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YEPP EUROPE  
20 YEARS OF YOUTH  
AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT  
ACROSS EUROPE

CONCEPT, DEVELOPMENT, IMPACT.

20 years of youth and community empowerment across Europe.  
Concept, development, impact.

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# Foreword

In 2020, we celebrate 20 years of youth and community empowerment across Europe through the YEPP approach and methodology, as well as 20 years of the international YEPP Community Network.

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary, this publication provides an account of the 20 years of YEPP, outlines the history and milestones in the development of the YEPP approach, presents the results of a recent impact research and gives an insight in our way forward toward fostering and mainstreaming youth and community empowerment across Europe.

In 1999, the idea to create YEPP in response to the global issue of social exclusion originated within the Youth and Education Interest Group of the European Foundation Centre (EFC) following a commissioned review on the role and best practice of foundations and corporate funders regarding Youth Funding and Youth Policies in Europe and the United States, co-authored by Angelika Krüger.

Inspired by the results of this study, a core group of ten European and US Foundations partnered with the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD/CERI) and the Institute for Community Education of the International Academy for Innovative Pedagogy, Psychology and Economics (INA/ICE) at the Free University Berlin to build a unique cross-sectoral partnership not to re-invent the wheel, but to pool the collective resources – both professional and financial – to create synergies for developing, implementing and evaluating a multi-dimensional innovative and sustainable approach to combat social exclusion of disadvantaged, vulnerable young people and the communities they live in.

In May 2001, after an eighteen-month preparatory phase, the partners launched the 10-year Youth Empowerment Partnership Programme (YEPP) under the auspices of the Network of European Foundations for Innovation (NEF). The partners of the YEPP initiative shared the vision of a just, equitable and sustainable inclusive society. They committed to the mission to develop and sustain holistic empowerment and participatory processes creating an active civil society with young people at risk of social exclusion and the communities they live in; with young people taking responsibility and having an active role in implementing just changes in their communities and in contributing to building a social Europe.

Towards the end of the Youth Empowerment Partnership Programme, a broad participatory consultation process with local and international stakeholders of the YEPP community was initiated to develop a plan for the

future of YEPP post 2011. Based on the results of the internal and external evaluation of the Programme where significant achievements were described, the majority of representatives of all YEPP stakeholder groups decided to continue the work in the Local Sites based on the YEPP approach and methodology, and to exchange and cooperate at the international level.

In January 2012, following this decision, the YEPP International Resource Centre, or YEPP EUROPE as it is now, was established at the Institute for Community Education of the International Academy (INA/ICE) with the mission to build on the achievements, expertise and experiences of the Youth Empowerment Partnership Programme; work for youth and community empowerment across Europe through the YEPP approach and 'Concept of Change'; provide support for the work at the local level; manage and expand the YEPP Community Network, and further develop the approach and evolve into a sustainable support agency.

In Autumn 2019, in preparation for the 20th Anniversary of YEPP in 2020, an impact research "Youth and Community Empowerment Through the YEPP Approach" was commissioned by the YEPP EUROPE Team and carried out by Karla Asuncion S. Morales. This 6-month long research project included numerous interviews of young people and YEPP community stakeholders with the aim to study the impact of the YEPP approach on the lives of young people and their communities. The findings of this research, as well as a short version of stakeholder interviews, are presented in this publication.

The successful work for youth and community empowerment across Europe through the YEPP approach and methodology was made possible by the unwavering commitment and support of all our international partners over the 20 years: the European and US foundations, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development / Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (OECD/CERI), European Foundation Centre (EFC), Network of European Foundations (NEF), the European Commission's ERASMUS+ Programme, European project partners, all the members of former and present international YEPP teams, but most of all, by the enthusiastic engagement of numerous young people and their communities and of all our colleagues: Local Coordinators, Local Researchers, Evaluation Facilitators, local partners and funders in the YEPP Local Sites and in national YEPP associations.

It has been a great honour and pleasure for us to engage together with the entire YEPP Community in working for youth and community empowerment across Europe over the last 20 years. Although, or even because the celebration of 20 years of YEPP coincided with the Covid-19 crisis in 2020, we are especially grateful for the collegueship, partnership and friendship at these times and would like to thank everybody for this successful and rewarding joint work until today!





Our special thanks go to the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (USA) that has supported us loyally from the very beginning of YEPP in 1999 providing valuable expertise, opening doors and, most importantly, providing infrastructural funding for the international YEPP Team and being the financial base of our work over the 20 years. Furthermore, our special thanks go to Compagnia di San Paolo (Italy) that has supported YEPP loyally for 18 years and committed to providing funding and expertise for the work at the international level, as well as at the local and national level in Italy. Compagnia's generous local and national commitment and support has facilitated an incredible expansion of YEPP across Italy.

After the 20 years, we are highly motivated and committed to continuing working with the YEPP Community and going together into the future!

Angelika Krüger  
Jochen Schell  
Dr. Tetiana Katsbert  
Dr. Virginia Gallo Cobián  
Karla Asuncion S. Morales

Berlin, April 2020



# 1. Background

## 1.1. Beginning of YEPP

Social exclusion has become one of the most pressing challenges for modern societies, both in Europe and globally. There has been consensus among researchers that *“social exclusion includes political and cultural dimensions as well as economic poverty. It combines linked problems which typically accumulate... and it is a dynamic process which occurs over time.”*<sup>1</sup>

Research and experience have shown that the risk of social exclusion is often concentrated spatially in disadvantaged rural and urban neighbourhoods, including neighbourhoods with a high percentage of low income and/or unemployed families, families with migrant backgrounds as well as families of discriminated groups across Europe such as members of the Roma community.

Children and young people in particular have been facing growing risks of social exclusion. In the 1980s - 1990s, the alienation experienced by young people living in areas of social disadvantage throughout Europe, often being brought up under disempowering circumstances and in precarious, insecure, non-supportive environments, depending permanently on social welfare, being largely excluded from developing their full potential and their self-confidence in their today and their tomorrow, presented challenges that were complex, prevalent and urgent.

Researchers have argued that young people living in these areas are often affected by lack of:

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<sup>1</sup> Colley et al. 2005, in Bleckmann, P. and Krüger, A. (2007): Youth Empowerment Partnership Programme – final cross-cutting report of the internal evaluation, Berlin: International Academy, p.7.



- access to education, training and employment – being at risk of income poverty;
- facilities for young people and fragmentation of services not meeting the needs of those they should serve;
- opportunities for meaningful participation in decision-making processes in their communities and society at large – unstable community affiliations and a widening gap between citizens and politics;
- real emotional recognition of their potential and respect for their voices;
- opportunities for getting to know their peers in other countries of Europe and for diversity experiences and learning;

and have often been challenged by experiences of

- severe discrimination (because of ethnic or cultural background, gender, disabilities, or sexual orientation).

At that time more and more youth workers, teachers, researchers, decision-makers and funders across Europe were alarmed by the growing number of children and young people facing complex experiences of social exclusion. It has been especially alarming that as a result of not being given fair and just opportunities, a growing frustration among young people could be observed and a considerable number of young people were at risk of turning their back to democracy, resulting in increases of xenophobia, racism and violence.

After coming to the conclusion that the relevance of these burning and complex challenges and the inherent risks for the whole society had not been recognized sufficiently, the partners of the YEPP initiative committed to overcoming the limited impact of traditional short-term “piecemeal approaches” of those days by contributing to the prevention of social exclusion through a long-term comprehensive and sustainable approach.

There has been consensus among the partners that sustainable change must be brought about by the people themselves – those affected by exclusion are the protagonists of change and they are an essential and systemic part of the solution.

In the YEPP initiative, this implied a shift of paradigm from treating young people as passive recipients of support to recognizing young people as experts of their own situation and as active change makers. This change of perspective required opportunities for stakeholder engagement, active civic participation, capacity building and training to build knowledge and awareness, and skills and competences as well as attitudes and confidence for young people to become active citizens contributing to positive change.



## 1.2. The YEPP approach and 'Concept of Change'

### YEPP empowerment approach

In the YEPP approach, empowerment is seen as a primary way to combat social exclusion because it is a holistic concept that can address the complexity of social exclusion processes and can facilitate action to overcome social exclusion sustainably.

The empowerment concept and approach is based on the "Menschenbild" that views disadvantaged groups as potential actors for change, which is driven by an inherent trust in people's strengths and on a normative orientation towards principles of autonomy, social justice and democratic participation.

This view represents a shift of paradigm in social welfare programmes from the deficit-orientation to the resource-orientation, from paternalisms to respectful and equal relationships, facilitating "help for self-help".

The term 'empowerment' is used to indicate a process, as well as an outcome. Empowerment stands for a dynamic process which results in the outcome of an expansion both of individual and collective capacities and spheres of action.

In the YEPP definition, empowerment refers to all those processes that lead citizens, in particular young people:

***"... to taking responsibility for, control over and ownership of their individual and collective lives and destinies; having the ability and the power to contribute effectively to the advancement of their communities and society at large thus building active, inclusive and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect, solidarity and cooperation. It is about having access to an array of opportunities to choose among<sup>2</sup>."***

Empowerment has an inherent political dimension which has emerged from the history of its origins in the Civil Rights Movement, in particular in the Black Power Feminist Movement, in the USA in the 1970s. It entails a redistribution of power, in particular for those who are already at risk of social exclusion. Power is understood as the rights of access to and control over resources as well as of decisional and structural capacities. Power is the power to shape, to change, the potential to transform.



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<sup>2</sup> Evans, P. and Krüger, A. (2012): *Youth and Community Empowerment in Europe. International perspectives.* Bristol, United Kingdom: Policy Press.



***“Moreover, this approach sees the young person not just as an individual, but as an essential part of a larger community. Hence, young people play an indispensable role in the formation and progress of the community and are perceived to be main actors in local change with decision-making power. Youth empowerment is interlinked with community empowerment.”<sup>3</sup>***

The YEPP approach has been influenced by the community education model which is closely related to the community development approach.

***“Community education provides opportunities for the learning and capacity building of citizens which is a key element of community development and contributes to the empowerment of a community as a whole.”<sup>4</sup>***

There are two different perspectives of empowerment. First, self-empowerment of people affected by power, helplessness and exclusion emphasizing the active acquisition of power, energy, agency and creative power by the people themselves as individuals and as groups. In this perspective, empowerment is seen as a process of reconstruction of self-determination, autonomy and control. Second, empowerment as professional support for gaining autonomy, self-determination and capacity to act relating to the aspect of support and promotion of autonomy, self-determination and capacity to act through professional helpers.

## YEPP empowerment matrix

To capture the depth and complexity of empowerment of young people and communities on a descriptive level, as well as to develop a referential framework for a comprehensive view of empowerment goals and processes as an analytic instrument for measuring the empowerment approach, its outcome and impact, the YEPP Empowerment Matrix was created and is composed of the following seven key dimensions which are viewed as interdependent<sup>5</sup>:

- Personal-social

This dimension refers to the individual level, as well as the relationship of the individual to the community. It is assumed that there is a relationship between the development of confidence, a strong sense of identity, social skills, a positive image of community, and the establishment of social capital.

- Political

The political dimension essentially covers active youth participation. This is manifested

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<sup>3</sup> Morales, K. A. S. (2020): *Youth and Community Empowerment Through the YEPP Approach*, Master Thesis, Potsdam, University of Applied Sciences, p.25.

<sup>4</sup> Krüger, A. (1997): *Urban Regeneration and residents' involvement – developments in Germany over the last two decades*, in: Henderson, P. (ed.): *‘No Europe without us’ – setting the scene: Community-based responses to urban deprivation in five European countries*, The Hague: LSA and Combined European Bureau for Social Development.

<sup>5</sup> Bleckmann, P., Krüger, A. and Sischka, K. (2005): *What works? What does not? Analysis of the programme development to date in the light of YEPP's theory and concept of change. Interim assessment report, implementation phase until June 2005. YEPP internal evaluation*, Berlin: International Academy, p.12.



in different ways, such as the forming of youth councils, youth parliaments, associations and/or community foundations, the increase of political participation opportunities, and the ability of the community to self-organize. It is also important to remember that young people's political participation is complex, and continues to evolve in response to social and political climates.

- Economic

This dimension refers to the capacities of young people to gain economic benefits, either through employment or entrepreneurship, and access to decision-making power over resources. Career and training opportunities are also included in this dimension.

- Cultural

The cultural dimension, similar to the personal-social dimension, involves both the individual and his/her perception of other cultures. The fostering of cultural values and respect and the increase of intercultural knowledge are also aspects of this dimension. Moreover, it is assumed that cultural empowerment is also linked to inclusion.

- Education and training

This dimension largely refers to the motivation and capabilities for learning. The importance and impact of non-formal education is of great importance to the YEPP approach, as it provides opportunities for young people to display other capacities and work outside the traditional school system, which is often very restrictive. This allows them to gain a sense of their capabilities and contribute to the development of other skills.

- Legal

The legal dimension involves knowledge on law and its application, such as civil and political rights.

- Health and environment

This dimension deals with holistic health, the perception of and actions performed for the environment.

The empowerment matrix, as well as the YEPP approach to empowerment resulting in the below-mentioned YEPP goals, form the conceptual framework for the impact analysis of the YEPP method on youth and communities in Europe presented in this publication.



*"I am Mirza, and I work as the coordinator of the Youth Bank Programme for Tuzla Community Foundation since January 2019. Before that, I was a volunteer in the Tuzla Community Foundation for thirteen years, which is why I am familiar with YEPP activities. In October of the same year, I was able to participate in the Inclusion Youth Exchange in Berlin where I had the great experience to meet sixty-eight other young people from different countries. It was an opportunity to learn how other young people view their communities and how they come up with solutions to issues they face. Since I am professionally engaged in community work, it was good not only to share my knowledge about this topic, but also to listen and learn about other new methods of community work. It was wonderful to meet people who despite coming from different countries, shared the same positive outlook about their communities, and who were very inspired to work together to achieve something worthwhile. I think we are on the right path, with results that we can already see. I am sure there are going to be a lot of problems or setbacks, but the important thing is to keep focused on the activities and their aims, to know your limits, and to trust in what you are doing. "*



**Mirza Mujezinovic**

**Youth activist, coordinator of the Youth Bank Programme in Tuzla Community Foundation, local coordinator of the project Inclusion! Actions across boundaries, Bosnia & Herzegovina**



Photo by Jakub Purej

**Lorenz Kallenbach**

**Youth activist in YEPP Görlitz-Zgorzelec, local coordinator of the project Build Your Future, Germany**

*It was in 2008 that I first heard about YEPP. One of the main projects I was involved in was Build Your Future, which had to do with entrepreneurship learning. The most significant change in the young people who engaged in this activity was not really the immediate transition to becoming an entrepreneur, but rather, a mindset that sought community impact in innovative and dynamic ways. Even after involvement with YEPP activities, the values still remained in their minds as they constantly reflected on how they can start positive change in their communities. A strong connection and appreciation for Görlitz was fostered alongside a can-do attitude. I think that YEPP does not only work with and impact young people with zero opportunities, but the potential of every young person is also nourished. When compared to more traditional youth work, the YEPP methodology allows every young person to discover and develop their potential and start projects proactively based on the needs of their community. "*

*"There was already a youth centre in Bivongi when I started my work with YEPP. It was through YEPP Bivongi that we were given the opportunity to continue the youth project I was involved with then. Through YEPP, I was able to participate in international exchanges, wherein I met new people from other cultures. Besides improving my English skills, this experience taught me that even though we were from different countries, we faced many similar situations and problems. Most importantly, I also learned that these situations could change for the better through our efforts. To this day I am still able to observe the impact of the YEPP methodology on young people. I can say that young people learn to be more responsible and confident. For example, they are now more empowered to talk to the mayor or other municipal representatives regarding their concerns. Activities that we implement are also very community-based, such as art, video making, and sports workshops that involve people from the community. "*



**Mario Passarelli**

**Youth activist YEPP Bivongi,  
current vice president YEPP  
Bivongi, Italy**

Photo by Ann-Sofie Langvik /  
Syd-Osterbotten



**Harriet Lindelof-Sahl**

**Youth Officer, Municipality  
of Kristinestad, Finland  
Engaged in YEPP since  
2001**

*"I work with YEPP EUROPE mainly through my position as a youth officer for the municipality of Kristinestad, Finland. As a partner organization, we are able to participate in their projects, like the Welcomeship project that aimed to promote inclusion through social entrepreneurship. Moreover, we also able established new connections, such as partnering with a twin city in Novello, Italy. Through the projects we implement, we continue to gain understanding and support from decision makers in the municipality with regards to the importance of including young people, especially those with migration backgrounds. One of our significant achievements is the Children's Parliament. Every year, children aged seven to twelve years old meet and discuss issues and challenges in their communities in order to propose solutions. Afterwards, they are granted with the means to implement these solutions by the City Board. This is an example of a community change that is seen at the policy level. In fact, this Parliament was recognized by the Committee on the Rights of the Child as a great practice of involving children in their own lives and in their communities."*

## YEPP goals

In accordance with the vision and mission, the YEPP approach and 'Concept of Change' are anchored fundamentally in five overall goals:

1. Youth empowerment
2. Community empowerment
3. Partnership
4. Advocacy
5. Learning.

These five overall goals are complementary to each other. They are components of a holistic approach to bring about sustainable change.

### Youth empowerment

According to the YEPP approach, young people are considered to be the main actors of local change. The principles of youth empowerment are that young people have equal opportunities; participate in the decision-making processes and have decision-making power. Empowerment entails a redistribution of power, and is therefore most necessary for those who are already at risk of social exclusion or those who live in disadvantaged communities. This approach sees the young person not just as an individual, but as an essential part of a larger community to create change and become active citizens in the wider society. Youth empowerment is interlinked with community empowerment.

### Community empowerment

The overall goal of community empowerment is to create self-confident and competent communities, so that residents and local stakeholders become active citizens and bring about positive change to the environment in which children and youth develop. The principles of community empowerment are that the members of the community participate in the decision-making processes; map their needs in the beginning and use their resources to bring about sustainable change which benefits the community and the environment. Thus, the defining elements of community empowerment in the context of YEPP are participation and sustainability. Participation is seen in the importance attributed to the members of the community, as they play key roles in decision-making and needs assessment processes. At the same time, sustainability is attained through the maximization of human, natural, and economic resources.

### Partnership

To overcome complex and deeply entrenched youth and community disempowerment and social exclusion in areas of social disadvantage and marginalisation requires systemic changes within the entire community. Fostering cross-sectoral cooperation and creating partnerships involving the public, private and independent sector have become core elements and a



key part of the YEPP approach at the local level as well as at the international level in order to pool the collective resources, both professional and financial, to join forces and to engage representatives of all YEPP stakeholder groups in the change processes from the beginning, strengthening and sustaining the change processes.

### Advocacy

To bring about sustainable change, mainstream participatory processes, and redistribute power, empowerment needs to be integrated and fostered in local, regional, national and European policies and structures, and in joint actions across boundaries. This requires young people and other citizens to engage in the creation of public policies and make sure that the target group and beneficiaries are included in policy discussions and policy making processes.

### Learning

To provide opportunities for self- and community development, building knowledge and awareness, skills and competences as well as attitudes and confidence to become active citizens contributing to shaping and changing personal and community life needs to be supported by capacity building, training and practicing. To achieve empowerment, YEPP is committed to participatory, interactive non-formal learning processes and facilitates capacity building opportunities, exchange and transfer of knowledge and expertise, as well as civic participation processes. This includes learning in diverse groups locally, as well as transnationally providing experience of diversity, commonality and of working together towards achieving common goals.

## Guiding principles

The YEPP empowerment approach is reflected in the non-negotiable key features of YEPP that are the common guiding principles underpinning the work of all stakeholders at all levels as a “red thread” running through every aspect of the work as well as through personal and collective attitudes:

- Identify the needs of the local community and mobilize local resources.
- Establish local cross-sectoral partnerships.
- Engage young people as drivers and protagonists of change.
- Engage local stakeholders in strategic planning, implementation and evaluation.
- Provide capacity building and non-formal learning.
- Integrate local, regional, and international dimensions.
- Engage local stakeholders in civic participation.
- Advocate for policy change.
- Commit to equal opportunities.

## Common working methods

The YEPP Concept of Change includes a set of common working methods, in particular the multi-level approach, YEPP Cycle of Change and non-formal learning methods.

### **Multi-level approach**

YEPP follows a multi-level approach which is one of the key conceptual elements of the YEPP 'Concept of Change'. While taking into consideration the European dimension of the problems and challenges and the mission to contribute to building a social Europe, the work at the local, regional and national level is integrated systematically with activities and learning opportunities at the international level.

#### *At the local level*

At the beginning of YEPP, seven areas of social disadvantage with communities in six European countries were designated YEPP Local Sites.

Designated YEPP Local Sites across Europe are characterised by different situations, social and political systems and cultures, challenges and problems, and are affected in different ways by disadvantage and risks of exclusion. The examples are rural Finland, Dublin's inner city, rural Slovakia, urban and rural Italy, Antwerp's inner-city and post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina.

#### *At the regional and national level*

Local Sites that are situated in the same region and/or country establish informal clusters, or formal associations as a platform for trans-local professional exchange and support, collaboration and strategic alliance with a stronger voice to be heard at the political level. In addition, they provide a legal framework for fundraising and income generation and for setting up joint projects, for example L'associazione YEPP Italia and Tuzla Community Foundation.

#### *At the international level*

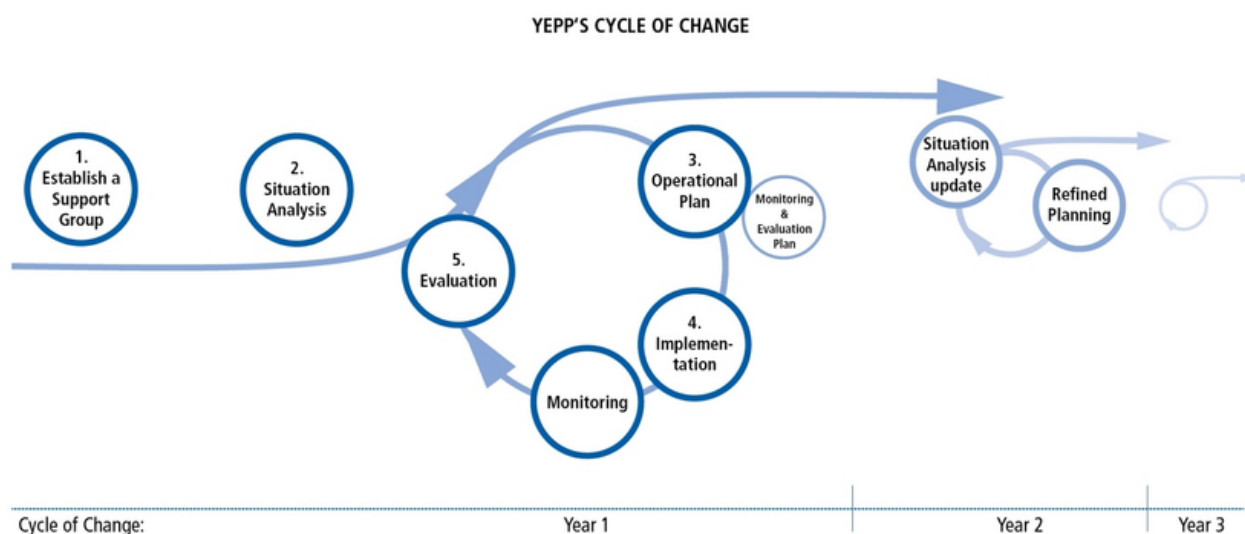
Local development processes are supported systematically by the international YEPP Community Network. Members of the network are all YEPP Local Sites including all YEPP stakeholders, local and national organisations, municipalities, diverse youth associations and networks, as well as all YEPP partners, including the foundation and project partners.

In response to the needs and interests of its members and in support of the local empowerment and change processes, the YEPP Community Network is an inspirational network providing an international platform for cross-border exchanges and learning processes sharing expertise and experiences, challenges and concerns; for peer learning and supporting; showcasing and recognizing examples of best practice; joint initiatives and projects; for capacity building and training; for the opportunity to experience diversity

land commonality and for raising awareness of the broader context of active citizenship in Europe. It is coordinated and managed by the international YEPP Team (former: YEPP Programme Team, YEPP IRC Team, current: YEPP EUROPE Team).

### YEPP Cycle of Change

Stakeholders in the Local Sites engage in applying the YEPP approach and methodology under the circumstances of their local situation. Supported by a local YEPP Team and the international YEPP Team, they engage in continuous participatory strategic planning and community development, which is driven by an on-going process of analysis, action, reflection, namely the YEPP Cycle of Change.



In the YEPP Local Sites, motivated local citizens, most importantly young people, as well as representatives of non-formal local groups, NGOs, schools, social workers, businesses and municipalities committing to the overall goals and principles of YEPP, get organised in Local Support Groups (LSGs) or Stakeholder Circles. These are informal action groups or formal non-for-profit organisations, such as community foundations, that aim to bring about the change they want to achieve.

They take the initiative to build a local YEPP infrastructure by mobilising and securing local resources, e.g. financial and/or in-kind support provided by foundations, the municipality, NGOs etc., to fund a local YEPP Team of two professionals: a Local Coordinator and an Evaluation Facilitator.

The LSGs engage in an in-depth analysis of the local situation with needs assessment, resource mapping and looking at the local political decision-making structure, and agree on its common ground.

The LSGs develop and agree on the Operational Plan including the key issues identified in the situation analysis, the objectives they would like to achieve within the frame of the agreed YEPP overall goals and the initiatives, activities and projects they plan to implement as well as the funding strategy and submission of respective proposals.



Part of the Operational Plan is the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan that defines indicators, outputs and outcomes to assess progress of the local work.

The development and implementation of the Operational Plan is monitored and evaluated by the Local Support Groups and/or Local Monitoring Teams. Based on the evaluation results, the Local Support Groups review the local Operational Plan and update the Situation Analysis. The next cycle of refined planning and implementation, monitoring and evaluation process starts.



### **Non-formal learning methods**

Non-formal learning methods are at the core of every step in the YEPP Cycle of Change: situation analysis, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, as well as the milestones of transnational YEPP activities, such as youth exchanges, training of trainers, workshops, conferences, and lately, webinars. Key features of non-formal learning are that it is voluntary, e.g. young people decide themselves on what, where and how much they want to learn; it is based on individual responsibility for one's learning outcomes, and it is a facilitated process supported by youth workers, tutors and educators. The result of non-formal learning may be "hard" skills like proficiency in English, skills in entrepreneurship, media work, or in project management, as well as "soft" skills such as intercultural competence, team work, conflict resolution, etc. Some of the non-formal learning methods used in the YEPP Community Network are: brainstorming, mind mapping, prototyping, pitching, needs mapping, photo safari, world café, etc. Any successful type of learning should be thought-provoking, inclusive, affordable and fit the digital age.

*"My involvement with the YEPP methodology began when I was still working for Compagnia di San Paolo. I began as the evaluation facilitator of the two local YEPP sites in Turin, Mirafiori and Parella. In 2011, as a response to the rapid increase of YEPP sites in Italy, YEPP Italia was established. Our mission is essentially to spread the YEPP methodology in Italy, make it grow, create new sites, and train people on the YEPP principles and approach. Moreover, we also have a mission to become one of the voices in advocating for youth policies and youth active citizenship.*

*One of the most important results of engaging in YEPP activities is the development of a sense of community in each young person. There are young people who have a very low interest in their community and what lies outside their personal concerns. However, when they meet other young people through these activities, a community mindset is created, and they begin to take responsibility. Through my work with YEPP Italia, I continuously become more aware of the high potential of young people. The world is changing very quickly, and stakeholders should step behind and leave space for young people to express themselves. The empowerment of young people means that young people and adults engage in meaningful discussions on the same level, understand each other, and work together to achieve a positive change in their communities."*



**Angela Lostia**

**President of YEPP Italia,  
Italy  
Engaged in YEPP  
since 2002**



**Luca Grbac**

**PEOPLE GOAL,  
Fondazione Compagnia di  
San Paolo,  
Italy  
Engaged in YEPP since 2010**

*"Fondazione di San Paolo has been supporting YEPP for almost twenty years now, primarily because we share the same values, beliefs, and goals regarding the empowerment of young people. When individuals are given the opportunities to actively participate in their communities, a better society is built. Our experiences with young people have taught us several important qualities as a foundation. One of these is their authentic and genuine participation in the processes and issues that affect them, and not one that is largely tokenistic. We try to incorporate this into our foundation by allowing young people not only to engage in selected stages of our activities, but also play more active and defining roles in our initiatives as a whole, in order to be the first change they want to see in their community. "*

*"In 2004, the Tuzla Community Foundation started to host YEPP sites in Tuzla. This was three years after the establishment of one of the first YEPP Local Sites, which was in Simin Han. We worked in small suburbs and neighbourhoods and tried to engage local people, especially young people and women, in local community development. I was also personally involved with some international activities of YEPP by taking the role of a youth coach.*

*The biggest change I observed in young people was that they became more proactive. With the implementation of the YEPP methodology, young people were able to discuss and recognise the issues and problems of their community and propose solutions and ideas. The innovative approach was new for them, and change was seen in the attitudes of young people that were able to implement the activities and projects that they had planned for their community. Now we have young people who run their own organizations or are in useful positions to initiate community change. Although I can say that we have not yet achieved strong political influence, we have empowered young people by giving them the wind at their backs and opportunities to become change makers."*



**Jasna Jasarevic**

**Executive Director of Tuzla Community Foundation, Bosnia & Herzegovina Engaged in YEPP since 2002**



**Patrick Gates**

**Coordinator of Young People at Risk (YPAR), Ireland Engaged in YEPP since 2004**

*"YPAR has been a partner organization of YEPP since 2004, ever since the Irish Youth Foundation\* agreed on setting up a YEPP Local Site in the North East Inner City of Dublin. Since then, we have participated in several of its projects, such as Dream Machine, Build Your Future, and Inclusion. Throughout these projects, I could say that the international youth exchanges have been most beneficial to young people. It gave them more confidence and a greater cultural understanding of others. Meeting other young people from different parts of Europe who share the same experiences and struggles leads to a sense of solidarity amongst the young people. Regardless of differences in perspectives, the youth exchanges create an understanding of difference and reduces the fear of it.*

*It really is all about empowering young people to express themselves in all sorts of forms and having meaningful engagement, whether it be on a political level, a local level, a school level, or a family level. The main goal is empowering young people to become comfortable with themselves and to exercise their capacities to create change in their communities."*

\*The Irish Youth Foundation was the initial hosting body for Ireland from 2001 – 2010.





### 1.3. Developments at the local level

In the span of twenty years, it is clear that the initiatives of YEPP have resulted in positive outcomes for youth and community empowerment at both the transnational and local level. Working at the local level is particularly essential to the YEPP approach, as it is through direct engagement with the local community that a real impact can be made. In this section, two of the most evident local developments are presented.



## YEPP in Bosnia & Herzegovina

YEPP began to work in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2001, making it one of the earliest local sites. The first site was established in Simin Han, a neighbourhood facing poverty, unemployment, and a lack of community cohesion.<sup>6</sup> In 2003, members of the YEPP Local Site opened up the AGORA Centre as a result of their situational analysis and the community's need for a shared cultural and educational space. In order to sustain this space and receive financial support for future projects, they created the Tuzla Community Foundation. This was first supported by the Freudenberg Stiftung, but eventually became autonomous in 2010. So, what started as a project from the YEPP Operational Plan became an organisation, a remarkable achievement of the empowerment process.

Currently, the Tuzla Community Foundation is recognized for their participatory and youth-led activities, and coordinates three YEPP Local Sites – in Simin Han, Gornja Tuzla and since early 2020 in Kiseljak. Young people from YEPP sites regularly take part in the international youth exchanges, and youth workers and project coordinators are involved in peer exchange on the European level for sharing best practice and learning from the experience of other colleagues in the YEPP Community Network.



## YEPP in Italy

The YEPP methodology has been developed in Italy in quantitative and qualitative terms due to specific context conditions and local choices.

YEPP started in Italy in 2003 with two local sites in two neighbourhoods in the city of Turin upon the initiative of Foundation Compagnia di San Paolo. New sites were formed annually, based on the interest of the local administrations in experimenting with an innovative methodology for their youth policies. The result was a network formed by a variety of local contexts: peripheral areas of big cities, rural areas in the countryside or in the mountains, and middle and small-size municipalities.

In 2020, 14 local sites form the Italian network in four regions: Piemonte, Liguria, Emilia-Romagna and Calabria, with around 60 municipalities involved in YEPP.

The main factors that have contributed to these developments are the following:

- Continuous support provided by Compagnia di San Paolo. From the very beginning, the Italian foundation has trusted the Youth Empowerment Partnership Programme, and therefore decided to finance its implementation in Italy. The results achieved in the first sites encouraged Compagnia to support the spread of new sites. In Piemonte, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Cuneo (Fondazione CRC) has also played a determining role with regards to the dissemination of YEPP in the vast Cuneo province.
- Continuity has also characterized the Italian way of YEPP with regard to staff involvement. In 2011, the Local Coordinators and Evaluation Facilitators who were in charge of the Italian sites established the association YEPP Italia - Associazione di Promozione Sociale. There have been some new entries in this team, but the core group is still in charge. This allowed YEPP in Italy to benefit from a continuous working circle of professionals who shift from practice to conceptual analysis and vice versa. As a consequence, some aspects of the YEPP methodology have been modified according to the needs arising from the field work.

Italy-specific aspects of the YEPP methodology:

- The role of the public administration

No site is started without an agreement. It is signed by the municipality, YEPP Italia, and one or more foundations. This document defines the YEPP approach, principles and methodology shared between the partners, and the specific contributions of each to the local development of YEPP. In particular, the public administration undertakes something unusual: that is, it does not simply support a project for a limited time, but takes on long- term responsibilities. There is a learning process for both the political local actors and the group of young people: on the one hand, politicians learn to give space to young people, to trust them, to recognize them as equal citizens in the





community; on the other hand, young people learn how to maintain relations with the administration and take a direct responsibility for their actions. The main effect of the central role given to public administrations is that some municipalities have innovated their youth policies and have adopted YEPP as their own methodology (in particular two middle-size towns like Loano and Albenga and eleven small municipalities of YEPP Langhe and twelve of YEPP Stura). All involved administrations demonstrate new attention for youth policies and become more open-minded with regard to the active role of young people in their communities.

- The local support group

The support group is the engine of YEPP at the local level. The initial model envisaged a group comprised of representatives of three sectors (public, private, third sector), as well as “individual community members including youth”. The Italian experience with the first local sites showed that this kind of model had a low appeal for the majority of young people, particularly for young people between 16 and 20 years and those who could be defined as disadvantaged. The initial “call for YEPP” in the Italian sites was therefore aimed at building a group of young people interested in fulfilling their passions, learning something new, and improving their community. The core elements of a support group are relations between peers and adults, and a growing sense of belonging. The group represents a space for the development of three dimensions of empowerment: individual (the involved young people gain confidence, become less shy, discover their unknown potential), social (they learn how to work in a group and become respectful of different ideas and personal characteristics), communitarian (the actions they develop through the operational plan make them aware of their role for the community). The support group is always open to new entries: the acquired competences are handed down from “old young people” to the newly arrived. For young people, experiencing the support group is a way towards a growing autonomy; this is a pre-condition for the development of a different phase in a site, which is one of the main specific features of the Italian YEPP.

- Evolution of local sites

At the end of the first experimental phase of YEPP in Europe (2001 – 2011), YEPP Italia

reflected on the extent real change was accomplished with regard to the social dimension of youth empowerment in the local sites: Did young people take direct responsibility for the YEPP action? Were the support groups fully recognized as local actors? Were autonomy and empowerment being developed enough? The groups were still led by adult professionals, the coordinator, and the evaluation facilitator; they were perceived by the young people themselves as a sort of protecting umbrella. At the same time, it was observed that an endless repetition of the same local formula would not be sustainable in the long run, neither for the funding foundations (it would have stopped the opportunity to enhance the Italian network), nor for the municipalities that pay for the local infrastructure. As a result of these reflections, a new design of the sites' evolution was defined.

The network of the Italian sites became a moving ensemble. A general view would show a simultaneous process of sites that are in the middle of the experimentation of YEPP, sites at their beginning that are about to enter the network, as well as sites transformed into new autonomous entities.

Each site undergoes four phases:

1. Preliminary (several months). Contact with the local actors, signing of the agreement, appointment of the local coordinator and the evaluation facilitator, first involvement of young people and forming of the support group.
2. Active (3 years). Piloting three annual YEPP working cycles (Cycle of Change): planning, implementation and evaluation of three Operational Plans.
3. Mature (1 year). While implementing its fourth Operational Plan, the support group discusses the future. Young people are going to decide in which form the local site would develop.
4. Post-YEPP. There are two possible scenarios:
  - a YEPP youth association is formed; young people take full direct responsibility for the local YEPP action; local facilitators gradually step back. The birth of 6 new associations between 2012 and 2018 is the culmination of this kind of evolution for the local support group in Langhe, Albenga, Loano, Falchera, Stura and Bivongi.
  - the association is not feasible and the public administration takes over YEPP by appointing a facilitator who will support the youth group. An example of this model is YEPP Monviso. In both cases, YEPP Italia ensures methodological support and training for the first 3 years. After this 7-year process, all the involved youngsters are still entitled to participate in the national and transnational YEPP initiatives and trainings. YEPP Italia monitors the youth associations in order to verify the application of the YEPP methodology.

In 2020, there is 1 site in the preliminary phase, 4 sites in the active phase, 2 in the mature phase, and 7 in the post YEPP phase.

The timing of the whole process in a site can vary. In many cases there have been periods of interruption due to local conditions or external change (typically, the change of public administration). What matters is not formally respecting the model but constantly working in order to establish conditions that allow the reactivation of the site and the further development of the youth empowerment process.





## 1.4. Developments at the international level

YEPP International Resource Centre (from 2017 onwards: YEPP EUROPE) was established at the centre of the YEPP Community Network with the mission to support local communities working with the YEPP approach and methodology and those involved in the network to achieve youth and community empowerment, to enhance and strengthen the YEPP approach and methodology, and to advocate for youth and community empowerment at the political level. Since its establishment in 2012 and until 2020, YEPP EUROPE has developed the following strategies to catalyse further development and expansion.

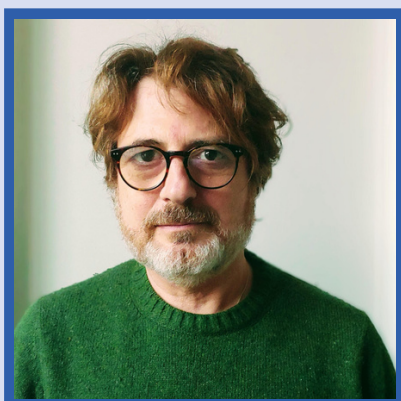


*"I joined YEPP Albenga last year through the Welcomeship project. I think this project is very important because it is mainly aimed towards promoting inclusion in our community. People tend to make judgements based on what they see without even knowing anything else about you, and this is something I want to change. There were also several important skills and attitudes I gained through Welcomeship. First, I was able to learn more Italian. This helped me not only understand the language more, but also enabled me to understand how other people think as well. I also learned the basic principles of entrepreneurship, like how to create and implement a business plan. Working with other young people in YEPP Albenga also allowed me to realize the importance of collaboration and sharing a common vision. Although I am personally aware that I am responsible for my own life, it is very inspiring to meet people who think like me and want to do the same things as well. This is what leads to change."*



**Ibrahim Galdima**

Participant of the Welcomeship project, youth activist YEPP Albenga, Italy



**Andrea Serafini**

Coordinator of the EmpowerMediaNetwork (EMN)  
Engaged with YEPP since 2004

*"The EmpowerMediaNetwork was established in 2004 to design and implement media related activities for the young people of the Youth Empowerment Partnership Programme. Since most young people have a strong interest in digital media and in sharing digital contents online, we found it important to support them by providing youth exchanges, workshops and training courses on creating awareness of the risk and opportunities offered by digital media and to encourage the use of such digital media as a tool for empowerment. Our initiatives bring together young people of different cultural background - both at international and local level - allowing them to explore and discuss issues relevant to themselves, their peers and their communities. The main topics are: identity, active citizenship, community concerns and potential solutions. The digital media produced by the young people during these initiatives are then shared online so as to reach other young people and their communities. Young people are always at the core of our work at EMN and their empowerment, participation and well being are the main focus of all our activities."*

*"I began working with YEPP by first taking on the role of a local coordinator of the YEPP local site in Turin. After a few years, due to the expansion of the YEPP local sites in Italy, I took on the responsibility of training other trainers, opening new sites, and developing other local sites. Together with Angela Lostia, I coordinated the growing number of local sites in Italy and eventually co-established YEPP Italia. One of the primary qualities of the YEPP methodology that inspired me to engage in all these initiatives was the international aspect of YEPP, particularly how it brought together not only young people from different countries, but also fostered unity amongst international partners that maintained similar goals of youth and community empowerment.*

*Through YEPP activities, I saw that young people gained confidence in their abilities, began to take responsibility in organizing their own associations or activities, developed open-mindedness, and advocated their needs to policy makers. In terms of community change, they also learned how to work together to create a sense of togetherness and social capital with other neighbouring villages."*



**Massimo Infanti**

Former Local Coordinator of the YEPP Local Site in Turin Mirafiori; Co-founder of YEPP Italia; Trainer of trainers, Italy  
Engaged in YEPP since 2003



**Diego Sgarlato**

Former youth activist YEPP Albenga, current president YEPP Albenga,

*"When I was first introduced to YEPP Albenga in 2011, I had no idea that I would still be active nine years later. Looking back, I can say that the experiences I had enhanced my personal knowledge and development. One of the most important learnings I had was the importance of collaborative effort and cooperation. Before YEPP, I always thought that whatever I had to do, I had to do it alone and without the assistance of anyone else, but now I believe that it is far better not only to share my ideas, but also to merge them with other people's ideas. When this is done, it is certain that the outcome will be much better. I also learned how to work with the administration of my city in order to advocate for our projects. Currently, we are pretty lucky to have more than two administrations and other partners that support our activities and desire the same changes in our communities. These changes, especially after Welcomeship, have a lot to do with inclusion. It is my vision that all people in the community are able to live their lives to a hundred percent, without any fears and with the support of other members of the community."*

## YEPP EUROPE horizontal expansion

At the end of the Youth Empowerment Partnership Programme 2001-2011, the international YEPP Community Network included 18 YEPP Local Sites in 8 European countries: Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland and Slovakia; YEPP Italia and several local Youth Associations from Italy; the Tuzla Community Foundation and a number of international partner organisations including 10 European and US foundations, the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD/CERI) and the Network of European Foundations for Innovation (NEF).

Between 2012 and 2020, YEPP EUROPE, significantly expanded the International YEPP Community Network geographically. At the end of the second decade, the International YEPP Community Network includes 106 directly involved communities in 16 European countries (Germany, Belgium, Austria, France, Ireland, UK, Finland, Sweden, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Slovakia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal). It has 38 active members, including 21 YEPP Local Sites and 17 project partners – of which five are networks. This horizontal expansion and the ambition to further promote the YEPP approach and methodology, and make more young people and communities benefit from the youth and community empowerment work of YEPP EUROPE will continue to be high on the agenda in the years to come.

## YEPP EUROPE vertical expansion

YEPP EUROPE also diversified its services and support for young people with fewer opportunities and their communities through a theme-based approach. It addressed current issues of young people and prevalent societal challenges in a number of European projects. This has often been done through EU-funded projects which aim at the development of innovative capacity building approaches in topics such as (community-based and social) entrepreneurship, media literacy (hate speech, fake news, etc.), inclusion of marginalized groups (Roma, refugees & migrants, persons with disabilities, etc.) or climate emergency. While developing these projects, new youth organisations and specialized organisations have joined the YEPP Community Network which broadened the expertise and know-how within the network. Some of the specialized member organisations are for example Österreichisches Institut für angewandte Telekommunikation (ÖIAT), Austria (Fake News), Migrafrica, Germany, UBELE, UK (Inclusion of Migrants & Refugees), Stiftung Entrepreneurship, Germany, the Institute for Creative Education, Croatia (Entrepreneurship), and Out of the Box International (Advocacy & Policy Work). Some theme-based projects which are directly connected to the needs and issues of young people include “Build Your Future: Entrepreneurship Programme for Young People”, “Welcomeship:



Building Inclusive Communities Through Community-Based Entrepreneurship”, “Inclusion! Actions Across Boundaries” and “Fake OFF! Fostering Internet Literacy for Youth Workers and Teachers with a Focus on Fake News”. All these projects are funded by the European Commission’s Erasmus+ Programme.

## YEPP EUROPE new membership types

Since 2015, YEPP EUROPE has introduced new membership types in the YEPP Community Network. Beside YEPP Local Sites, which are local communities working with the YEPP approach and methodology, there are also YEPP project partners – youth organisations, municipalities or specialized organisations who joined the network through EU-funded projects focused on Strategic Partnerships, e.g. ERASMUS+ Key Action 2. Project partners share the goals and principles defined in the YEPP working standards and sign an agreement based on the guiding principles and working methods as mentioned above.

A third type of members that has joined the YEPP Community Network in the recent years are regional, national and international networks. They have also become project partners. There are five of those networks, namely DYPALL (Portugal), Out of the Box International (Belgium), LOGO Jugendmanagement (Austria), ÖiAT (Austria) and Youth Bank International (UK). While YEPP EUROPE’s work does not directly involve all members of these networks, digital communication (campaigns, social media, newsletters, webinars, etc.) makes it possible to increase its visibility and also indirectly reach out to a far wider audience in Europe and beyond.

Beside the successful expansion strategies, YEPP EUROPE moved the YEPP approach and methodology forward as it has:

- broadened the scope by expanding the target groups;
- aligned its work with the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals and European Youth Goals;
- complemented the YEPP approach with other concepts committed to empowerment, e.g. community-based entrepreneurship and rights-based approach;
- developed online tools for learning, coaching and training, e.g. blended learning, online exchange, online learning platforms, international challenges, etc.;
- increased the use of social media for communication, as well as for dissemination of project materials, e.g. Guidebooks, Manuals, Training Material for young people and youth workers.



## 2. Results of the YEPP empowerment process

Because of its nature, empowerment can be perceived and interpreted in various ways. Hence, the impact of the YEPP approach is explored through the combination of numerical data collected from the online surveys, and personal life experiences gathered through the in-depth interviews. The following chapter presents the results of the YEPP empowerment process based on the impact research conducted by Karla Asuncion S. Morales in 2020 in the framework of her M.A. Childhood Studies and Children's Rights at the University of Applied Sciences Potsdam, Germany.



## 2.1. Methodology

The perspectives of local coordinators and project partners on youth and community empowerment, as well as the impact of the YEPP approach within the context of their own communities regarding the YEPP goals, were identified by means of online surveys. These were sent out to 21 members of the YEPP Community Network, 19 of which responded. The countries represented in the survey were Germany, Poland, Finland, Ireland, Slovakia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, United Kingdom, Greece, Spain, Romania, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, and Austria. The survey results are presented below.

Besides the survey, in-depth interviews were conducted in order to gain a stronger understanding of the processes and dimensions of empowerment. Respondents were young people who are participating or have participated in YEPP activities, and YEPP stakeholders who have supported the Youth Empowerment Partnership Programme, e.g. funders, members of foundations, and members of the YEPP EUROPE team. Out of 29 individuals contacted, 23 were interviewed through online calls, including 12 YEPP stakeholders and funders, 9 young people, and 2 members of the YEPP EUROPE team. The countries that were represented in the interviews were Italy, Finland, Austria, Germany, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovakia, and Ireland. The interview guide followed the seven dimensions of empowerment. The questions differed for the young people and the community stakeholders to cater specifically to the experience of the respondent. Although politicians were often mentioned as important stakeholders in the YEPP approach and methodology, unfortunately, there were difficulties in securing an interview with them due to scheduling issues. Understanding the point of view of politicians, and the reasons behind the difficulties of creating and implementing youth policies, would have provided a more comprehensive understanding of political participation. The interview results are also presented below.





## 2.2. Survey results

The graphs below summarize data collected from the online surveys completed by either local coordinators of YEPP sites or project partners. Each graph represents a measure of a singular YEPP goal. The measurement of the attainment of this goal is reflected through a five-point scale, with the value of 1 set as “strongly disagree” and the value of 5 as “strongly agree”. The x-axis represents this scale, while the y-axis presents the percentage of respondents who selected the value.

### A. Youth empowerment

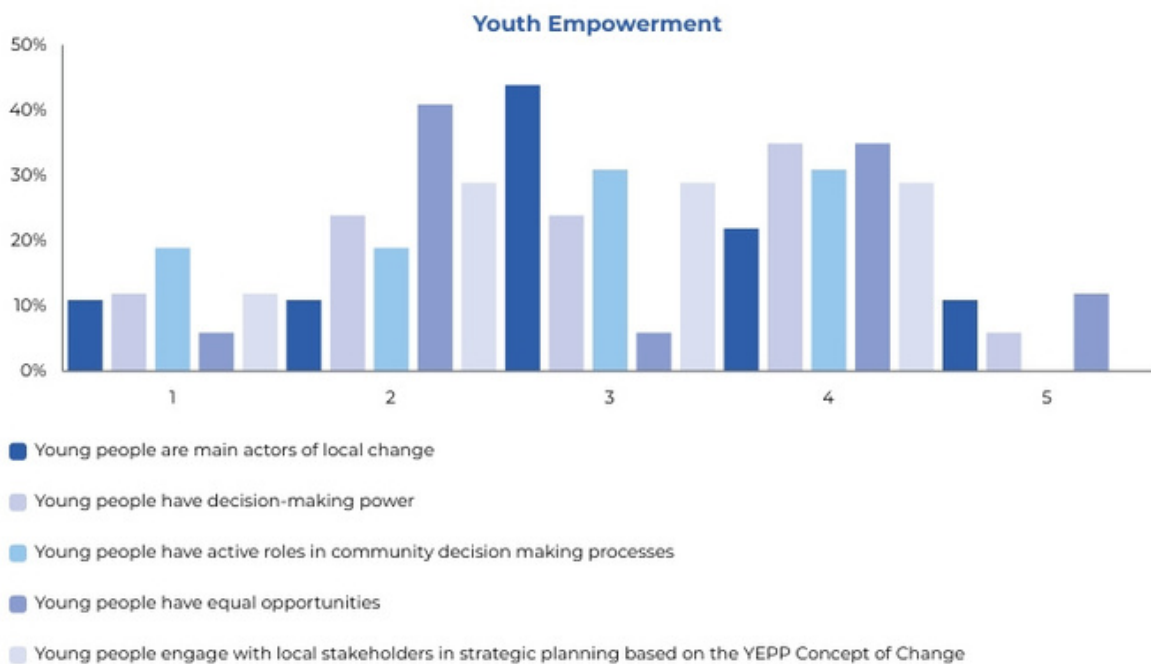


Figure 1. Results of work on youth and community empowerment on young people

Youth empowerment was measured according to these five parameters. Results of these parameters are unevenly distributed, suggesting that the manifestations of youth empowerment are different in each community. In general, the perception of young people as main actors of local change fell in the mid-level, while young people having decision making power resulted in a higher tier. Young people are not strongly perceived to have equal opportunities, as this parameter scored rather low. These results show that although young people may have decision-making power, their efforts may not necessarily translate into local change due to several factors, such as pre-established legal frameworks and societal perceptions. Moreover, the challenge of providing equal opportunities to every young person remains present, reflecting a current general trend of exclusion and difference.

## B. Community empowerment



Figure 2. Results of work on youth and community empowerment on the community

Impact on community empowerment fell in the mid-range level, suggesting that activities may still lack the involvement of community members and that the reach of YEPP Local Sites in their communities is still limited to a small population. The results also indicate that a needs-based approach, one of the fundamental elements of the YEPP approach, is prevalent amongst local sites and partners. However, community-based entrepreneurship is low, indicating that such initiatives are not yet significantly present in communities, and that activities are largely funded by external organizations. The results of parameters measuring youth empowerment are similar to these results, which reflects the strong mutual relationship between youth empowerment and community empowerment.



### C. Partnerships

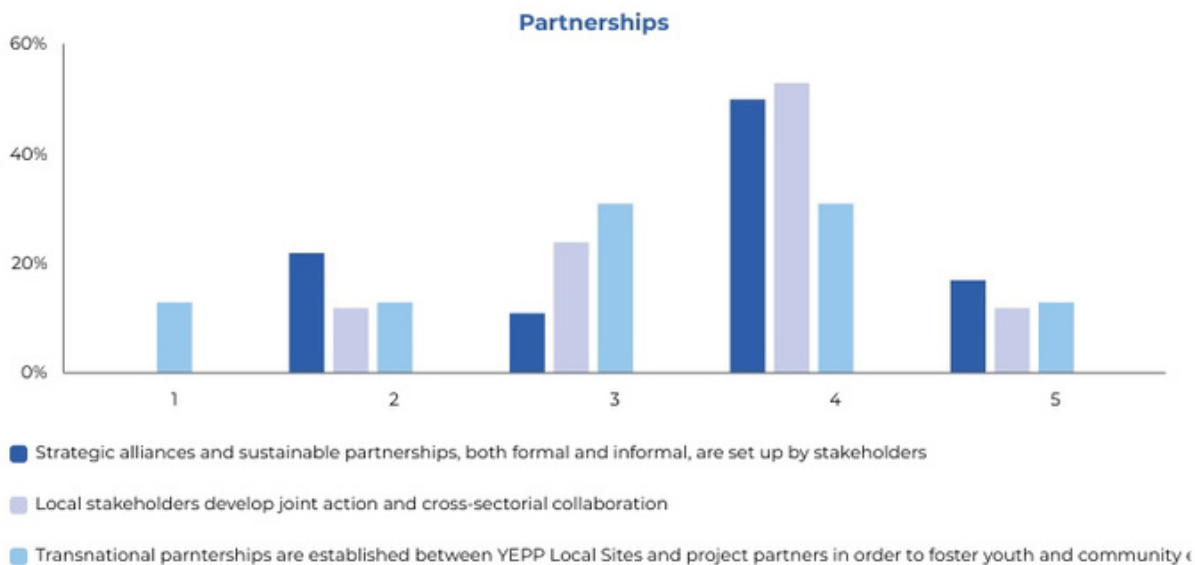


Figure 3. Results of work on youth and community empowerment on partnerships

It was established that cross-sectorial partnerships were strong, supportive, and strategic. Partnerships included both the local, regional and transnational level, thus contributing to a more solid development of youth and community empowerment. From these results, it can be argued that the establishment of partnerships between local and transnational stakeholders is a strong element of the holistic YEPP approach. It can also be argued that the YEPP goal of partnerships is more easily attainable compared to the goals of youth empowerment and community empowerment because the establishment of partnerships is one that can generally be controlled by local coordinators and project partners. On the other hand, empowerment and the parameters it is measured by, are influenced by a multitude of factors and are therefore more challenging to assess and control.





## D. Advocacy

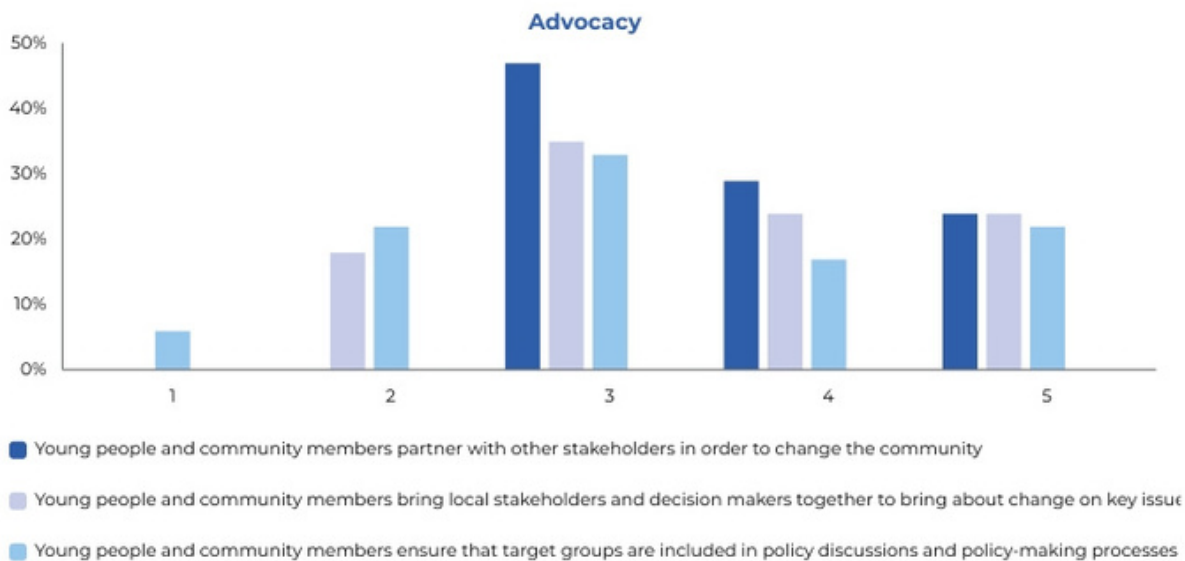


Figure 4. Results of work on youth and community empowerment on advocacy

Impact on advocacy fell in the mid-range level for all three parameters. This suggests that the effect of advocacy efforts between young people, community members, and local stakeholders are present, but still lack a significant impact on young people and communities. This could be due to the involvement of other stakeholders, particularly those in political positions, and the additional challenges this may result in. It is easier to achieve an aim within a group than with the involvement of other stakeholders who may not share a similar vision or aim. This is one of the main challenges of any advocacy initiative, and is therefore naturally reflected in the results of this survey.

## E. Learning



Figure 5. Results of work on youth and community empowerment on learning

In general, the parameters measuring the impact on learning scored relatively high in comparison to the other goals. Learning was fostered through activities that were implemented at the local and transnational level. Through several activities and programs, young people and community members participated in capacity building projects and had the opportunity to develop necessary skills. Learning was also achieved between partner organizations, wherein resources, tools, and training and exchange opportunities were shared. It is arguable that the goal of learning scored high due to the fact that learning, in this context, is largely within the control of local coordinators and project partners. This is in contrast to the other goals, particularly youth empowerment, community empowerment, and advocacy, that involve not only more stakeholders, but also other processes that may potentially increase the difficulties in attaining such aims.

Based on the results of the survey, it is evident that the goals of learning and partnership were the most achieved throughout local sites and project partners, while the goals of youth empowerment, community empowerment and advocacy fell in the mid-range level, suggesting the need for considerable improvement. Although none of the five goals fell below the mid-level, challenges to youth and community empowerment are yet to be overcome. It can be suggested that some goals are more easily attained than others simply due to the amount of control possessed by young people and local coordinators. The processes of youth and community empowerment and the efforts to advocate for particular causes are definitely more complex and nuanced than the establishment of partnerships or the fostering of learning. For example, through the utilization of the YEPP approach, young people are able to create new and strategic partnerships and develop projects that foster learning, but they have less control over the success of advocating for youth and community empowerment to political stakeholders. Ultimately, it is clear that the goals of learning, advocacy, and partnerships contribute to the goals of youth and community empowerment. Therefore, if the attainment of one of these three initial goals is weak, then the attainment of empowerment is most likely impeded.



## 2.3. Interview results

The impact of the YEPP approach on the empowerment of young people and communities is seen when measured according to the different dimensions. Based on the YEPP empowerment matrix, it is clear that young people and communities have been impacted in several aspects. It is important to remember that these dimensions are not mutually exclusive, but rather complement and build up on each other. Hence, the delineation between certain dimensions is not strongly defined, as one dimension may be strongly linked to another in certain contexts. Similarly, the impact on an individual cannot solely be attributed to involvement in YEPP activities and projects, as there are of course other factors that contribute to empowerment. As with most interview procedures, it is important to keep in mind that the answers of the respondents may have been said in a way that is deemed suitable for the researcher. The following results are presented:

### *A. Personal-social*

#### I. Development of personal traits and skills

Both respondent groups (young people and stakeholders) acknowledged the development of important personality traits as a result of involvement with YEPP. Specifically, confidence, open-mindedness, communication skills and leadership ability were fostered and developed.

##### a.) Confidence

Confidence was gained through interaction with different people in YEPP (participants, coordinators, international exchanges) and the capacity building exercises.

*"I got a lot of capacity building through these activities, a lot of self-confidence."*

- Young Person

*"When I go there, I see very very very nice people. I see different things, people who give memory, who give consideration. People who change how I see, give me what, I don't know... confidence."*

- Young Person

*"I think the international exchanges were a huge sort of a cultural understanding. It gave them confidence..."*

— Community Stakeholder



*“What is very frequent, especially when young people come to international exchanges, very often, what you can observe is very shy young people with very little confidence, fear, and very little belief in themselves, who then turn into people who are able to make presentations in front of forty-fifty people, who are actually pitching ideas in front of an audience. You sometimes can even see the physical change in people hiding in a corner to people walking straight with far much more confidence. This is actually quite surprising in just one week, sometimes.”*

— **Community Stakeholder**

## **b.) Communication skills**

Communication improved in terms of the effectiveness of communication and the improvement of language. It can be said that language and the ability to communicate properly with others plays a significant role in the development of confidence, the ability to voice out personal opinions, and the process of inclusion into the community. This is especially true for those who are new to the community.

*“They (family) saw how I changed, and how it made a change in me. I got more communication skills. I wasn’t ashamed to speak with people because I always wanted to be involved.”*

– **Young Person**

*“Welcomeship helped me to know many things. The first thing, I was trying to speak the language. I was not perfect, but I spoke the language more with them.”*

– **Young Person**

*“I really think that without this experience, my point of view would not be the same. I try to think less traditional.”*

– **Young Person**

*“In the municipality, it is really difficult to change because we work like tk tk tk. You have to do this, and not do more, and don’t think about much. But it is my objective in life to change it, so I am trying really hard every day, no no, I don’t want to do it like this. This is better.”*

– **Young Person**

## **c.) Open-mindedness**

Open-mindedness was fostered through transnational exchanges and local projects. Young people especially acknowledged that due to the exposure to other cultures, their approach and perceptions towards different cultures were positively influenced. Another element of open-mindedness was the ability to see issues and concepts differently and in less conventional ways.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Welcomeship is a project of YEPP EUROPE that aims to build inclusive communities through community-based entrepreneurship.

## II. Improvement of interpersonal relationships

Consequently, the development of individual traits positively contributed to the improvement of interpersonal relationships.

### a.) Interpersonal understanding

Participants were better able to understand other people, not just in the context of the program, but also in the community.

*“I see that Welcomeship is very good for me to understand everybody because (otherwise) it’s very difficult to make (social) relations.”*

- Young Person

### b.) Cooperation

Participants learned how to value cooperation and teamwork, placing importance on the advantages of working together and synthesizing ideas. This also includes the ability to establish partnerships with other stakeholders.

*“So I think it was really important for them... when they learned how to discuss with each other and learn from others’ opinions.”*

- Community Stakeholder

*“It is important to try to create new partnerships in the intersectoral level, institutional, NGOs. What is important is that they can work together in different roles also, it is important that they have a common goal, they can work to attain this goal and objective.”*

— Community Stakeholder

*“But also the way to act inside an association really changed... I thought that anything I should do, I should do myself without asking anyone, because it would be bad if too many people worked on the same things. But in YEPP, it is quite the opposite. I think it is far better to share ideas, to share projects.”*

- Young Person

## III. Positive change in the perception of community

Because of the changes at both the individual and interpersonal level, the view on community was also positively impacted.

*“The young people... I think they get a more positive view of their hometown, and more self-confidence.”*

- Community Stakeholder

*“They cared about their neighbourhood, they cared about their country in general.”*

— Community Stakeholder

*“Of course the starting point is that you have somehow a sense of your community. If you don’t have it, at least you get it. I mean, at the beginning, some people did not have a goal, but then there were other young people in the group who were contagious about this.”*

— Community Stakeholder

*“One of the big changes which happened was in overcoming the fragmentation of little villages. Meaning, here, every village has its own strong identity. Even if they are only two kilometres apart from each other, they very often have a sort of spirit of independence... but this started to change.”*

— Community Stakeholder

## **B. Economic**

### **I. Employability skills**

Skills that were learned through YEPP activities were found to be useful in employment, particularly in finding a job and keeping a positive and innovative work attitude.

*“To make videos is something I learned at YEPP. Someone watched some videos we did in YEPP, and then asked me to make something like that as work. Not the work of my life, obviously. Just like a second, if not a third, job.”*

- Young Person

*“I still use at work some stuff that I learned in YEPP, like when you organize a meeting with a lot of people, I am still using YEPP stuff... Like we learned some strategy to brainstorm stuff...I think I got my first job because of YEPP. When I finished the program, I had a job interview for a local social enterprise that makes projects about social innovation, and they said, ‘We are impressed because you did this program’.”*

- Young Person

### **II. Business and entrepreneurship skills**

Participants also learned how to craft business plans and implement them.

*“YEPP helped me a bit with the part to think about the business plan. But it was a really long turning to end up here. We opened two months ago, and I started to think about it four years ago.”*

- Young Person



### III. Political/economic

It was interesting to discover that some activities resulted in economic benefits of political participation.

*“But they get paid for now. Last year, or I think it was this year. The municipality council, they had written an initiative that they have to get paid for the meetings. The council took this and considered this, and now they get paid also. Because in politics, you get money, you get paid. Now they thought that they are also working politically, they should also get paid for the meeting they are on.”*

- Young Person

### IV. Socially oriented career

An interesting association between a socially oriented career and involvement with community activities was found.

*“Today I am having this job, and still working with young people. I try to give them this energy which I collect through all the years and got from this people who worked with me when I was younger. Now it is my task to give them everything I know through these years, so tomorrow somebody else can have some story like mine.”*

- Young Person

*“I know that most of the young people we had in the youth council, and also in the municipality council all have great jobs now. They are like in their thirties, and I think they got this community activity already on an early stage.”*

- Young Person



## C. Political

### I. Involvement in local governments

Local government involvement is the more traditional measure of political participation. Involvement in the local political sphere involves both maintaining a dialogue with politicians and obtaining their understanding and support.

#### a.) Dialogue with local politicians

Having the freedom and capacity to voice out one's opinions and specific needs opens up the possibility to dialogue with local politicians.

*"In one case, in the mountains, there is a girl, now nineteen. Last year, we had some problems with the adults, and so we went to several meetings in the local foundations, with the local administration, which are all in different villages. She was fighting very strongly, she said, 'No, it is important for us, YEPP, because it gives us competencies and strengths. We change, we grow up, and we take responsibility for our community.' But until two years before, she was so shy, she never talked, only with her peers."*

— Community Stakeholder

#### b.) Support of decision makers

Although participation is a rather long and difficult process, it eventually leads to the support of stakeholders.

*"We feel that we get inspiration for our work, more understanding and support from decision makers in the municipality and political people about the importance of including young people, and also different minority groups, in the policy work and decision making."*

- Community Stakeholder

### II. Organizing and forming non-governmental associations within the community

This is a less conventional way (that is, more freedom to move as one wishes) of political participation. Forming associations and organizations to mobilize people is also a form of participation, and one that is taken up mostly by children or young people, due to the defined and rigid structure of political rights.

*"The biggest change I see is in the people. We had many many participants through the years, and I heard many times from young people and adults in the community that they learned a lot through the process and now they're running their own organizations. This is the change we wanted to see in the community when we were starting this process."*

- Community Stakeholder

*“Then he found something different, not only photography, but organizing cultural events in this place which is a sort of barrio. A youth centre, more or less. With the group, they took responsibility for this place.”*

- Community Stakeholder

*“Various activities. We organized workshops, different types, like painting, video making, photography, or other events in the summer.”*

- Young Person

*“They found their own space, a youth club where they can meet. They built rules, what is okay, what shouldn’t be in the youth club, and they were painting the walls, and they did meetings to discuss their roles, of the parents in their life, of early marriage, of forced marriage sometimes. So this was quite important.”*

- Community Stakeholder

## **D. Cultural**

### **I. Increase in intercultural knowledge**

Through transnational exchanges, the participants were given opportunities to meet other people from different countries, therefore allowing them to learn about other cultures.

*“YEPP helped us with these values, which were shared in the local or national level, to be shared in the international level. They can learn and they can see that the young people from Finland, Italy, Germany, Ireland have the same problems as they do.”*

- Young Person

*“We feel we opened the doors to more international contacts, and we also got one twin city during this YEPP project. Our twin city is in Italy.”*

- Community Stakeholder

### **II. Inclusion and awareness of diversity**

The increase in intercultural knowledge contributes to the understanding and appreciation of diversity, and therefore leads to a more inclusive mindset. It is a significant factor and result of transnational exchanges.

*“Very very important to us, the whole issue of gender identity, ethnicity. We have a lot of migrants living in our area, so it’s really just understanding their culture, trying to prevent xenophobia and racism.*

*I think the transnational exchanges and the exchange of YEPP are very useful for that, because it gives you sort of a platform to understand different things.”*

- Community Stakeholder



*“They explain, in Welcomeship, what we have to do, and that we have to work together. We have to know how to try to change the system. Something like, when someone who doesn’t know you, judges you, maybe about color or other things. We try now to change those things.”*

- Young Person

*“This experience of diversity, the experience of getting to know other cultures. That was very important, for example, for the Roma people, that they were accepted as everybody else. There was no questions, there was no prejudice, no xenophobia... But here, everybody was the same. Of course, that’s a great experience for yourself, if you are from a disadvantaged or discriminated group. Then of course diversity also, that although they all had different circumstances and life situations, but some of the problems were the same.”*

- Community Stakeholder

### **E. Education and Training**

Non-formal educational processes and its benefits were highlighted in the interviews. Young people and community stakeholders upheld the importance of non-formal education in the development and empowerment of young people and communities.

*“Because what the school says is that this is the model, if you are out, you are out... And this makes a very low self-esteem. While if you have another way to learn and through that way, you discover your competencies, your potential comes out, and then you become stronger for yourself.”*

- Community Stakeholder

*“All activities which wasn’t about studying in school, which gave us something different from studying. When we were in those activities, we are studying a lot about how to manage our free time, how to be productive, how we can help our community.”*

- Young Person

*“The guy had a lack of attention. It was not the typical school lessons that there is a teacher who speaks, and then he learned. He surely learned more doing, making things. And I said, ‘Okay, if the school thinks that the only way to be smarter is to fly in a school with birds and fishes, the fish is stupid’”.*

- Young Person

*“Capacity building for them, they create a lot of opportunities in different things, like how to organize meetings, how to work with other people, how to do advocacy with local institutions. These are some of the changes that I observed.”*

- Community Stakeholder

*“For instance, they had a problem to get money for the buses for the tickets to go to a higher education institution. They founded a student club so they could get donations and support to find their way to school. Now, we have more than 200 people who are visiting high school or university. Ten years ago, there was nobody who could attend.”*

- Community Stakeholder

*“Another project was to work with a painter, and they learned to paint. They painted public buildings, or the inside of doctor’s rooms. They painted the walls in a farmhouse. It was also quite empowering for them, because they could be seen and they learned something special.”*

- Community Stakeholder

## **F. Legal**

The impact of YEPP initiatives on the legal abilities and knowledge of young people was not a prominent theme in the interviews, as only respondents who were already in the field of law or policy claimed development in this dimension.

*“I had to specialize some legal skills for YEPP. So it was not something I learn in, but something I had to learn for, in particular, to create the juridical form of the association I got now. Sometimes it’s really useful for my job, because a lot of projects we had... gave me the chance to know the juridical path to create that.”*

- Young Person

## **G. Health and Environment**

Similar to the legal dimension, the impact on health and environment seemed to be lacking in comparison to the other dimensions.

*“Surely for the psychological health. YEPP gives opportunities to guys to have better health, because they treat anyone at the same level in the same way, and there is no discrimination. I think, psychologically, that is really helpful.”*

- Young Person

*““We made different events in the summer... For environmental events, the change of climate.”*

- Young Person



**Vernon Ringland**

YouthBank International  
Director, UK  
Engaged in YEPP  
since 2008

*"My first involvement with the Youth Empowerment Partnership Programme was through the Irish Youth Foundation, and in later years, through YouthBank International. We all had a similar goal of creating opportunities to keep young people engaged and connected to their peers and hometowns in the Republic of Ireland. YEPP was a good partner for identifying some sites in Dublin wherein we could work towards these objectives. Afterwards, I was also involved with YEPP EUROPE by taking on moderation roles, especially in events and activities with social entrepreneurship themes. Between our two organizations, we produced several training programmes aimed to support young people in developing their own initiatives and addressing causes that matter to them.*

*I think a strength of the YEPP approach is the balance of specificity and support, in a sense that a local YEPP site is able to focus on the unique challenges of their community, while receiving support from other international partners. They were committed to the YEPP methodology, but also had the freedom to carry out their own programs. YEPP EUROPE exists because it sees challenges, formulates solutions to address these, and taps into their large network to foster change in the communities of the partners they work with."*

*"I have worked with YEPP in their projects that especially promote the inclusion and empowerment of people of the Roma community. I have seen that through the implementation of the YEPP methodology in these communities, young people engage in more innovative and creative ways to participate in their communities, such as painting walls and building spaces that foster inclusion (e.g. youth clubs and student clubs). They were also able to advocate for their rights and needs, particularly with regards to education, marriage, and housing."*



**Thomas Handrich**

YEPP EUROPE Consultant,  
Germany  
Engaged in YEPP since 2010

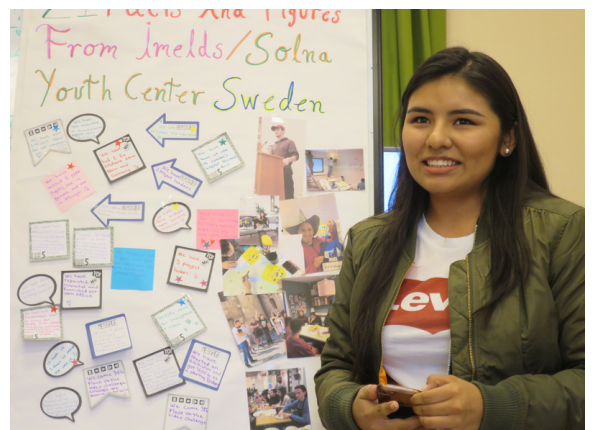


# 3. Discussion

## 3.1. Empowerment as measured through the empowerment matrix

### Individual empowerment

The YEPP approach has had a powerful impact on young people and their communities in the past twenty years. This can be seen not only in the individual empowerment experienced by young people, but also in the way their personal development led to positive community and social change. Hence, it is actually the individual process of empowerment of young people that most significantly contributes to the empowerment of their community. In fact, when considering the results, it is growth in the personal and social dimension that young people spoke of with most enthusiasm and at great length. Personal skills and abilities were either created or honed, which resulted in the improvement of their interpersonal relationships. The development of self-confidence was the most referred to, suggesting that this trait is one that is not only most common, but also fundamental to the entire process of empowerment. Self-confidence and the belief in one's capabilities are essential to subsequent efforts that contribute to community empowerment. This is reflective of the concept of youth empowerment maintained by YEPP, which highlights the control young people have over their lives. When young people are confident and sure of themselves, including their personal weaknesses and capabilities, they are more aware of what they want to and can achieve, therefore developing a greater sense of control over their own lives. This sense of control naturally contributes to a more positive understanding of their participatory capabilities. Transnational exchanges also played a key role in the empowerment of young people,



especially in terms of their understanding of diversity and inclusion. It was through these exchanges that young people met like-minded individuals that shared the same views, needs, and desires for their personal lives and communities, despite coming from different backgrounds. When young people realize that they are not the only ones facing certain issues in their community, but that these issues are also the same ones challenging other young people, a sense of solidarity is created. This not only inspires them to address these issues, but to do so more creatively and collaboratively. Through transnational exchanges, young people are able to exchange ideas, share suggestions, and learn from others who have also been working towards the same cause.

In addition, it is also through both local, national, and transnational activities that young people undergo training and gain knowledge through non-formal education. Capacity building exercises were seen as effective means to hone skills and abilities that would not usually be learned in the formal educational setting. This proved the effectivity and importance of non-formal learning, which should be seen as a way to supplement, even complement, formal educational processes, and not to work in opposition to it.

Amongst the seven dimensions of empowerment, the legal and the health and environment dimensions seemed to be the least impactful on young people. The reason for this is most likely due to the strong focus of YEPP initiatives on inclusion and, more recently, entrepreneurship. This also shows that an increase in legal knowledge may not be perceived to be immediately useful to young people in their everyday lives. Instead, it is the values of personal growth, interpersonal understanding, and inclusion that affect their realities more. Moreover, it can be said that young people are now less dependent on traditional legal structures to advocate for their causes, and instead use resources more available and accessible to them, such as media channels. Initiatives on health and environment were also not as prominent. Albeit urgent, such issues are relatively new when compared to others.







**Irene Cornaglia**

**Participant of the Build Your Future project, founder Café Sociale, Italy**

*"I got to know about YEPP through the Build Your Future project after a friend of mine, who was working for a YEPP local site at that time, informed me about it. When I started Build Your Future, I already had the idea of a café wherein people can gather in a public space, participate in social activities, and foster inclusion. Build Your Future helped me create my business plan and develop other necessary skills for setting up the café. Now, after four years and much effort we established Café Sociale in line with its initial objectives. We ensure that individuals with special needs find opportunities for employment, that local products are sold, and that art and culture are promoted. This is the way we give back to the community. My involvement in YEPP also changed the way I approach work. Since I work for the municipality, structures and methods of working are pretty much pre-established. However, I always try to come up with more innovative and effective ways to address certain issues and make things better."*

*"I was introduced to the YEPP concept even before it was officially launched. In the year 2000, I was at the annual meeting of the European Foundation Centre in Stockholm. It was during this meeting that Bill White, who was then the Chief Executive Officer of the Mott Foundation, approached me and introduced the concept of a "community foundation", which is essentially the idea of local people putting their resources and abilities together at the local level to achieve change and progress. This concept fascinated me primarily because it was similar to the ideas that form the foundation of the European Union. After meeting Angelika Krüger, the Founder of YEPP, and then convincing other foundations to support and commit to its establishment, YEPP was born. In a sense, I was directly involved in this process and later on became part of the Executive Committee. I think the way YEPP brings young people together, those from the local community and those with migration backgrounds, contributes to the creation of a sense of inclusion. The values that young people and youth workers get from working together are crucial for building multicultural communities. This is why I am very happy and proud to have been present during the beginnings of YEPP. It is only locally that you can build something solid; foundations are always at the bottom, not at the top. That is why YEPP is one of my favourite examples of building something coherent, and something that has a future. The fact that we are talking about it twenty years later, I can say that the decision was right."*



**Raymond Georis**

**Former Secretary General of the European Cultural Foundation; Founder and first Managing Director of Association for Innovative Cooperation in Europe (AICE), since 2002 renamed Network of European Foundations for Innovative Cooperation (NEF), Belgium - the hosting body of YEPP 2001-2010. He was engaged in YEPP 2001 - 2010**





*"We wanted to combine all our resources, which meant not only the funding for the foundations, but also really building a partnership by bringing all our expertise together, the resources and funds, the competences, and the experiences in order to create synergies and to develop a long term, sustainable, comprehensive, and holistic approach. That is how it started."*

### **Angelika Krüger**

Director of the Institute for Community Education (ICE) of the International Academy Berlin (INA) gGmbH; Initiator and Director of the Youth Empowerment Partnership Programme (YEPP) (2001-2011); Co-founder of the YEPP International Resource Centre in 2012 (now YEPP EUROPE)  
Engaged in YEPP since 2000

*"My first involvement with YEPP was when the foundation I worked for, Compagnia di San Paolo, started showing interest in actively cooperating with other major European foundations in implementing joint initiatives. Later on, I became the representative of Compagnia di San Paolo in the YEPP Steering Committee. Although I did not have many opportunities to work with young people directly, I observed that they initially participated in YEPP activities out of curiosity, but then became more personally involved in later stages. As they took greater ownership of the projects they developed, they also worked harder to implement them. This was inspiring to observe, since it reflected a change in the mindsets of young people. They found their own ways to get involved with their communities, whether it be a music festival or a workshop. They were really active, enthusiastic, and proud of what they could do for their communities. This is the reason why YEPP can be considered as a big school of active citizenship, as young people continue to be active citizens in their own ways after being involved in YEPP.*

*Currently, there are several projects to support young people in Italy, but most of them are created without the input and active involvement of young people. The YEPP approach sees young people not only according to what they lack or need, but in a more holistic manner, considering them as a resource for themselves, for their communities, and for the whole society. This is what YEPP fights for."*



### **Antonella Ricci**

Former Head of Social Policies and Welfare, Compagnia di San Paolo, Italy  
Engaged in YEPP in 2002 - 2018



## Community empowerment

Young people were also able to work alongside each other and other community stakeholders in a spirit of cooperation and collaboration. This then fostered a greater sense and understanding of inclusion in the community. Personal and social growth naturally tied to the economic dimension, particularly in terms of their choice of career. Most of the young people who participated in YEPP activities eventually chose to work in the social sector, such as in local NGO's or municipalities. For some, entrepreneurship endeavours that utilized local resources and involved local community members were undertaken.

Another essential element in the empowerment process is the ability of young people to work with local stakeholders, particularly those who have political power. This was seen in narratives of young people conducting dialogues with local politicians to advocate for their projects and ultimately gaining their support. According to the survey and the interviews, this proved to be one of the most challenging aspects of community development for two main reasons. First, young people acknowledged the challenge of establishing initial contact with political stakeholders. Second, some young people also reported the difficulties of convincing stakeholders about their projects or that they simply prioritized other agendas. On the contrary, local sites and partner organizations that received strong support from the municipality gained the most traction and had the most visible impact on young people and communities. In addition, opportunities for decision-making were present in almost all the interviews conducted, which can be considered as the first step in the process of individual and community empowerment. Through local support groups, young people are able to form associations, which also ultimately contributes to civil society development.

Another finding was that the YEPP approach followed the nine operational domains as proposed by Laverack (2001)<sup>8</sup>. Domains that were most observable were participation, leadership, problem assessment, resource mobilization, asking why or evaluation, and links with other people and organizations or partnerships. Hence, it can be concluded that community empowerment as a result of YEPP activities is consistent with other studies' measures of community empowerment.

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<sup>8</sup> Laverack, G. (2001). *An identification and interpretation of the organizational aspects of community empowerment*. *Community Development Journal*, 36(2), 134 - 145.

## Contributions to policy change

Results of the interviews and the surveys support the idea that leadership competence, or the ability to form associations or groups in the community, does not necessarily lead to policy control, or have an influential effect on policy decisions. This is due to the legal frameworks that young people operate in, which are unable to quickly adapt to specific community concerns. However, there were situations wherein YEPP initiatives were able to influence policy, to a certain extent. In Italy, one of the major funding organizations of YEPP Italia modified their grant provision policies in order to create more space for the participation of young people. In this new phase, young people are asked not only to submit proposals, but also take part in the creation of the guiding framework for the selection of proposals. Although this process has not yet been fully implemented, the reason behind this development was the recognition of the capabilities of young people by other stakeholders, which was developed during the years of working with the YEPP approach. Another instance wherein policy change was achieved was in Kristinestad, Finland. The local coordination office supports a youth parliament, which is composed of young people aged 13 – 25 years old who meet several times a year with political leaders to discuss matters that concern them. What is interesting in this initiative is that young people receive the same opportunities as their adult counterparts, as they also receive financial compensation for this work. Hence, it is not just a tokenistic form of participation, but one that effects real policy change and acknowledges them to be on equal footing as adults.

As mentioned earlier, policy change or any change in the pre-established structural framework is a multi-layered challenge that will most likely take a considerable amount of time to achieve. However, instances like these are great examples of how young people, when given the opportunity to participate in an authentic way, can effect real change in their communities.

## 3.2. Empowerment and institutions

Community empowerment does not occur apart from the individual empowerment of its members. This is a theme that ran throughout the interviews and the surveys. Individual agency, as supported by a positive development of personal traits and evidenced by the growing number of opportunities for young people to contribute to shared decisions, inevitably resulted in a grassroots approach to community change. A decentralization of power was not apparent in most narratives because this is arguably beyond the control of young people and stakeholders in the local support groups. It is interesting to note that empowerment is truly embedded in power structures, as community empowerment with a bottom-up approach is only possible in states that do not have a highly centralized structure of government. In other words, the more equal the distribution of power is in a certain state, the more effective such community empowerment processes are, and the larger the space for young people's participation.



However, despite this, it is still evident that young people were empowered, mainly through authentic participatory practices. This shows that despite institutionalized structures, and perhaps even because of them, young people are able to exercise their agency, engage in their communities, and foster a sense of empowerment. This further strengthens the idea that conventional forms of empowerment and participation are also complemented by new and dynamic ones.

### 3.3. Empowerment in the context of space

An interesting aspect of empowerment that was not covered neither by literature, nor by the empowerment matrix was the concept of spatial empowerment. This was particularly seen in the YEPP local site in Slovakia, wherein the main actors of local change were individuals from the Roma community.

*“Through this process, they are building now I think, forty or fifty houses. Legal houses. They have property now; they have a registration officially. A street name, and not living in barracks. And they have water supply, others have no water supply. But this is at the end of seven years, six or seven years.”*

- Community Stakeholder

Compared to the narratives of the majority of young people, the first and defining aspect of empowerment was not a development of personal traits, but an establishment of a legal, safe, and exclusive space. This also entailed the legal assurance that these houses were not built on illegal land, and that their presence in the community is not just acknowledged and safeguarded by the members of the community, but also by the law. This proves that empowerment is not a singular process for every individual, but also largely depends on one’s societal and economic context. As undesirable as it is, this process is longer for some than it is for most. Before being able to achieve a visible impact on the community, such as youth centres, some individuals have to first secure a space for themselves and their families. Hence, it can be argued that empowerment is definitely a complex process, and one that first requires personal, familial, and legal security as a stepping stone towards any other form of empowerment.



"I work with YEPP through the Fake OFF project, which is aimed to inform young people about fake news and develop their media literacy, particular in the context of the internet. Through this project, I observed that young people do not necessarily change their online habits or preferences, but are simply more aware of the results of their online choices and behavior, which for me is already a big achievement. I would say that the greatest impact of Fake OFF is found in the materials that we produced for youth workers, such as teachers and social workers. For example, we wrote a General Didactic Concept with information about how and why fake news is produced and how to foster media literacy. We also created an app for young people wherein they learn how to be more critical of information they see on the internet. Third, we produced a training material for youth workers with more than eighty exercises to develop the media literacy of young people. I think an important element of these materials is that it can be distributed and used by anybody, which contributes to our goal of fostering media literacy worldwide."



**Thomas Doppelreiter**

Project partner in the project Fake OFF! Fostering Adolescents' Knowledge and Empowerment in Outsmarting Fake Facts, Austria



**Walter Veirs**

Senior Program Officer,  
Strengthening Civic Space  
Program Area, Charles  
Stewart Mott Foundation,  
USA  
Engaged in YEPP since  
2007

"The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation was one of the first funders of the YEPP program when it was established. It was the shared belief in the value of engaged communities and the importance of the participation of young people that brought the Mott Foundation and YEPP together. Essentially, I have been representing the foundation by taking part in the Advisory Board, previously the Steering Committee, and giving input on strategy and development. Since then, I have seen how the YEPP program has become more sophisticated and impactful due to a deep understanding of how young people are motivated in the context of their communities. Moreover, the impact of YEPP primarily stems from the ability of taking its core methodology of empowerment and applying it to particular needs or issues, such as migration, fake news, and inclusion. Throughout the years, YEPP has been able to connect and engage with an increasingly wider range of networks and actors. This has resulted in a strong transnational community that is not only able to build up on each other's strengths, but also bring impact back into their local communities."

*"I was already volunteering in Tuzla Community Foundation before becoming the coordinator of their youth programs in 2017. During this time, I was able to participate in YEPP activities in the local sites of Simin Han and Gornja Tuzla. These activities, along with the individual activities of Tuzla Community Foundation, helped my personal growth and be the person I am today. Capacity building activities developed my self-confidence, honed my public speaking skills, and enabled me to organize and lead actions in my community. People often ask why I am so involved in the community when it is not very profitable, but I believe that this type of work gives another kind of satisfaction. Now, I am still working with young people with the aim to give them the energy that I have collected from the people who have also worked with me throughout all these years. It is my hope that in the future, somebody can also have a story like mine. I think it is important for young people to have the positive energy to become a better person and to contribute to their community. We get so much from our community, and so we are also responsible to give something back. Together, we can make a better future for our youngsters, children, and the other young people who will come. It shouldn't matter how you help, if it is with time or money, what is important is that we think about how we can help our community in all ways. When people start to think like that, our communities will be better. "*



**Azra Isanovic**

**Youth activist Tuzla Community Foundation, Bosnia & Herzegovina**

*"I first got involved with YEPP when I worked with the local coordinator in Kristinestad in 2002. In the past years, I can say that YEPP has contributed to the empowerment of children and young people. In 2004, we were able to establish the Children's Parliament through YEPP. This parliament enables children to explore the concerns in their communities and propose solutions for it. They then receive financial support to implement their project, so it does not just remain as an idea. In 2019 we received an award from the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child for our work with the Children's Parliament, which I think is a great achievement. Since the participation of young people is integrated into the municipal level, young people have an official platform on which to speak up on matters that affect them. This is true participation."*



**Jessica Bardsnes**

**Evaluation facilitator YEPP Kristinestad, local coordinator of the project Welcomeship, Finland**



## 3.4. Adherence to YEPP guiding principles

The ten guiding principles of YEPP were also prominent themes in the study. In order to attain empowerment and reinforce its process, local sites and project partners observed these guiding principles in most, if not all, their initiatives. It was evident that young people were provided with many opportunities to exercise their agencies and take decision-making roles. This was done in projects that were based in the community itself and therefore utilized local resources, such as the establishment of youth centres, cultural hubs, and sports areas. For example, members of the YEPP Local Site in Görlitz/Zgorzelec built a co-working space centred on young entrepreneurs. In Turin, a young lady established a café promoting the theme of inclusion based on an entrepreneurship idea she developed under the “Build Your Future” project. The provision of equal opportunities was also witnessed in these projects, as individuals were able to participate in activities regardless of their background. These were seen in activities that particularly promoted inclusion. However, it is interesting to note that although this was possible in YEPP activities, the survey scored rather low in this area in the context of the broader community. This shows that there is still much work to be done in terms of promoting equal opportunities to individuals regardless of their racial, ethnic, education, age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, or religious backgrounds in the community and society in general. Cross-sectional partnerships were also established at various levels. Local stakeholders, such as schools, NGOs, municipal or regional representatives collaborated together in the creation and implementation of certain projects. Examples are the Little Parliament in Kristinestad, the establishment of the Youth Council in Tuzla, and the allocation of a participatory budget by the municipality of Albenga. Involvement of local politicians has also grown, which has led to a change at the policy level. In general, the voices and opinions of young people on the issues that affect them are heard and considered by policy makers. As a result, their concerns are addressed through the establishment of new policies. Although this is a long and challenging process, it is one that ensures sustainable change.

The strengths of the YEPP approach are also reflected in the guiding principles. Throughout the interviews, it was clear that the empowerment of young people and the belief in their capacities, the committed involvement of the community, cross-sectoral partnerships, and continuous evaluation of all initiatives serve as the foundation of any positive and sustainable social change.



## 3.5. Potential challenges

Two main challenges are identified. First, the success of such initiatives is also dependent on the dispositions of young people and stakeholders towards empowerment and positive social change. The results of these interviews and surveys paint a generally positive picture of community change. However, it is also important to note that these individuals certainly already had an inclination or predisposition to make a positive impact on their community. In fact, several respondents reported that despite the extensive work done in the field of youth empowerment, the majority of people still do not believe in the capabilities of young people and their potential to effect social change. This creates barriers to advocacy and policy, as discussed earlier.

Reaching the most marginalized communities in Europe remains a challenge to the YEPP approach. Hence, YEPP's reach can be enhanced by establishing more partnerships with stakeholders who share the same aim. Moreover, promoting advocacy efforts for the most marginalized groups can also be a challenge.

Sustainability of such initiatives is also complex. The most evident aspect is the importance of a stable financial and logistical support system from stakeholders. Without this, it is very unlikely to implement such projects. Second, sustainability should also be considered in light of the natural life course of young people. At this stage of life, they will most likely relocate for work or study, and perhaps be unable to maintain their commitment to projects. Projects and activities therefore have a higher risk of either discontinuation or simply being less effective due to the continuous change of local site members. This is especially important in empowerment work, as this process rarely takes only a few years and continuous modifications in the organizational aspect may obstruct any positive and significant social change.

The financial sustainability of YEPP EUROPE's activities has already been one of the main aims since 2012, when social entrepreneurship was introduced as a primary theme of several projects. However, sustainability also entails the committed dedication of individuals. It is therefore necessary to structure projects and activities in such a manner that they can be taken over and continued by the next generation of young people. This way, initiatives are not short-term, and have lasting and impactful effects on the community.



# 4. Future outlook

The future outlook of YEPP EUROPE is defined as the following by the YEPP EUROPE Team:



## Unique positioning

A fundamental element of the YEPP approach is the combination of youth empowerment and community empowerment. Hence, it is one of YEPP EUROPE's aims to be the leading expert in this unique approach. An important aspect is also the transfer of knowledge to young people and youth workers with fewer opportunities through non-formal learning methods.



## Increasing outreach and impact

Expansion is viewed both horizontally and vertically. Horizontal expansion entails the increasing involvement of more young people, communities, and other stakeholders in and beyond Europe. Vertical expansion involves close collaboration with young people in order to determine specific concerns and identify issues that may not have been dealt with in previous activities. Furthermore, increasing the impact means a continuous review of the quality and sustainability of the YEPP approach based on the results and lessons learnt from evaluation activities, consultations with stakeholder groups and impact research.



## Innovating for a better world

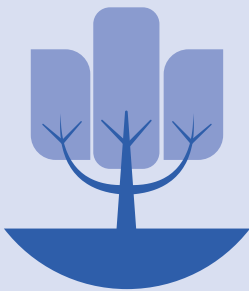
In parallel with the changing needs and experiences of young people and communities, creative and dynamic methods and approaches appear to be necessary. Through the utilization of technology and newer learning methods, fuelled by close collaboration with young people, methods are aimed to be both effective and grounded on the needs of individuals.





### Vision, commitment, partnerships

The establishment and development of partnerships is already a strong suit of the YEPP approach. However, in order to continually address the evolving needs of young people and communities, YEPP EUROPE aims to create more partnerships between local and transnational organizations in order to not only address specific issues in their local community, but also share this knowledge with the transnational network.



### Sustainability

YEPP EUROPE, as it is now, is made possible due to the support of foundations, particularly the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the Compagnia di San Paolo. However, YEPP EUROPE also seeks to diversify and strengthen its endeavours towards the sustainability of short and long term efforts. This is a unique challenge, as it is important to continue collaboration with young people while fulfilling clients' and funders' needs. However, this is definitely feasible through support of current and future partners who share the same vision of youth and community empowerment.

"What you can observe is that young people are taken more seriously. It is not just because of the self-confidence and skills they gain, but also because the YEPP approach and methodology are based on very concrete procedures. Young people do not only come up with random ideas, but identify issues and resources based on a situational analysis of their community. They then have a stronger role in their community, and are also trusted even more."



*Jochen Schell*

YEPP EUROPE Director,  
Germany  
Engaged in YEPP since 2012

# 5. Conclusions



This study sought to determine the impact of the YEPP approach on youth and community empowerment in the span of twenty years. It was made clear that according to the seven dimensions of empowerment, impact was present, albeit in varying degrees. The dimension of social and personal empowerment was the strongest and most evident amongst the narratives, while legal and health dimensions appeared to be lacking. However, young people stated that their involvement with YEPP contributed to their overall empowerment. They also acknowledged that their

individual empowerment and personal development resulted in growth of their capacities and an increase in opportunities to initiate change in their communities in various ways. Young people took initiatives to establish partnerships with key stakeholders, form associations within their community and, when possible, collaborate with local politicians. Not only were such actions the most definite and observable manifestations of empowerment and participation, but they can also be considered to be the most effective and sustainable in the current legal, social, and political framework. However, this was not true for all young people, as some of them engaged in activities that may not be considered to be typical forms of participation. This supports the idea of the dynamic nature of empowerment, and how its meaning is constructed differently by various community members. Empowerment is not just a process, but a cycle that simultaneously involves both the personal and community level. This is reflected in the numerous projects of the YEPP network, which aim to address the different and evolving needs of young people and their communities. Participation appears to vary across individuals, as young people described their participatory activities in different ways. Hence, it can be concluded that the YEPP approach and methodology is indeed impactful on youth and community empowerment.

It was also established that the individual empowerment of young people is strongly related to community empowerment, and one cannot be authentically present without the other. Hence, other parameters such as advocacy, partnerships, and learning contribute to the achievement of both individual and community empowerment. This shows that when young people are provided with opportunities to voice their opinions, make decisions, and effect authentic change in their communities, they do so by utilizing their resources in creative and innovative ways. Hence, a continuous process of re-examining the rigid notions of young people, their capacities, empowerment, participation, and how these are able to contribute to community empowerment is both necessary and prudent.

This study clearly showed the participation of young people in decision making processes and to a certain extent their influence on policies. However, another key element that seems to be lacking is the integration of youth policy into the overall legal framework. Youth policies should not be singular, that is, one activity aimed to address one issue. Instead, they must be reflective of the multi-dimensionality and complexity of youth issues, and should therefore ensure that aims are holistic and comprehensive.

For the potential future studies, it may be interesting to determine other innovative ways, which are supplementary to traditional ways, for young people to practice their participation in their community. The less traditional examples given in this study are the establishment of cafes or co-working spaces. Moreover, it is also helpful to dive deeper into the specific factors that influence the participation and empowerment of young people, such as the environment, causes, attitudes, limits, challenges, and opportunities that are associated with these processes.



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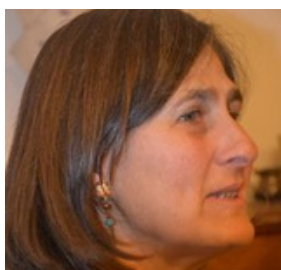
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