizations from:

- Unga Kan Riksorganisation
- Demokratie för Barns Framtid
- Unga Kan Habo



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## ROMANIA

*Online workshop organized on October 25:*

- 1 person from the Ministry of Youth, Covasna local section
- 1 person from the student organization Liga ETC
- 4 students
- 2 people from the staff
- Răzvan Orășanu, Founder "Tine de noi" Association - Guest
- Roxana Buzetelu, Founder of the NGO "Micile Bucurii" (The Little Joys) – Guest.

*Online workshop organized on 2<sup>nd</sup> November:*

- 4 young people from the NGO, Ateliere fara Frontiere
- 1 person from the Ministry of Youth, Covasna local section
- 4 students
- 2 people from the staff
- Radu Puchiu, Director of Technology & Society Program at Aspen Institute Romania and Co-Founder of the NGO H.appy Cities - Guest
- Irina Filip, Business Development Manager within Lugera the People Republic and Founder of the Back in Business Support Community – Guest.

## SPAIN

It was impossible to find suitable dates for the meetings during November so we interviewed all participants by phone/zoom in order to retrieve the information and will hold the two meetings on the 07 of December.

*16th of November: Sustainability and Participation*

- Olimpia Lopez Zabell -Young Entrepreneur
- Gwyneth Morgan-Garton - NGO Representative
- Julio Battle -Laboratory of Social Entrepreneurship. UIB.
- Jose Mendez - President of Naturalment, NGO

*17th of November: inclusion and participation.*

- Toni Canoves - Member of Naturalment, NGO
- Xavi Mañez - Student and Young Entrepreneur
- Eddie Brown - Student and Young Entrepreneur. YEP



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- Clara -Student, YEP
- Miquel Ramis - Coordinator, NGO, Artifex Balear

## Conclusions

In the context of the YEP project, therefore, it is suggested to create an extremely solid and consistent network, to allow young people (from a transnational perspective) to be able to unite, to be able to add all their voices so that every related institution can take notice of them, listening to them and giving them the right space and attention for the future.

Whether it is a matter of sustainability and digital culture, for which the awareness of students - but also of those responsible belonging to institutions - needs to be increased, or whether it is a matter of greater inclusion in national and European political life (for which a breaking down of the barriers that still divide 'youth' and 'experience' is needed in equal measure), it turns out to be absolutely certain how the need to be seen as no less 'a class apart,' estranged from a society of adults, needs to be fostered. In this way, young people can truly participate in the development of the future of what is not only the organization of their countries, but also the development of the European context. Also, the participants revealed that some of them are sensitive to the degradation of the environment linked to greenhouse gases (gaz à effet de serre) and demonstrated how young people can participate in the reduction of these gases. In the same time, a lot of young people still believe that being sustainable means paying more for products or services. On this subject, the facilitator recommended the participants to follow on social networks the contribution of Miss Greta Thunberg to the fight against environmental degradation. Greta Tintin Eleonora Ernman Thunberg is a Swedish environmental activist known for urging world leaders to take immediate action to mitigate climate changes.

The disconnection between public administration and youth is perhaps the main challenge to be faced in the following years. It is not clever insisting in using the same strategies to try to obtain different results, so the next conclusion has been the need to identify and use alternative tools to engage participation. Also, it is very important to emphasize that young people are not motivated enough to get involved in the current activities of the community they belong to and many of the participants do not have enough information regarding access to information of public interest, they do not know how to access or whom to contact for information belonging to a public institution.



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Access to jobs combined with continuous learning could be a solution to the lack of motivation of many young students. Incentives may be useful to foster a continuous learning culture (Entrepreneurship mentors, business incubators, participation in proof-of-concept projects.) The barrier between theory and practice refrains and chokes the flow of energy that many students have inside.

Multi-age participation can help to transfer a wealth of experience from old to young generations. Young generations have little contact with older persons and vice versa and therefore each group reassures themselves instead of being open to the learning experience. Europe, either will be a common project, or will not be. We need to get involved in trans-national projects away from the silo culture of the industrial era. Creative collaboration and Regenerative Culture are the key to a common project.

It is clear that the common issues are:

- The need to find clever ways to engage young people into more meaningful use of their time (find a job, continuous education, climate change awareness) while dis-engage them from infocination (social media, online/offline games).
- The institutions need to speak a language that the young ones may understand.

So as a resume, both collectives need to bridge the existing communication gap: The young ones must address the use of their mobile phones and time and focus on practicality, while the administration needs to understand these limitations and provide reasonable vehicles to convey meaningful ideas and messages to them. Even middle- and upper-class students are being lured by the virtual world, social media, metaverse, so no wonder to see a bigger confusion in those coming from families basically focused on urgent needs (job, food, accommodation) with no time, contextual information or skills to guide them.

The real challenge is designing projects that initially may be of their interest while providing a different angle without patronizing them. They need to see real results after a change of attitude and habits before they feel compelled to change. Real living examples are the best role model.



