



Hotspots

CONNECTING EUROPEAN SUBURBS THROUGH
SMART YOUTH WORK

TOOLKIT FOR DIAGNOSTIC AND TOOLS SHARING
MAIN OUTCOMES OF THE FIELD RESEARCH



Erasmus+



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PROJECT PRESENTATION

PROJECT

WHAT

HOTSPOTS is a Cooperation Partnership in the field of youth, 26 months long, supported by the Erasmus+ Programme, Italian National Agency and involving partners from Italy, Finland, France, Portugal, Romania and Spain.

AIM

Hto develop non-formal education tools and methods within a newly designed pedagogical approach, to enhance both online and offline intercultural learning – ICL approaches and attitudes among young people coming from suburban backgrounds, and more specifically, in national and transnational Youth Participation Activities - YPA, within the Erasmus+ program.

THEMATIC FOCUS

- Culture
- Intercultural Learning
- Suburbs
- Smart and Digital Youth Work

TIMELINE

Transnational Project Meeting in Italy

April 2022

Project Results 1 - Toolkit for Diagnostic And Tools Sharing

01st June – 31st January 2023 (8 M)

- Country Field Research
01st June – 30th September 2022 (4 M)
- Tools and Activities Gathering
- 01st September – 30th November 2022 (3 M)
- Finalization of the Project Results
01st December 2022 – 31st January 2023 (2 M)

Transnational Project Meeting in Romania

February 2023

Project Results 2 - Handbook for a Smart Youth Work

01st March 2023 – 28th February 2024 (12 M)

- Suburban Hotspots – Design
01st March – 30th July 2023 (5 M)
- Suburban Hotspots - Local Testing
01st September – 30th November (3 M)
- Finalization of the Project Results
01st December 2023 – 28th February 2024 (3 M)

Learning Teaching Activity in Italy

August 2023

Project Results 3-Blended Learning Board Game

01st March 2023 – 28th February 2024 (12 M)

Multiplier Events in all the countries

March 2024

Transnational Project Meeting in Spain

April 2024



TOOLKIT FOR DIAGNOSTIC AND TOOLS SHARING

WHAT

the Toolkit includes two main parts:

- **Chapter II – Country Situation** and **Chapter III – Research Results:** including the main outcomes of the field research run in the participating countries
-
- **Chapter IV – Tools:** including the collection of workshops on Intercultural Learning used by the consortium members during the activities run on a daily base with youth





RESEARCH: MAIN ELEMENTS

MAIN ELEMENTS

DIAGNOSTIC

Chapter II – Country Situation and Chapter III – Research Results include the milestones of the detailed diagnostic, the analysis of the urban and suburban dimensions where the project is taking place, and of the main challenges faced by youth workers and young people.

The research **aimed** to detect the needs youth workers, educators on a larger scale, and organisations are facing in their work with young people, especially in the current sensitive moment still affected by the consequences of the Covid-19 widespread.

WHERE

The field research took place in Catalonia, Finland, Italy, Portugal and Romania.

WHEN

The field research was run **from June to September 2022 (4 months)**, then during October, November and December 2022, all the information was re-elaborated and included in the publication.

INTERCULTURAL LEARNING

the research allows highlighting the cultural issues more relevant in these area, providing a detailed picture of the needs, in terms of tools, workshops and methodologies educators have highlighted.



MAIN ELEMENTS

LINKS

the research is the starting point for the design of the Project Result 2 - Handbook for a smart youth work, where the new workshops and activities created have the specific purpose of meeting the identified needs.

STRUCTURE

- **Chapter II – Country Situation:** synthetic demographic, politics (parliament structure and governance, youth policies), youth work (how youth work is considered and organized, national framework for youth work, general issues impacting youth work), local background situation (description of the area/s where the research took place)
- **Chapter III – Research Results:** research overview, focus groups, interviews, predominant issues, conclusion

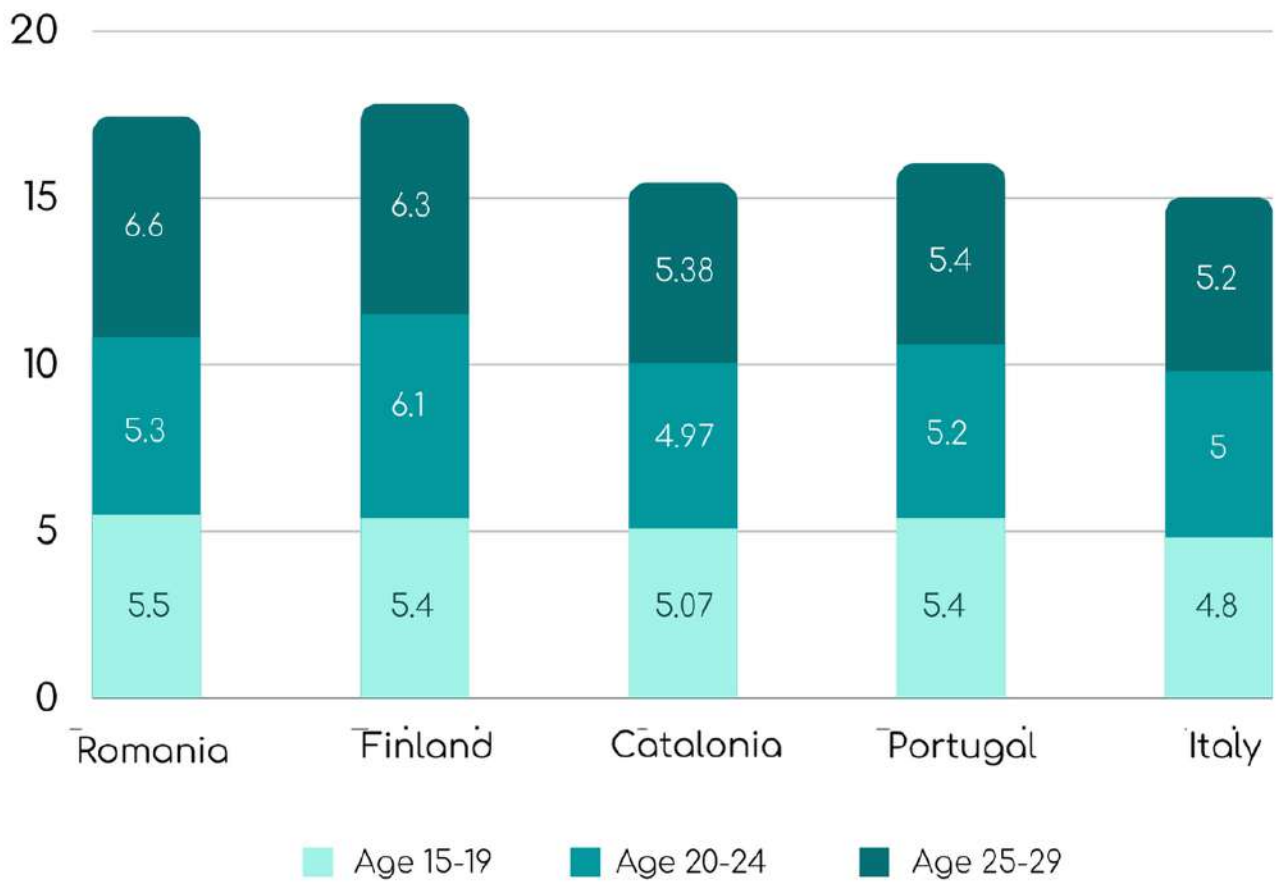




FIELD RESEARCH

- RESEARCH: TOOLS
- FOCUS GROUPS: MAIN OUTCOMES
- INTERVIEWS: MAIN OUTCOMES
- CONCLUSIONS

RESEARCH: TOOLS



- *Youth ratio by age groups*



RESEARCH: TOOLS

The field research consisted in **interviews** and **focus groups**.

The research was based on qualitative analysis to better identify and understand the specificities of each reality in order to sketch and implement effective workshops.

The main **aim** was to identify the challenges both the youth workers and the young people are facing in their daily work/life.

An interview guide was designed for the youth workers and a focus group guide for the young people.

FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW

Were chosen because they are more suitable for the youth workers for the possibility to interact with the interviewee, to gain more insight and being the interview a very suitable tool for capturing verbal and non-verbal cues.

FOCUS GROUPS

Were chosen for young people because the term "research" is not exactly attractive to youth and being in small groups allows them to interact and become more participative than having individual discussions.

DISADVANTAGES

Related to the logistics and the resources involved: both interviews and focus groups are time-consuming, and they need rigorous planning and suitable context to be conducted efficiently.

LIMITATIONS

Motivating the target group. All partners faced difficulties in scheduling the focus groups due to the workload of the beneficiaries, the lack of time and/or of the meeting facilities. These obstacles were overcome because of the good collaboration and the professionalism of all the team members.

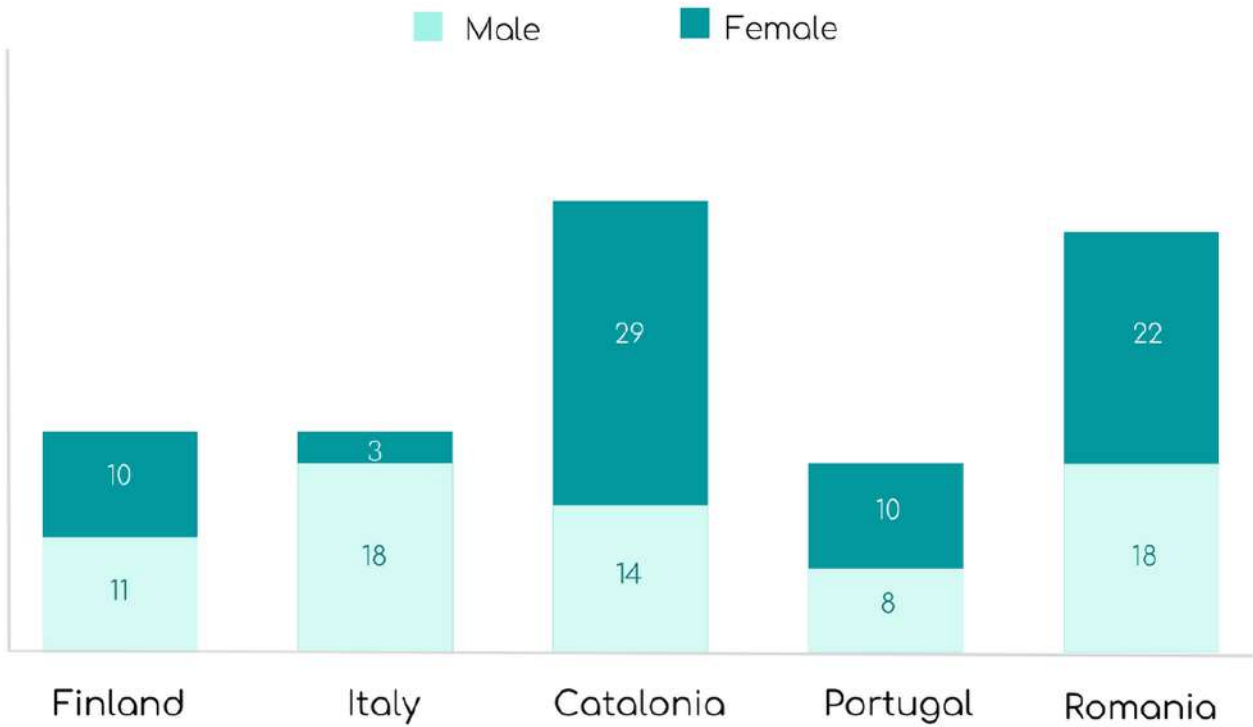
FOCUS GROUPS: MAIN OUTCOMES

NUMBERS

15 focus groups with a total number of 143 participants

AIM

To determine the challenges young people face in four different contexts: school, family, online, and in the neighborhood



- *Number of participants in focus groups*



FOCUS GROUPS: MAIN OUTCOMES

CHALLENGES IN SCHOOL

- **PEERS:** relationship with their colleagues since the need for belonging is more prominent at this age. The colleagues are the main agents that influence the well being in school since peer pressure generates most of the deviant behaviours
- **FAMILY PRESSURE:** parents' need to fulfil their own dreams through their children or to "use" them as an instrument for pride. In a family context where competition is cultivated through an educational system based on control and punishment than on personal development of skills and aptitudes
- **CURRICULUM:** busy schedule and overloaded curriculum as factors of stress and de-motivation, constant lack of perspectives after graduation lead to confusion and anxiety
- **TEACHERS:** educators also have difficulties in respecting curricula, since they must focus on teaching rather than on managing conflicts and emotions between classmates
- **DISCRIMINATION:** almost all the youngsters mentioned they were subjects or witnesses to cases of discrimination, racism, bullying or some sort of violence
- **MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES:** prevent them from reaching their potential and live in a harmonious environment. The agents and the context generate anxiety, panic attacks, burnout, fear of letting people down and uncertainty
- **RESOURCES:** for youngsters with fewer opportunities, the lack of financial resources is always a leading cause for school dropout or for being oppressed/bullied. The pandemic widened the gap between the rich and the poor by digitalising education in "un-digitalised" communities
- **TRANSPORTS:** another issue that affects youngsters from peripheral and isolated areas is transportation and the difficulties that come along with the need to commute.

FOCUS GROUPS: MAIN OUTCOMES

CHALLENGES ONLINE

- **THREE MAIN CATEGORIES** – known (friends, family, colleagues and acquaintances), not known (online is when one has to interact with strangers or face anonymous comments) and invisible/systemic
- **NEED OF BELONGING AND FOR CONFORMITY** can go in the wrong direction when youngsters decide to take part into online challenges and dares, capitalized by unethical app developers (es. The Blue Whale Challenge)
- **SPENDING A LOT OF TIME ON SOCIAL MEDIA:** craving for likes, loves and other positive reactions that most often come with their counterparts – hate speech and bullying, sexism and harassment
- **NEW JOBS:** “influencer” – a job which many youngsters wish to have, neglecting their traditional professional path
- **“CANCEL CULTURE”:** constant pressure of being exposed, targeted and/or forgotten
- **FAKENESS OF ONLINE CONTENT:** from fake accounts to fake news, fake information and fake lives – generating a crisis of values and of identities
- **HEALTH CHALLENGES:** are both mental and physical. From sedentarism and its effects – obesity, risk of heart diseases etc. to social anxiety. From the inability to have an efficient face-to-face communication to the helplessness generated by the impossibility of managing the amount of information and filtering the news



FOCUS GROUPS: MAIN OUTCOMES

CHALLENGES IN THE FAMILY

- **PARENTS' BEHAVIOURS AND CONSEQUENCES:** if it's about over protection they tend to do extreme things in order to escape family control. If it's about too much freedom, they tend to feel neglected and ignored and they take actions to stand out and be seen
- **SELF-ESTEEME AND COMPETITIVENESS:** fear of not being good enough or not performing well enough. Sometimes parents create an atmosphere of competitiveness between siblings
- **ADDICTIONS:** as great problems to be dealt with. Whether it is alcohol or drugs, they all lead to tensions and consequently to violence, traumas, and replication
- **INTERGENERATIONAL GAP:** affects the dialogue between parents and youngsters, sparking conflicts
- **RESOURCES:** families from isolated areas (and not only) and how finances are managed. Combined with poor parenting, this issue materialises in providing poor quality food and too few educational resources, which lead to lack of future opportunities
- **POVERTY:** materialises into school dropout due to the fact that children/youngsters are asked to help around the household or to work



FOCUS GROUPS: MAIN OUTCOMES

CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS IN THEIR ENVIRONMENTS

- **SAFETY:** clear need of knowing how to interact with people with deviant behaviours in public space. Youngsters find it difficult to protect themselves and enjoy the public space
- **WELLBEING:** importance of youth centres and leisure facilities for their wellbeing, especially sport facilities that foster inclusion and reduce discrimination and racism (the places in use lack lots of things in terms of socialization, housing/accommodation, respect, intercultural dialogue, hobbies ...)
- **LANDSCAPE:** for suburbs the poor transportation system and bad conditions of roads sentence their inhabitants to isolation. Environmental issues as scarcity of trash bins, the pollution, the traffic jams



FOCUS GROUPS: MAIN OUTCOMES

YOUNG PEOPLE AND ROLE MODELS

- **QUESTION ASKED:** young people were asked about their superheroes in the attempt to identify their role models
- **FAMILY:** mother is the most frequent answer, along with father, parents, siblings, grandparents and other relatives
- **FRIENDS:** when family fails to do that, friends become role models
- **OTHERS:** educators are also important, artists, athletes, advocates/activists, politicians, entrepreneurs, and social media influencers. A large number of participants chose fictional characters (Batman, Spiderman, Ironman, Cat Noire, Deadpool, Songoku etc.) for their main features: humor, speed, agility, rebellion, charm, empathy



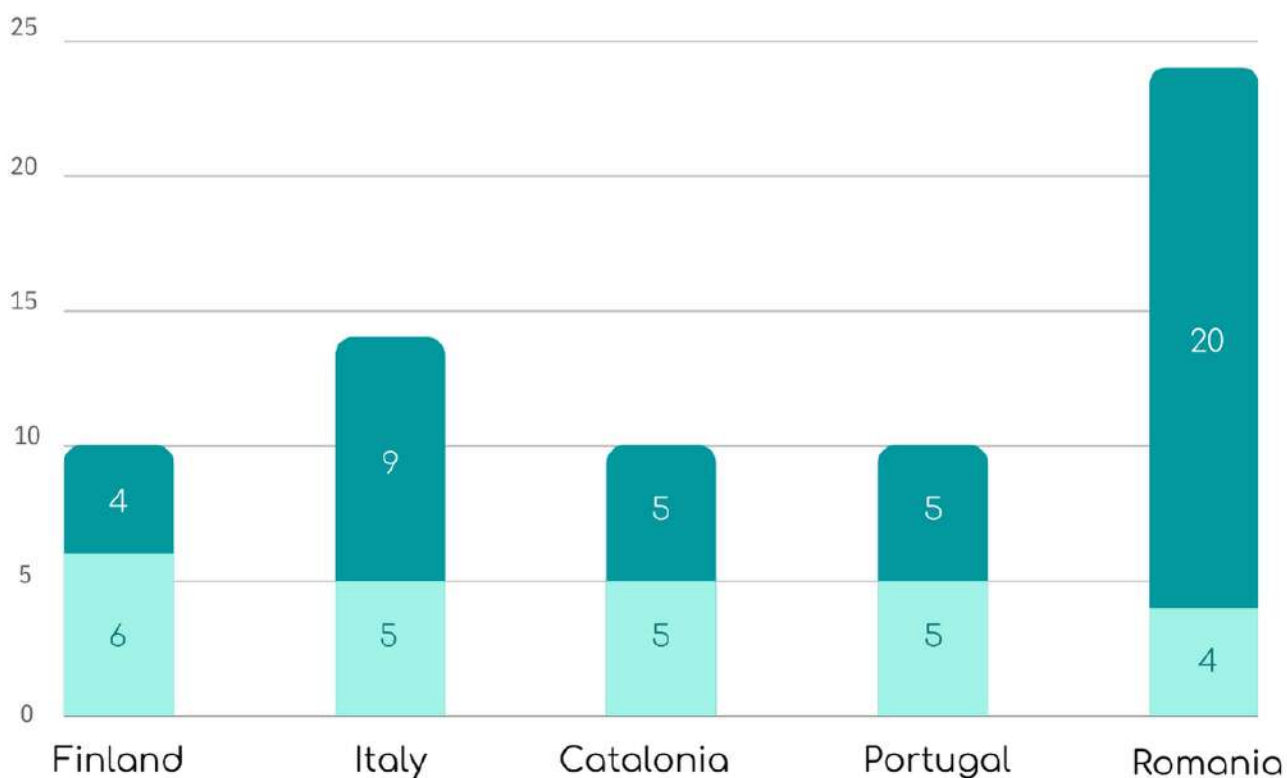
INTERVIEWS: MAIN OUTCOMES

NUMBERS

68 youth workers

AIM

To determine the challenges youth workers face in their work and their needs, in terms of tools and methods for a better participation of young people



- *Number of interviewees by country and gender*

INTERVIEWS: MAIN OUTCOMES

CHALLENGES FACED

RESOURCHES:

- managing time, managing human resources, dealing with material issues and resources needed for upgrade
- huge workload and difficulty of finding balance between desk work and field work
- bureaucracy prevents from doing more grassroots work and disconnects youth workers from the reality
- juggling with more projects simultaneously
- lack of time affects networking which is essential
- times restrictions while collaborating with schools (sometimes activities meant to last for 3-4 hours have to be squeezed in 1 hour or 3-days workshops in 1-day only)
- financial issues, the need for software and the need for quality information free of charge: pandemic brought "forced" digitisation and the need for up-to-date hardware and software
- need for resources for upgrading the curriculum, for developing new skills and for improving visibility
- lack of time, human and material resources leads to a lack of visibility of the youth work conducted, which generates lack of awareness and difficulties in reaching the target groups

KNOW-HOW:

- communication, knowledge and reaching and motivating the target group
- they need more knowledge related to intercultural dialogue and deviant behavior management
- when dealing with persons suffering from different addictions (drugs, alcohol, video games etc.) or mental health issues, they need more information, exchange of good practices and trainings
- better communication skills could also have a significant impact on reaching and motivating the target groups: they are either currently overwhelmed with project opportunities or they are isolated and forgotten (mainly) in rural areas

INTEGRATION:

- integration of youngsters with SEN (special education needs) or SLD (specific learning difficulties)
- integration of migrants in the educational system and on the labour market due to the excessive bureaucracy and the cultural differences

INTERVIEWS: MAIN OUTCOMES

PERCEIVED CHALLENGES OF THEIR TARGET GROUPS

The research was useful to determine the correspondence between the challenges of young people perceived by themselves and the ones perceived by the youth workers

- **BEHAVIOURAL ISSUES:** almost all interviewees mentioned the problem of addiction – drugs, alcohol, social media, video games etc., violence – domestic, gender-based, bullying, cyberbullying, and theft. The pandemic contributed in a negative way to the sedentarism and the individualism
- **MARGINALIZATION ISSUES:** youngsters with special needs or the ones with an inferiority complex are more likely to be excluded. Marginalization is generated also by the cultural division: for migrants (and especially refugees) the bureaucracy contributes to their marginalization, poverty and exclusion from the community life (living in enclaves generates stigma and poor access to facilities designed for “general public”)
- **EDUCATIONAL ISSUES:** lack of vocational, sexual and emotional education and their catastrophic impacts – teenage pregnancies, individualism and social exclusion, anxiety and many other mental issues
- **PERSPECTIVES FOR THEIR FUTURE:** difficulties of entering the labour market, value crisis and the lack of role models lead to a “copy-paste generation” who fails in being authentic, but paradoxically craving for individuality and the need to stand out at the same time

INTERVIEWS: MAIN OUTCOMES

IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE YOUTH WORKERS

Pandemic had both positive and negative impacts that were clustered in three different categories

WORKLOAD:

- even more difficult to manage than before. Run activity online was a huge challenge, for adapting the activities for the virtual space
- discovering new apps and tools was, anyway, a positive aspect, as it also offered the opportunity to reconsider the strategic vision and to reorganize
- even though the absence of a coherent strategy or a plan of action from the governments generated massive confusion
- another challenge was the management of private vs. professional space and time
- lack of tech knowledge and the lack of infrastructure (no computers, no internet) deepened even more the gap between people with more and fewer opportunities
- youth workers claimed to be missing the skills for dealing with the mental health issues generated by this context
- after the quarantine, the youth workers did more outdoor activities and promoted more sports among their target groups

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TARGET GROUP:

- lack of non-verbal communication and the lack of empathy which are essential especially while working with vulnerable groups
- lack of physical contact and the interaction with other peers lead to even more isolation and introversion
- more difficult to reach and motivate the youngsters to participate in the activities

EMOTIONAL:

- insecurity and disillusion accentuated or created new mental health issues very difficult to tackle
- lack of privacy led in vulnerable families to domestic violence, anxiety, depression, and lack of perspectives

INTERVIEWS: MAIN OUTCOMES

TOPICS YOUTH WORKERS HAVE CHALLENGES ADDRESSING

INTERCULTURAL SKILLS:

- youth workers do not always feel at ease discussing about religion and politics since they do not know very well the ethnic backgrounds of the youngsters they work with
- in many situations youth workers can reinforce stereotypes out of ignorance and lack the information
- a better knowledge on the world history and geography would really contribute to inclusion, as well as understanding how the legal system works
- need for understanding child marriage and other cultural practices that can be difficult to address

SEXUALITY:

- whether it's about the basic sexual education is completely missing from the educational system of some countries or about more specific topics (LGBTQAI+, sexual orientation, gender spectrum, transition, etc.), youth workers face challenges in discussing them with the youngsters

COMMUNICATION:

- youth workers believe they could use better conflict management skills, have more knowledge on how to deal with the families of their target group and how to better use social media and online tools to motivate and reach the youngsters
- they would like to reflect on the limits of their role as youth workers – to which extent is it okay to listen to the youngsters and give advice on personal matters and when is the moment to recommend them to see a psychologist

VALUE CRISIS:

- need to be better equipped with information related to media (and mainly with the popular reality shows) and social media (on threads and trends) that influence the behaviour of the youngsters

MENTAL HEALTH:

- youth workers need more skills in understanding and dealing with depression and anxiety, the consequences of violence (domestic, gender-based, psychological, verbal, physical, bullying, cyberbullying etc.), and addiction (drugs, alcohol, video games, internet etc.)
- impact of the COVID pandemic: most of the youth workers did not have the chance to discuss, debate and share experiences about it
- lack of specific competences on SEN (special education needs) or SLD (specific learning difficulties), that would contribute to a better integration of youngsters with special needs

INTERVIEWS: MAIN OUTCOMES

PREDOMINANT ISSUES

- **INFRASTRUCTURE:** youth focused on the need of having more and better sport facilities and competitions, youth workers focused on the intercultural and inclusive role of sport, proposing more facilities for games
- **GREEN SPACES:** is crucial for a better life and better care for nature – more recycling facilities, better management of these areas (more trash bins and less vandalised places that “encourage” other deviant behaviour)
- **CULTURAL FACILITIES:** theatres, multimedia rooms, performance halls, up-to-date libraries
- **MEETING PLACES:** in the neighbourhoods they live, they would like improved security, more shops and more meeting places (building shopping malls in the suburbs is proven to have improved the wellbeing of the residents and the destigmatisation of the neighbourhoods)
- **BETTER PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION:** to reduce the gap between the suburbs and the centre, dedicated school buses for the youngsters commuting on a daily basis would also reduce aggression, bullying and gender-based violence that happen quite frequently in this context
- **CENTRE THAT PROVIDES FREE PSYCHOLOGICAL CARE:** teachers highlighted their need to be able to discuss with specialists (psychologists, social assistants) about particular cases they encounter
- **EDUCATION:** utility of implementing more non formal education tools and methods in schools, moreover for students, field work contributes to a better specialisation and preparation for the labour market, while for youth workers it helps identify and address the needs of their target groups. Need for better taught English classes (and other foreign languages)
- **ACTIVISM:** to be developed with more volunteering events, projects regarding environmental issues
- **GRANTS:** youth workers should develop more awareness on funding opportunities and more sustainable grants
- **INTERCULTURAL ACTIVITIES:** to narrow the gaps between suburban and central areas and privileged and less-privileged people
- **POSITION:** most of the leisure facilities are in the city centre prevents young people from participating and stigmatises the ones that live in the periphery. Moreover, it segregates them and reinforces stereotypes and prejudices. Therefore the creation of talent pools (dancing, singing, playing instruments, etc.) in the suburbs to give the youngsters the opportunity of standing out
- **INTERCULTURAL EVENTS:** could contribute to the inclusion of minorities and to a better understanding of their background and vision

CONCLUSIONS

Many of the issues depend on structural changes and massive interventions of authorities (better urban planning, more cultural facilities/institutions, more leisure facilities etc.)

There are five main topics that could be used in designing new tools and methods for youth workers:

- mental health issues
- stereotypes and prejudices
- efficient communication
- campaigning for visibility
- gender issues (with a particular emphasis on LGBTQAI+ issues).



PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS



ALLIANSSI

Helsinki, Finland

www.nuorisovaihto.fi



AGORA VEIRO

Aveiro, Portugal

www.agoraaveiro.org



LUNARIA

Rome, Italy

www.lunaria.org



NEXES

Barcelona, Spain

www.nexecat.org



UNIVERSITUR

Bucharest, Romania

www.universitur.ro



INFINITIVITY DESIGN LABS

Lausanne, Francia

www.infinitivitydesignlabs.com

PRESENTATION REALIZED BY

Sara Mandozzi

RESEARCHER AND DATA ANALYST

Anca Tudoricu

PROOFREADING

Universitair association

COVER DESIGN

Youssef Bahanni

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Alice Di Paolo (Lunaria)

Cátia Alexandra Silva Lima (Agora Aveiro)

Nataša Gološin (Agora Aveiro)

Mikaela Henriette Vahvelainen (Allianssi)

Essi Elina Vilhelmiina Holopainen (Allianssi)

Georgios Kalmpourtzis (Infinitivity Design Labs)

Saint-Clair Amaury Marcel Lefèvre (Infinitivity Design Labs)

Marta Ewa Piszczek (NEXES)

Anna Rodrigues Casadevall (NEXES)

Dalila Sofia Freitas Fernandes (NEXES)

Eliza Donescu (Universitair)

Anca Tudoricu (Universitair)

Sabina Grădinaru (Universitair)

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