



Erasmus+

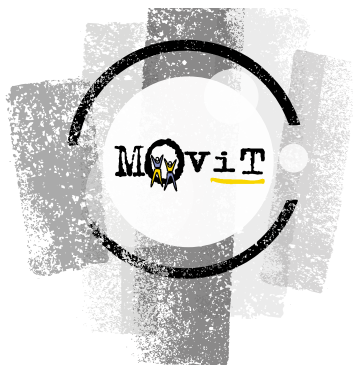
SALTO

SOUTH-EAST
EUROPE



cherry

ON THE CAKE



QUALITY PLANNING
OF YOUTH EXCHANGES

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“Cherry on the cake” – Quality Planning of Youth Exchanges

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QUALITY PLANNING
OF YOUTH EXCHANGES

- 6 Erasmus+ Programme and Youth Exchanges
- 7 MOVIT and SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre

8 FOREWORD

- 10 What is the publication about and how should it be used?
- 10 Youth Exchanges as a part of (international) youth work
- 11 Target group
- 11 What is “Cherry on the cake”?

12 “CRASH COURSE” ON YOUTH EXCHANGES

16 1. EXPLORATION

- 17 1.1 What exactly is a Youth Exchange?
- 18 1.2 Learning by doing: an adventure of a lifetime
- 20 1.3 Not school, not leisure time: How does learning happen in a Youth Exchange?
- 21 1.4 Meaningful youth participation: for young people, with young people, by young people
- 22 1.5 How to get started?
- 23 1.6 From dreams to doable ideas
- 25 1.7 Who does what and who takes the lead?
- 26 1.8 The number of young people and group leaders?
- 26 1.9 Nobody should be left behind: some thoughts on inclusion
- 28 1.10 Overcoming fears – and not just young people have fears
- 29 1.11 Different views and decision-making

30 2. PLANNING

- 31 2.1 What does Europe have to do with this?

- 32 2.2 Creating a consortium with partners
 - 34 2.2.1 Examples of how to find partners for a Youth Exchange

36 2.3 The art of choosing the right partners

38 2.4 Communication with the partners

39 2.5 Aligning the ideas

39 2.6 Is the final idea (still) good?

39 2.7 Aim and objectives

41 2.8 Setting indicators

41 2.9 Reflection on learning

42 2.10 Youthpass: more than just a certificate

42 2.10.1 Eight key competences for life-long learning

43 2.12 Programme of activities

46 2.14 External partners and possible co-funding: How can you involve the local community?

51 2.15 How should you communicate with external partners?

51 2.16 Formalising the partnerships

51 2.17 What is a Preparatory visit?

52 2.18 Finances and budget

52 2.19 Application form

55 2.21 The Application Has Been Submitted!

56 2.22 And what if the application is not successful?

58 3. PREPARATION

59 3.1 When is the right time to start?

59 3.2 Partners’ preparation process

60 3.3 Getting the host group ready

61 3.4 The possibilities of digital tools: networking and learning can start early

62 3.5 Venue(s) and logistics

62 3.6 Programme re-check

63 3.7 Incorporating sustainability

64 3.8 External stakeholders, co-financing and the media

65 3.9 Welcoming (more) diversity

CONTENT

66 3.10 Practicalities related to the needs of the young people

66 3.11 Protection, health, and safety of participants

67 3.11.1 *Safeguarding and child protection of underage young people*

68 3.11.2 *Documentation*

68 3.11.3 *Data protection*

69 3.11.4 *Unexpected things will happen, something will go wrong*

69 3.12 The activity is really happening!

70 4. IMPLEMENTATION

71 4.1 Managing the travels and arrivals

71 4.2 Oh no! What happens in case of a no-show?

71 4.3 Group dynamics

72 4.4 Phases of group development

73 4.5 What are the concrete measures to support group dynamics at this stage?

73 4.5.1 *Group-building activities*

74 4.5.2 *Get to know the young people personally and respond to the needs that occur*

75 4.6 Gamification: How to make the activities and team work more interesting?

75 4.7 Document, communicate and be visible

76 4.8 Your Youth Exchange leaves a mark in the local community

76 4.9 Collect a lot of feedback and do something about it

77 4.10 Reflection of learning and issuing the Youthpass

77 4.11 How much is enough and how much is too much? – “Life begins at the end of your comfort zone”

79 4.12 Intercultural learning

81 4.13 What rules need to be discussed?

82 4.14 Conflict and conflict transformation

82 4.14.1 *Zero tolerance*

83 4.14.2 *Dealing with disclosures*

84 4.15 Closing the group and the process

84 4.16 Evaluation

85 4.16.1 *Participant evaluation*

86 4.16.2 *Team evaluation*

86 4.16.3 *Using the evaluation results*

88 5. FOLLOW-UP

89 5.1 Celebrate the success

89 5.2 Return and reintegration of the young people

89 5.3 What was the impact, if it all?

90 5.4 Project results

91 5.5 Creating project outputs

91 5.6 Visibility

91 5.7 Plan to communicate the results

93 5.8 Event focussing on communicating the results and other follow-up activities

93 5.9 Lobbying for policy change

93 5.10 Contributing to quality in youth work

93 5.11 Projects Results Platform

94 5.12 Another Youth Exchange?

94 5.13 Closure of the project

95 5.14 Your own evaluation and experience



ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME AND YOUTH EXCHANGES

Erasmus+ is the European Union's programme in the field of education, training, youth and sport in 2021 - 2027. The general objective of the Programme is to support, through lifelong learning, the educational, professional and personal development of people in education, training, youth and sport in Europe and beyond, thereby contributing to sustainable growth, quality jobs and social cohesion, to driving innovation, and to strengthening European identity and active citizenship. In the field of youth, the Programme aims to promote non-formal and informal learning mobility and active participation among young people, as well as cooperation, quality, inclusion, creativity and innovation at the level of organisations and policies in the field of youth.

Mobility projects for young people, such as Youth Exchanges, are a part of the Programme's Key Action 1: Learning Mobility of Individuals. The objective of Youth Exchanges is to engage and empower young people to become active citizens, connect them to the European project as well as to help them acquire and develop competences for life and their professional future. Youth Exchanges also ought to contribute to the transversal priorities of the Erasmus+ Programme, namely:

- Inclusion and diversity;
- Digital transformation;
- Environment and fight against the climate change;
- Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement.

MOVIT AND SALTO SOUTH EAST EUROPE RESOURCE CENTRE

MOVIT has been the Slovenian National Agency for EU programmes in the field of youth, currently Erasmus+ (youth field) and the European Solidarity Corps, since May 1999. In this role, MOVIT manages decentralised EU budget funds and supports different forms of learning mobility activities in youth work. It also runs activities to promote the development of youth work and non-formal education, in particular activities contributing to strengthening European cooperation in the field of youth. Since 2018, the European Solidarity Corps has extended these fields also to other spheres and actors organising solidarity activities as a means to contribute to strengthening cohesion, solidarity, democracy and citizenship in Europe.

Along with its role as a National Agency, MOVIT also serves as an office of Eurodesk, the European Commission's info service offering EU-related information to young people.

In 2002, MOVIT took over as the SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre (SALTO SEE) Resource Centre, which promotes cooperation with the Programmes' Western Balkan partner countries within the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme and the European Solidarity Corps, through training and partner-finding activities and various other support measures, tools and resources. SALTO SEE Resource Centre aims to contribute to youth work and youth policy development in the Western Balkan region, in collaboration with other stakeholders and the help of pools of trainers, Quality Label experts and Contact Points located in the Programmes' partner countries in the region.

SALTO SEE Resource Centre is part of the network of SALTO Resource Centres. SALTOs provide resources, such as tools and support materials and activities, for youth workers, trainers and other practitioners in the field of youth work to support organisations and National Agencies in the frame of the Erasmus+ programme and the European Solidarity Corps and beyond.



FOREWORD

The objective of Youth Exchanges is to engage and empower young people to “become active citizens, connect them to the European project and to help them acquire and develop competences for life and their professional future”. Therefore, Youth Exchanges are characterised by a genuine give-and-take: young people’s active participation in their communities and in the wider society is a service for the common good, while their acquisition of important competences is an investment in their own future. A quality Youth Exchange combines both of these elements in a balanced way.

In contemporary Europe, young people’s possibilities to realise themselves as citizens and learners have been steadily expanding. The Erasmus+ Programme and its predecessors, having reached an increasing number of young people throughout the years, are a good example of this development. At the same time, however, young people’s lives are increasingly influenced by uncertainty and change.

The ways in which young people participate in democratic life, and the preconditions framing their participation, are undergoing change. In addition to having a chance to participate through conventional decision-making processes based on hierarchical structures of representation, young people in today's Europe are engaging in a variety of alternative forms of participation, such as cause-based civic activism, social movements or political consumerism campaigns, of which many take place, in whole or in part, in transnational and digital spaces.

At a time when possibilities to participate are becoming more versatile, the quality of democracy in Europe is still a growing concern. Young people, who are better equipped than any generation before to make their voice heard, are also hindered by turbulent political climates, difficulties faced by institutions in adapting to changing societal needs and realities, crumbling social cohesion, as well as growing disinformation and ambiguity in the public discourse. It is increasingly important for young people to have a constructively critical outlook on what is going on around them, and to acquire civic, political and social competences that correspond to the complexity of contemporary society.

Supporting young people's effective engagement in public life and their motivation to remain active in society is essential for sustaining democracy in Europe. Consequently, fostering youth participation is one of the cornerstones of the EU Youth Strategy (2019 – 2027) and the eleven Youth Goals annexed to it. The Erasmus+ Programme in the field of youth serves as a central mechanism that puts the Youth Strategy into practice. The programme provides young people a variety of opportunities, such as Youth Exchanges, to demonstrate – and learn – meaningful youth participation.

The EU Youth Strategy and the Erasmus+ Programme also emphasise the role of youth work in supporting

young people's growth and development. Connected to the EU Youth Strategy, the European Youth Work Agenda also aims to strengthen and further develop youth work practice and policies in Europe. Youth Exchanges often take place as a part of regular youth work, which has an important role in integrating the principles and approaches of non-formal learning in transnational mobility, and thereby seizing its educational and pedagogical potential.

Youth Exchanges are a unique form of transnational learning mobility, since during a significant part of the project, young people are actually not on the move. Therefore, opportunities for learning extend from the period spent abroad, or with other young people from foreign countries, to the very early stages of project conception and the last steps of follow-up, which happen predominantly at the local level. Yet, as Youth Exchanges connect two or several localities across Europe with a common goal, the entire project has a strong European dimension from start to finish.

When young people are involved in a Youth Exchange in all phases of the project, it can become a truly transformative learning journey for them. The local group leader, who is the main support person in a Youth Exchange and whom this publication also targets, has a key role in shaping the exchange and guiding the young people involved. A group leader is often a youth worker or an experienced youth leader, a person representing youth work in one of the many different shapes and forms it manifests itself in Europe.

Overall, this publication places great emphasis on local youth work and the crucial role of work practitioners at the local level, as well as their sustainable presence in young people's lives and continuous efforts to support them that go beyond single-issue projects or other short-term interventions, as the prerequisite of quality transnational learning mobility.

WHAT IS THE PUBLICATION ABOUT AND HOW SHOULD IT BE USED?

This publication is designed as a manual to support group leaders to plan and deliver quality Youth Exchanges within the Erasmus+ Programme 2021–2027. It aims to offer insight on various quality aspects and practical application of Youth Exchanges, and to promote Youth Exchanges as a vital tool for developing young people's competences through meaningful youth participation at the local and European levels.

The publication has been structured according to five chapters, which correspond to the five chronological phases of a Youth Exchange project: exploration (of ideas), planning, preparation, implementation and finally, follow-up. In order to understand Youth Exchanges better and navigate through the application and the project, it is advisable for the reader to go through all of the chapters before starting, even if questions, such as how to communicate the project results, might seem distant in the beginning. The application form for a Youth Exchange requires that all aspects of the project are reflected on and planned in advance, although, for the sake of clarity, the application process is addressed in this publication early on in Chapter 2. After the initial reading, the publication can accompany the reader through the journey of a Youth Exchange as it happens in real-time.

Important: All information about Youth Exchanges and the Erasmus+ Programme presented in this publication should be checked in the valid Programme Guide for the relevant year!

YOUTH EXCHANGES AS A PART OF (INTERNATIONAL) YOUTH WORK

The premise in this publication is that Youth Exchanges are part of international youth work. What is understood as youth work and how it is organised differs from one country and context to another. In this publication, youth work is understood as a long-term process, which offers activities with and for young people of a social, cultural, educational or political nature. Youth work can take many forms and approaches, however, the main objective of youth work is to provide opportunities for young people to shape their own futures.

The essential features of youth work are:

- **Young people actively choose to participate – it is optional;**
- **The work takes place where the young people are;**
- **The young person and the youth worker or youth leader are partners in a goal-oriented and planned learning process for the benefit of the young person's development;**
- **Young people co-shape the activities in youth work, which helps them learn how social processes work and how they themselves can contribute to life in society;**
- **It is inclusive and non-discriminatory;**
- **Young people's protection, health and safety are ensured.**

TARGET GROUP

The target group for this publication is any person or group that is thinking of organising a Youth Exchange within the Erasmus+ Programme. This can be a youth worker, activist or volunteer in a youth centre, youth organisation or any non-profit entity working with young people¹, or a team consisted of them, or an active member of an informal but organised group of young people interested in Youth Exchanges.

Whatever the capacity of the reader, the publication assumes that, ideally, he or she is already involved in youth work either professionally or voluntarily and therefore directly works with young people on a regular, long-term basis. The term group leader, which the reader will be addressed as, refers to an adult (18 or older) who joins the young people participating in a Youth Exchange in order to ensure their effective learning as well as protection and safety. The group leader also represents the organisation (or an informal group) which is one of the formal partners in the Youth Exchange project.

The publication is addressing the reader as a newcomer or a beginner in Youth Exchanges, but this does not mean that more experienced group leaders will not benefit from it. Since the focus is on how to increase quality in Youth Exchanges, it does not matter if the reader has already led a Youth Exchange previously. There are always things to learn and to improve!

The publication is written with a premise that the Youth Exchange activity is hosted by the reader and his or her youth centre, organisation or group. However, since all partners and groups should participate in all phases of the project and involve their respective local communities, the publication can equally benefit

those readers, who represent the partners, who plan to send young people and group leader(s) to an activity in another country.

The reader is provided with many tips and reminders of how to approach a certain issue or a task. However, in actual projects, the tasks are meant to be shared between the leaders, and certain tasks could and should be taken up by the young people alone or in cooperation with the leaders. The task division in each project is to be decided according to what is appropriate for that specific project.

WHAT IS “CHERRY ON THE CAKE”?

“Cherry on the cake” is a support measure within the Erasmus+ Programme and its predecessor Programmes developed by MOVIT, the Slovenian National Agency for the Erasmus+ Programme (youth field), and the SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre. It consists of this publication (and its previous edition published in 2015) and a concept for a residential training course on increasing the quality of Youth Exchanges, which is delivered annually. The name “Cherry on the cake” refers to how international Youth Exchanges are the cherry on the top of existing youth work processes with young people at the local level.

Feedback on this edition is welcomed and any feedback should be sent using the contact details outlined at the end of the publication.

¹ A profit-making entity can be a partner if it is dedicated to corporate social responsibility.

»» CRASH COURSE ««

ON YOUTH EXCHANGES





Specific objectives:

- to foster intercultural dialogue and learning and feeling of being European;
- to develop skills and attitudes of young people;
- to strengthen European values and breaking down prejudices and stereotypes;
- to raise awareness about socially relevant topics and thus stimulate engagement in society and active participation.



Stages of a project:

- planning (define the needs, objectives, learning outcomes, activity formats, development of work programme, schedule of activities etc.);
- preparation (practical arrangements, set up of agreements with partners, linguistic/intercultural/learning- and task-related preparation of participants before departure etc.);
- implementation of activities;
- follow-up (evaluation of the activities, identification and documentation of the learning outcomes of participants, as well as dissemination and use of the project's outcomes).



Quality elements:

- relies on the active involvement of young people and participating organisations, who should take an active role in all the stages of the project, enhancing in this way their learning and development experience;
- involves diverse groups of participants and builds on this diversity;
- is based on clearly identified needs of the young participants;
- ensures that the non-formal and informal learning outcomes of the participants are properly identified and documented;
- encourages the participants to reflect on European topics and values.



Eligible participating organisations

- a non-profit organisation, association, NGO; European Youth NGO; a public body at local, regional, national level; a social enterprise; a profit-making body active in Corporate Social Responsibility;
- an informal group of young people.

established in an EU Member State or third country associated to the Programme or a third country not associated to the Programme neighbouring the EU.



Who can apply?

Any eligible participating organisation or group established in an EU Member State or third country associated to the Programme can be the applicant. This organisation applies on behalf of all participating organisations involved in the project.



Number of participating organisations

Minimum two participating organisations (at least one sending and at least one receiving organisation) from different countries must be involved.



Eligible participants

- Young people aged between 13 and 30 residents in the countries of their sending and receiving organisations;
- Group leaders and facilitators involved must be at least 18 years old.



Duration of project

From 3 to 24 months.



Where to apply?

To the National Agency of the country in which the applicant organisation is established.



When to apply?

Applicants have to submit their grant applications by the following dates:

- 11 May at 12:00:00 (midday Brussels time) for projects starting between 1 August and 31 December of the same year;
- 5 October at 12:00:00 (midday Brussels time) for projects starting between 1 January and 31 May of the following year.

National Agencies may decide to open an additional round. The National Agencies will inform the applicants about the opening of the additional round through their website.

If an additional round is organised, applicants have to submit their applications by 4 May at 12:00:00 (midday Brussels time), for projects starting between 1 August and 31 December of the same year.



Duration of activity

From 5 to 21 days, excluding travel days.



Venue(s) of the activity

The activity must take place in the country of one (or several, in case of itinerant activities) of the organisations participating in the activity.



Number of participating organisations

Minimum two participating organisations (at least one sending and at least one receiving organisation) from different countries must be involved.

Activities within EU Member States and third countries associated to the Programme: all participating organisations must be from an EU Member State or third country associated to the Programme.

Activities with third countries not associated to the Programme neighbouring the EU: the activity must involve at least one participating organisation from an EU Member State or third country associated to the Programme and one participating organisation from a third country not associated to the Programme neighbouring the EU.



Number of participants and composition of national groups

- Minimum 16 and maximum 60 participants per activity (group leaders, facilitators and accompanying persons not included). In the cases of Youth Exchanges involving only young people with fewer opportunities, the minimum number of participants is 10;
- Minimum 4 participants per group (group leaders, facilitators and accompanying persons not included);
- Minimum two groups of young people from two different countries;
- Each group must have at least one group leader;
- Maximum two facilitators per activity.

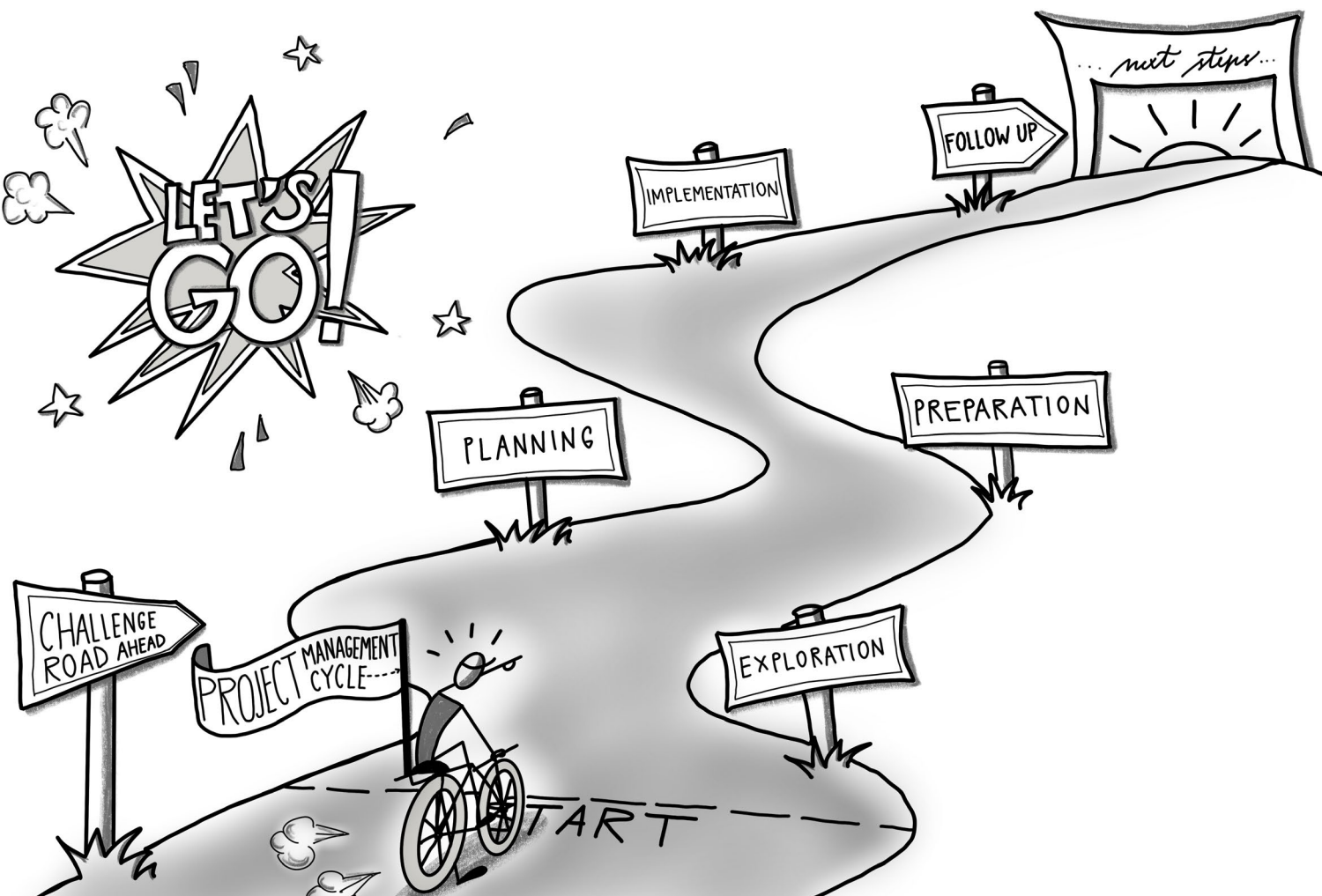


Other criteria

At least one of the sending organisations or the receiving organisations in the activity must be from the country of the National Agency to which the application is submitted.

01 EXPLORATION

So, future group leader, you want to organise a Youth Exchange! That is fantastic! Wait a second though...



1.1 WHAT EXACTLY IS A YOUTH EXCHANGE?

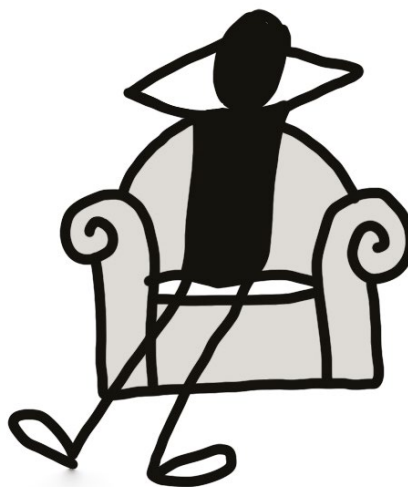
A Youth Exchange is a form of non-formal learning mobility of young people that happens on the international level. At the core of a Youth Exchange project is an activity where two or more groups of young people from different countries meet and spend quality time together while participating in activities of their common interest. The Youth Exchange activity can contain workshops, exercises, debates, role-plays, simulations, outdoor activities and much more. Sounds exciting, right?

In a broader sense, a Youth Exchange is a part of international youth work. This means that it should provide young people a space for experiencing, learning and sharing in an inclusive, safe and encouraging environment. The process should be goal-oriented and ensure both the active participation of young people and adequate leadership from the beginning until the end. Therefore, the first encounter for young people with youth work should not be to give them a plane ticket and send them abroad for an international Youth Exchange activity that they know nothing about. Although definitely not recommended, this too sometimes happens. Instead, Youth Exchanges should accompany an existing youth work process and form a logical step forwards. Think of it as the dessert – something to look forward to after the starters and main course.

Every Youth Exchange should reflect the objectives set by the Erasmus+ Programme (check the section titled “Crash Course on Youth Exchanges” at the beginning of the publication). However, at the same time, the framework is rather open. Essentially, a Youth Exchange is about the participation of young people, their needs, interests and aspirations to learn, to be civically active and to make changes in their own lives

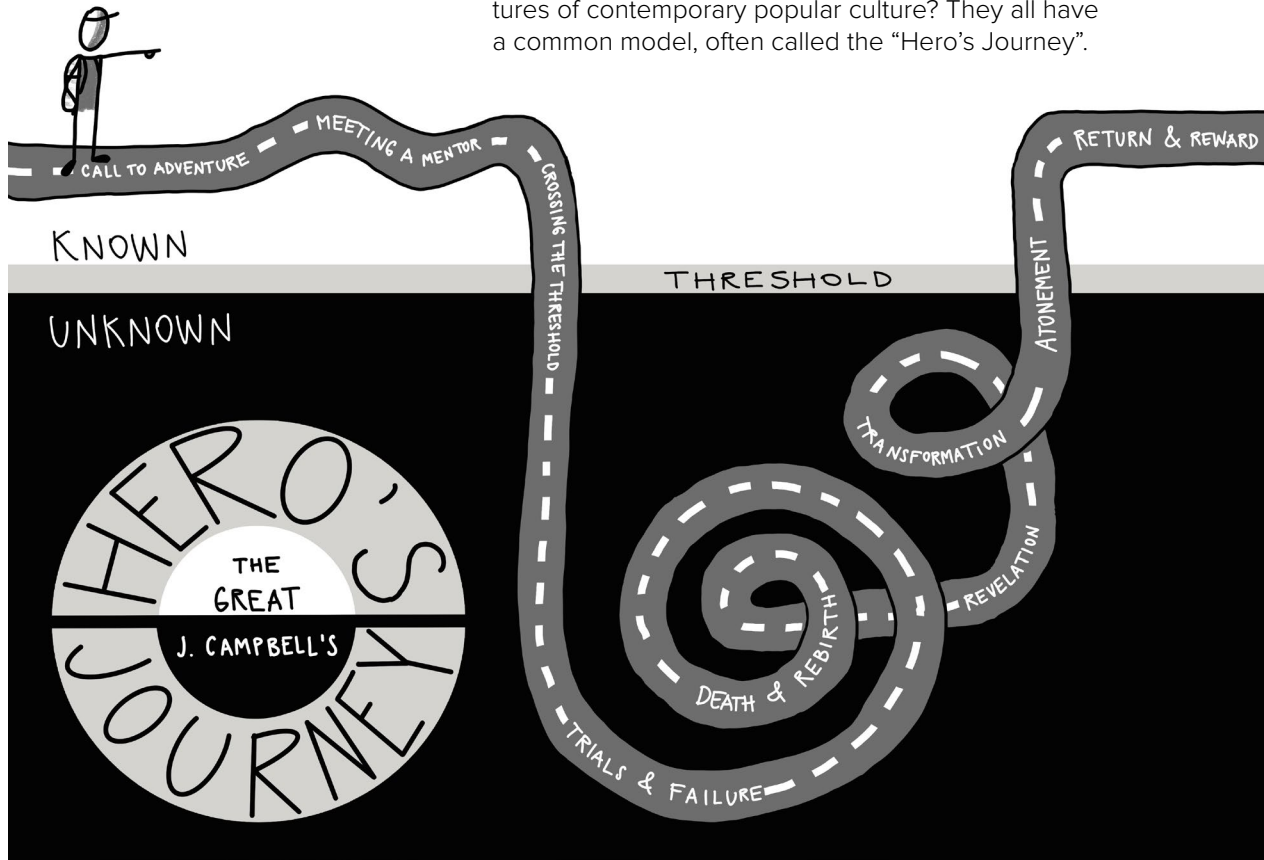
in society as a whole. Therefore, the process should be designed and implemented by the young people themselves, with help and guidance of the group leaders. As many young people and group leaders from different backgrounds cooperate in a Youth Exchange, it also provides a unique opportunity for intercultural learning and discovering what it means to be European. Importantly, a Youth Exchange specifically targets young people with fewer opportunities and therefore aspires to advance social inclusion.

The peak of a Youth Exchange is the time when all groups meet for some time, but that is not the whole of it. Youth Exchange refers to the entire process that starts from the drafting the first ideas, continues with concrete planning, preparation, and implementation of the project, and it finishes with the follow-up. Many phases and activities within a Youth Exchange actually happen locally.



1.2 LEARNING BY DOING: AN ADVENTURE OF A LIFETIME

To capture its essence, a Youth Exchange is like a journey. Are you familiar with the “coming-of-age” stories that characterise many ancient myths and adventures of contemporary popular culture? They all have a common model, often called the “Hero’s Journey”.

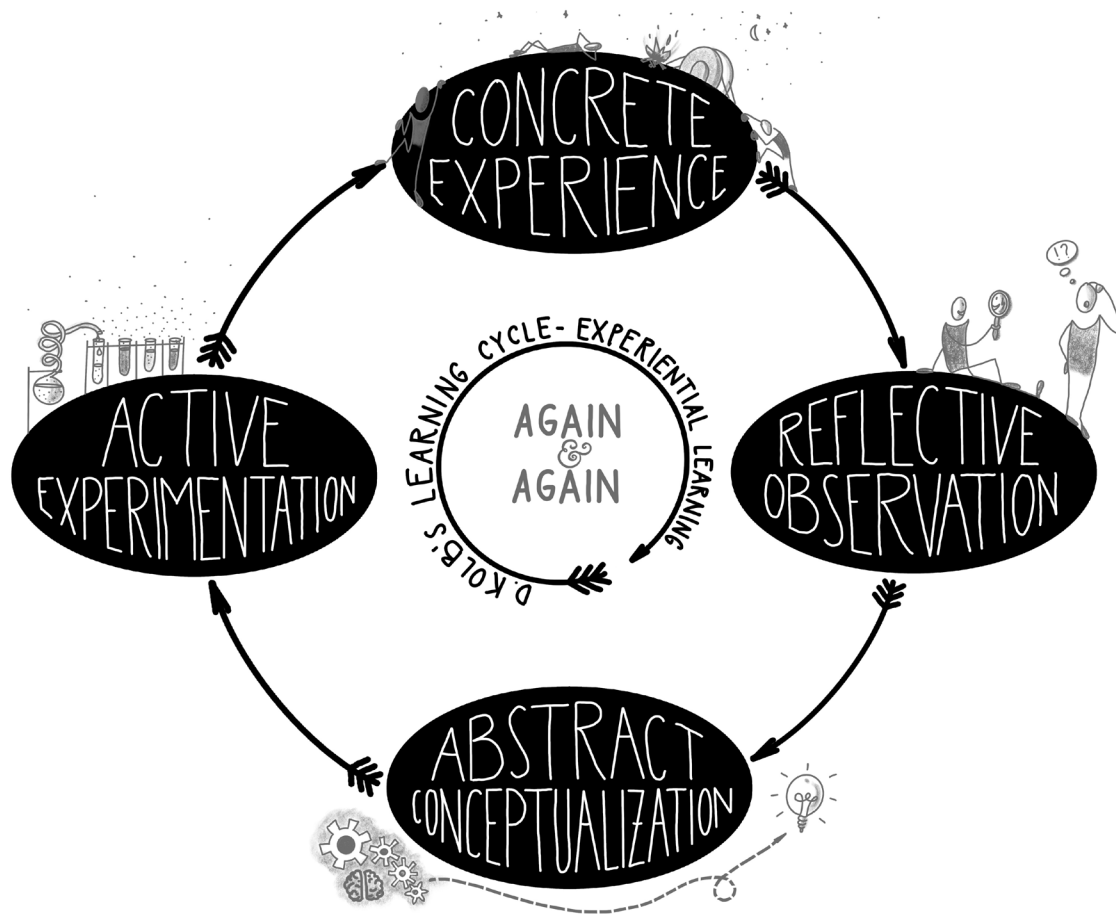


Every journey has the same stages. The hero(ine):

- leaves his or her familiar, ordinary environment to enter an unknown world;
- meets new travel companions, who influence his or her journey;
- encounters challenges and learns from them;
- realises the real value of the experience;
- returns home transformed.

The hero's journey is so popular because it well describes experiential learning. In a Youth Exchange, young people go on a journey, not only because they travel to another country at one point of it, but because they experience things that likely change them and prompt them to grow. Young people, if allowed to take an active role, should be the main heroes and heroines of the Youth Exchange journey.

Experiential learning is namely learning through doing, where individuals construct knowledge, acquire skills, and develop attitudes and values from direct experience. It involves critical reflection on the experience, drawing on relevant and useful insights, generalising knowledge and then putting the learning into practice. This can be illustrated in Kolb's Experiential Cycle:



Experiential learning is the core of a pedagogical process supporting personal growth, but also developing empathy for understanding other individuals and cultures. When returning from the hero's journey, young people have likely grown, but so has their world. What used to be boundaries of the great unknown for them are a bit further from home now.

1.3 NOT SCHOOL, NOT LEISURE TIME: HOW DOES LEARNING HAPPEN IN A YOUTH EXCHANGE?

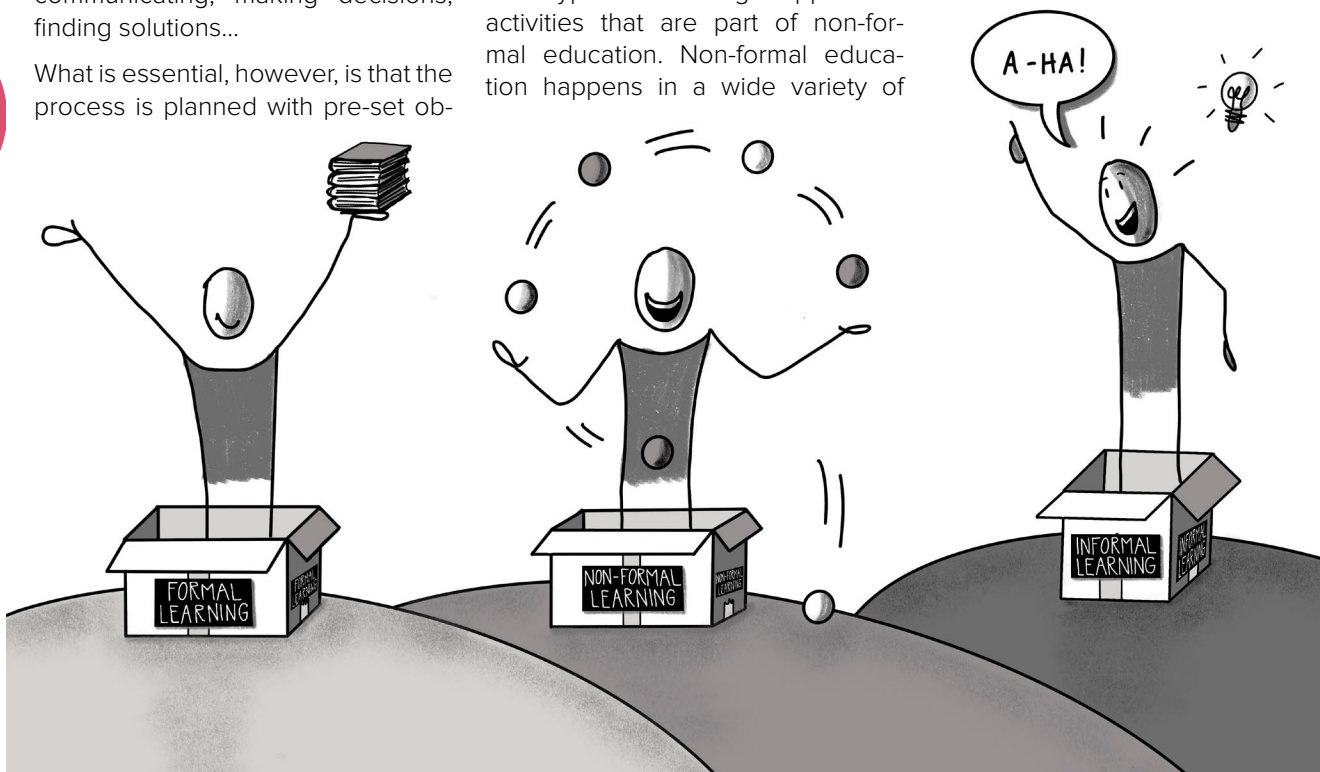
So, learning in a Youth Exchange does not happen quite like the learning process is conventionally understood. There are no theories, memorising, classrooms, exclusive criteria or testing, and it is not compulsory. Instead, learning happens while getting to know new people and cultures, creating something new, communicating, making decisions, finding solutions...

What is essential, however, is that the process is planned with pre-set ob-

jectives and a programme of activities, which provides opportunities for building competences. It also monitored reflected on and evaluated, no matter that the final learning outcomes vary from one young person to another and no standard learning outcomes can be predefined. When things go wrong or not as planned in a Youth Exchange, this can be where the most impactful learning takes place, assuming that a proper reflection process on what did not go well and why is carried out.

This type of learning happens in activities that are part of non-formal education. Non-formal education happens in a wide variety of

contexts and environments (a Youth Exchange being just one example) and it emerges in the interaction between the learner, learning group and facilitator. In comparison to formal education (schools universities...), it is voluntary, focussed on the learners' needs and does not offer a formal certification. However, it is also not the same as informal learning, which can happen through different life experiences, but which is not planned or structured.



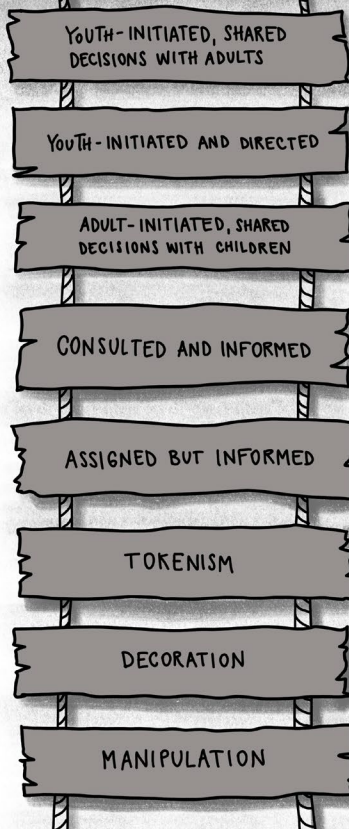
1.4 MEANINGFUL YOUTH PARTICIPATION: FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, WITH YOUNG PEOPLE, BY YOUNG PEOPLE

Since you are reading this, you are probably already motivated to organise a Youth Exchange. There could be many different reasons for that. Maybe nothing very exciting has happened in your local youth centre, organisation or group, and you are looking for something new to boost your activities. Perhaps you just took part in an inspiring workshop or training course on the topic and you feel ready to take up the challenge. Or maybe it is the aspect of professional development that motivates you and your organisation.

These are all valid reasons, but remember, Youth Exchange was supposed to be based on the needs of its target group, the young people. And not only that, the young people should take the driver's seat in it, at least from time to time. Ideally, you actually got the idea to organise a Youth Exchange directly from the young

people and now you are looking into how you can do it together.

Meaningful youth participation requires that any activity is not only delivered for young people, but also with and by them. A model called the Ladder of Participation by Roger Hart helps to illustrate different participation approaches.



The first three levels are false participation, which means that young people are either manipulated or their participation is only tokenistic or decorative. From the fourth step on, there are different forms of meaningful participation and being higher on the ladder is not always necessarily better. One always has to take into consideration the situation, context and capacity of the young people, and make sure that there is a balance between the evolving capacities and increasing responsibilities.

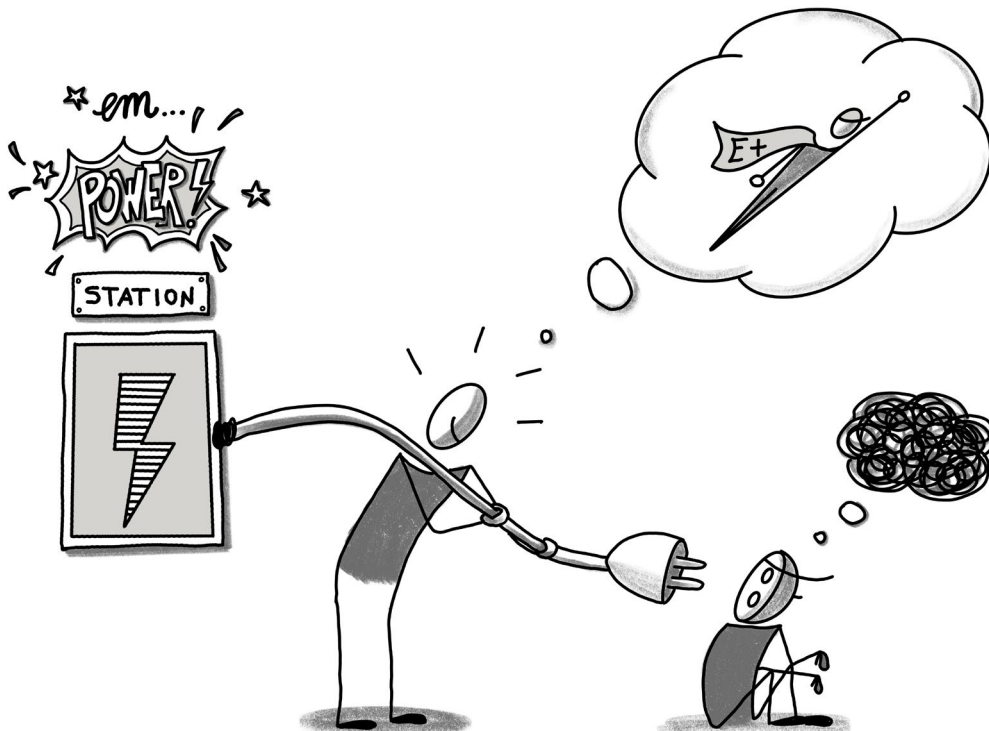
Therefore, in order to reach a level of meaningful youth participation in a Youth Exchange, young people need to be empowered to take responsibility and assume leadership positions. If they have already worked with a group of young people in a youth work setting, the chances are higher that they are more than ready for the challenge that a Youth Exchange poses. But if you involve young people who are less experienced, a Youth Exchange provides many opportunities to practice active participation with a group leader who can back up the decisions taken. Your role as the leader is crucial here in providing enough learning opportunities and challenges without overwhelming them.

1.5 HOW TO GET STARTED?

Even if the first idea to organise a Youth Exchange did not come from young people, it is of course also a good start if your youth centre, organisation or group takes the initiative towards them and suggests organising one. You might have some ideas already about what issues in the lives of young people the Youth Exchange could tackle, but at the same time wonder what it is that the young people actually need. The first task then is to go and ask them!

The needs-based approach means that, for a Youth Exchange, its organisation should be based on a real issue identified by a group of young people, preferably an issue to which they want to contribute + or make changes. This could take the form of addressing a pressing issue, in the local context, that young people would like to raise awareness of, or do something about, such as a lack of opportunities faced by young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to pro-

per in life, civic and political apathy in the local community, littering the environment, and so on. Very likely, similar issues are of concern for young people elsewhere in Europe as well. There are countless global concerns and transnational civic and social causes today's young people take to heart, and many concretely manifest themselves at the local level. At the same time, the issues do not always have to be based on large-scale societal problems. Young people might, for instance, simply identify the issue that



there is not much experience in meeting people from different countries in their peer group and in their local community, and they would like to change that. You, as a group leader, can guide them to see how an issue like this can be connected to more general topics such as fostering tolerance, combatting discrimination and gaining competences in intercultural dialogue.

It is important, however, that the needs take precedent, otherwise it could be that a Youth Exchange happens for the sake of a Youth Exchange. This is where there is a heightened risk of it becoming simply an opportunity for travel and tourism, rather than having a meaningful educational process and developing core competences of the young people involved.

If you already have an active group of young people who you work with closely and regularly at your youth centre, organisation or group, you probably enquire about their needs on a regular basis. However, if your potential target group for the Youth Exchange is larger, there are other solutions to doing a needs analysis. A kind of a “focus group” could be implemented, consisting of a selection of young people from a wider group you are trying to reach. Having got some clues from these young people on what their needs and interests might be, it is easier for you to approach the wider target group. If you cannot have a face-to-face meeting with them in person or online, you could introduce a questionnaire.

Whatever your approach is, try to resist the temptation to consolidate the idea that the Youth Exchange could address, and especially even to choose the topic and make a plan before you have involved the young people who will actually take part. By involving them from the earliest phases of brainstorming and drafting the ideas, you not only ensure it really corresponds to their needs and interests, but you also have the best chance to keep them engaged through the whole process by giving them a feeling of ownership over it.

This does not mean that you have to remain passive at this stage. You can inspire and challenge the young people to express their needs and get involved.

Be mindful to try to build a group which has variety in areas such as gender, ethnicity, and/or socio-economic background, to name a few. Remember also that there are many young people who are not necessarily so easy to reach, since they are in an excluded, marginalised or vulnerable position. You might want to make extra efforts in finding and involving these young people, as they might be the ones who benefit from the Youth Exchange the most, and the Erasmus+ Programme also encourages including young people with fewer opportunities in projects. The topic of inclusion is looked at in more detail later in this chapter.

1.6 FROM DREAMS TO DOABLE IDEAS

Once you have gathered the group, a good idea is to organise a session, where you try to develop the first ideas on the basis of the identified needs. Young people come with their own expectations about the Youth Exchange and shape them according to what you present to them. At this stage, it would be good to give them the basic idea what a Youth Exchange is, but there is no need to present all of the details at once. Make sure the expectations of everyone are heard by all – so that you can work to meet them or establish why they cannot be met. This way, you support the motivation of the group and establish whether a participant is really appropriate for the Youth Exchange.

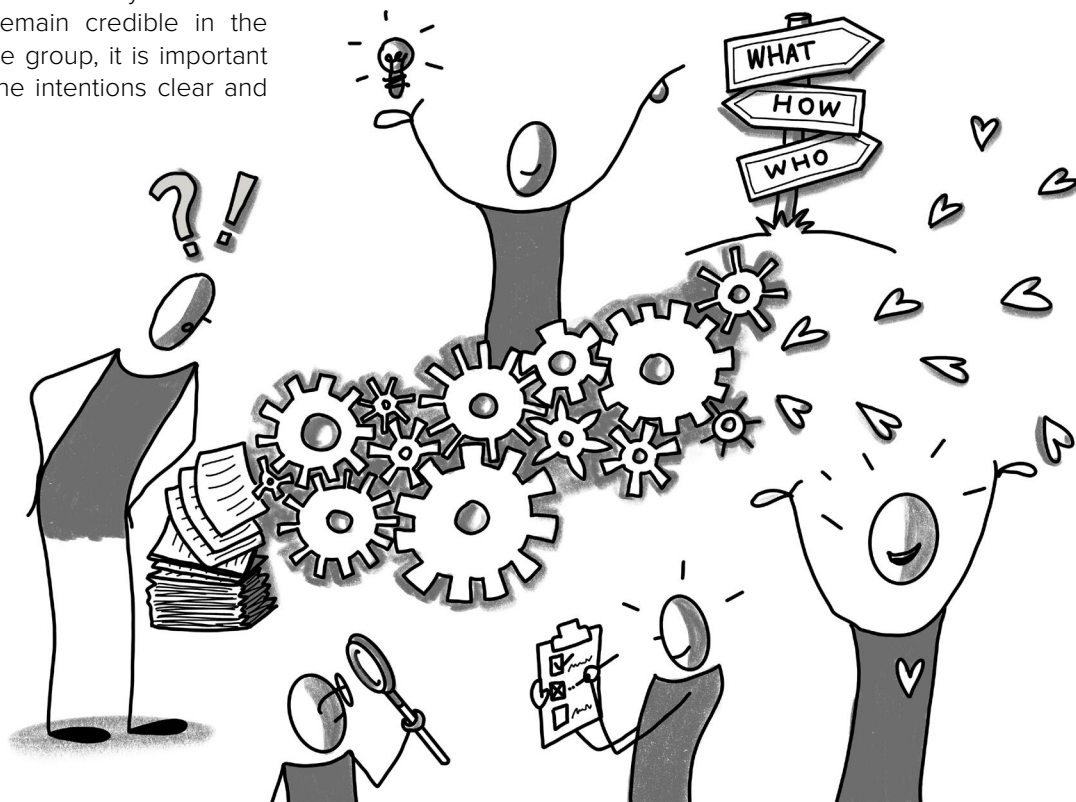
A theme – how to address the identified needs, for example, through artistic expression, civic or community activism, sport activities, can have many starting points. It might come from the activities young people take part in their daily lives. Also, young people are usually very curious about new things; maybe a Youth

Exchange could be the doorway to discover them! Or maybe some of them have already taken part in another Youth Exchange, which inspired them to work further on a specific theme?

You can help the young people develop the idea with creative methods and should not limit them too much at the initial stage. This way, you will probably get more ideas from which the group can choose the ones they like. However, to remain credible in the eyes of the group, it is important to make the intentions clear and

transparent from the beginning. While introducing the session, it could be good to state that every idea will be welcome, but at the end of the meeting only some will be chosen. It is also possible that you may not always agree with the young people on how good or realistic some of the ideas are, but it is important to remain open and supportive towards them. Some ideas might seem weak or unrealistic until you start working on them.

In some cases, it might be a good idea to limit the thematic area a little bit. If your youth centre, organisation or group has a particular core field or activity, it may be safer to state this from the beginning, and keep the brainstorming around that topic.



Especially if you have gathered a group of young people who do not already know each other, they might not feel secure enough to fully enter into the process. They might hesitate to express their opinions or expect a bigger input from you regarding the idea. It is important that you withhold the pressure from taking too much responsibility in such a case, but rather try different ways to get them engaged. It may seem confusing at first, but a little bit of creative chaos in the first meeting is not a necessarily a bad thing.

If you know other young people or former group leaders, who have taken part in a Youth Exchange before, maybe they would like to come and present their experience to inspire your group? If there is nobody in your local community who has participated, it could still be a good idea to find and show some videos or other materials to make the concept more concrete for the young people. You can consult your National Agency or the SALTO Resource Centres for such materials.

Once the young people have come to the first ideas and chosen the one that appeals to them the most, you can help them to take the idea to a higher level and assist them in aligning it with the principles and criteria within the Erasmus+ Programme. Needless to say that by now, you should have familiarised yourself with what the Erasmus+ Programme says about Youth Exchanges.

It is also worth reminding the young people that eventually a Youth Exchange will also involve other youth groups and so should also be meaningful for them. Therefore, they should keep in mind that the idea should also potentially resonate with others who are not present in the session, and that there will be another process to align the chosen idea with the needs and ideas of the future partners.

1.7 WHO DOES WHAT AND WHO TAKES THE LEAD?

It is good to start dividing roles and responsibilities in the group right from the beginning. Knowing who does what increases the young people's motivation and confidence, promotes the group cohesion and helps different competences to emerge. Also when dividing tasks, young people should be involved in the decisions, and the decisions should reflect their preferences and skills. If a person is passionate about photos and editing for example, why not let them be in charge of the graphics and communication? Maybe one day, this person will become a professional and will always remember his or her first learning experience that was so gratifying. At the same time, be mindful of giving young people space to develop new skills and get involved in tasks that they might not have a background for, but have the motivation to learn from the start. Also, if the young people ask for more responsibilities and want to take a more leading role, trust them. It might not be easy, but after all, this will be their journey.

However, just because young people are at the forefront of running the project, this does not mean that there is no role for a group leader. You should take on a supportive mentorship role and recognise that all young people have different strengths, abilities and difficulties, and support them to learn and do as much as they can while taking into consideration their different starting points. This could be in directly supporting areas on which the young people need more help or by identifying training or development opportunities for young people to develop new skills and increase their knowledge in a certain area, so that they better manage their responsibilities in the Youth Exchange. It could also be that certain tasks in the Youth Exchange are delegated to the group leader – such as booking travel – at the request of the young people.

There are many different factors that need to be considered when assessing how much support a group or a specific young person needs. This could be down to factors such as age, educational background, prior experience in youth work activities or special needs. Note also that especially the underage, more inexperienced or otherwise vulnerable young people will need their work to be monitored and supported throughout the project, but you should still recognise their abilities and support them to learn and do as much as they can themselves, similarly as with any other young people.

In the end, you and your youth centre, organisation or group are still responsible for the bigger group and the Youth Exchange together with your partners and other leaders, so do not lose track of what is happening, even though you have let the young people carry out the tasks!

1.8 THE NUMBER OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND GROUP LEADERS?

Each organisation should send at least four young people, accompanied by at least one leader. If your Youth Exchange will only involve two organisations, each group will need to send eight participants to reach the minimum threshold of sixteen participants, with the exception of Youth Exchanges involving only young people with fewer opportunities, the minimum number of participants is ten). It is recommended that Youth Exchanges involve at least one more person than the required minimum. This is to factor in cases where there are cancellations before the activity and replacements cannot be sought due to a range of factors such as a last minute illness or family emergency.

Even though only one leader per group is required, different countries and youth work cultures may have different approaches, for example, it might be expected

that there are both a male and a female leader per group. It is advisable not to take anything for granted or to impose any particular approach. It might be good to leave this question for later when the other partners get involved.

1.9 NOBODY SHOULD BE LEFT BEHIND: SOME THOUGHTS ON INCLUSION

Consider the young people's backgrounds. In the end, is there anyone in the group who comes from a disadvantaged background? Inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities is one of the priorities of the Erasmus+ Programme, however, such inclusion needs to be handled with care. All necessary measures should be adopted in order to lower the barriers to participation and therefore encourage inclusion.

In order to understand social inclusion, one needs to understand social exclusion first. Social exclusion is the process of pushing individuals and groups to the margins of society and preventing them from participating fully – as a result of discrimination – over a long period of time. Social exclusion distances individuals from employment, education, social and community networks, and activities, and prevents them from taking part in decision-making processes. Put simply, social exclusion is the combination of policies, systems, structures, attitudes and behaviours which result in some individuals being side-lined, left out or left behind.

Talking about social exclusion, it is important to understand who the members of our society are that might need additional support and empowerment in order to fully participate. From the perspective of Youth Exchanges, there is a focus on young people with fewer opportunities. This means young people who are at a disadvantage compared to their peers because they face one or more of the exclusion factors and ob-



stacles, which can be, for example, related to health and disability, belonging to a socially marginalised or discriminated group, poor school performance or early school leaving, precarious socioeconomic backgrounds, social and interpersonal challenges, residing in peripheral, less serviced or problematic areas, and so on.

Social inclusion is the process of preventing or reversing the process of social exclusion by empowering individuals and groups by the providing opportunities and resources needed to fully participate in society. This implies participation in decision-making processes and access to fundamental rights, which should lead to a sense of belonging. While it is believed that the process of inclusion should be focussed on those who have been socially excluded, sometimes there are young people who do not fall into any of the categories of young people with fewer opportunities but still need additional support in order to be included in the process of a Youth Exchange. Whatever the reason, a Youth Exchange should be the place where everyone should feel welcome and a place to celebrate difference and diversity.



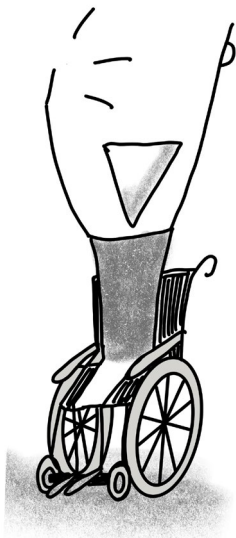
1.10 OVERCOMING FEARS – AND NOT JUST YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE FEARS

In addition to expectations, young people can have hesitations or even fears about taking part in a Youth Exchange. Many fears derive from facing the unknown. One young person might never have used a foreign language before; another might not have spent a night away from home before. Even if the young people are more experienced, a Youth Exchange poses a challenge for them. It is normal to have mixed feelings. It is important that the hesitations and fears are addressed with the young people, so that the chances are higher that they overcome them and transform them into personal victories. Many fears can be eliminated just by creating a supporting and encouraging environment.

A good moment to address fears and look for solutions is when the group has already formed and the young people feel safe in it. Your task as the group leader is to make sure that any necessary precautions are taken to ensure everybody's physical and emotional wellbeing. A Youth Exchange should challenge the young people, but you should have their backs! The topic of the protection, health and safety of the young people is addressed in detail in Chapter 3.

Depending on the age of the young people, you might also need to face the fears of their parents. For the younger ones, namely the underage, you will need the approval of their parents so that the young people can take part. Sometimes, parents have more fears than the young people, and some of these fears might seem irrational to you. Remember, however, that the parents are responsible of their children and might have concerns for a good reason. You should be open and transparent about the project and its progress right from the beginning and maintain a dialogue with them. You should also encourage the young people to talk to their parents about the Youth Exchange.

Finally, you might have some concerns yourself, especially if this is the first time you are about to take on the responsibility of being a group leader in a Youth Exchange. That is completely normal. Remind yourself that you are not doing the project by yourself, even if at this stage you might be the only leader of your group and do not have any partners yet. A Youth Exchange is a collaborative project of many groups of young people, who all have their group leaders who share the responsibility of the overall project and support each other. Further on, you can seek support from your peers or colleagues at your youth centre, organisation or other leaders, even if an active role is not foreseen for them in the Youth Exchange itself. At the later stage, if your project is approved, your National Agency is available to provide support for any questions or dilemmas related to the project that might emerge. Finally, if any serious situation should come your way, where you feel like you cannot find a solution alone, keep in mind to seek for professional help and guidance early enough.



1.11 DIFFERENT VIEWS AND DECISION-MAKING

Although joint goals and efforts can be really rewarding, they also bring out different and possibly opposing views on how to do things. Finding a way that is acceptable for all requires negotiating between the views and sometimes making compromises. Learning how to put forwards views and to justify them, but also how to take into account others' views, is an important part of the young people's learning process in a Youth Exchange. You can support them by ensuring an open, fair and transparent decision-making process during which everybody is heard. Sometimes, as a group leader, you must insist on some solution, as the young people might not at this stage know or understand, for example, some of the non-negotiable criteria of Youth Exchanges. (This is a good time for you to tell them and justify your view.) Also, later on, as the project progresses, situations might arise which require fast and effective decision-making, and often the group leader is the right person to make those decisions. Explain this to the young people and highlight that such rights come with responsibilities. However, when facing a disagreement about an issue, where there is no single "right" answer, give the young people some room to come to an agreement without hurrying the decision too much or taking the lead too much. Support them in the process and suggest different methods of decision-making: One person may be given the power to make the decision, the group can vote, or a consensus can be negotiated. A disagreement might be uncomfortable at times and you might feel like you just want to get it over with as soon as possible, but it is worth taking the time. In the process, young people can learn valuable competences in the area of cooperation, decision-making and democratic processes.



02 PLANNING

So, group leader, did you gather the young people together, draft a wonderful idea, and overcome all of the fears and disagreements, and everybody is ready and excited? Remember, the Erasmus+ Programme is about Europe.

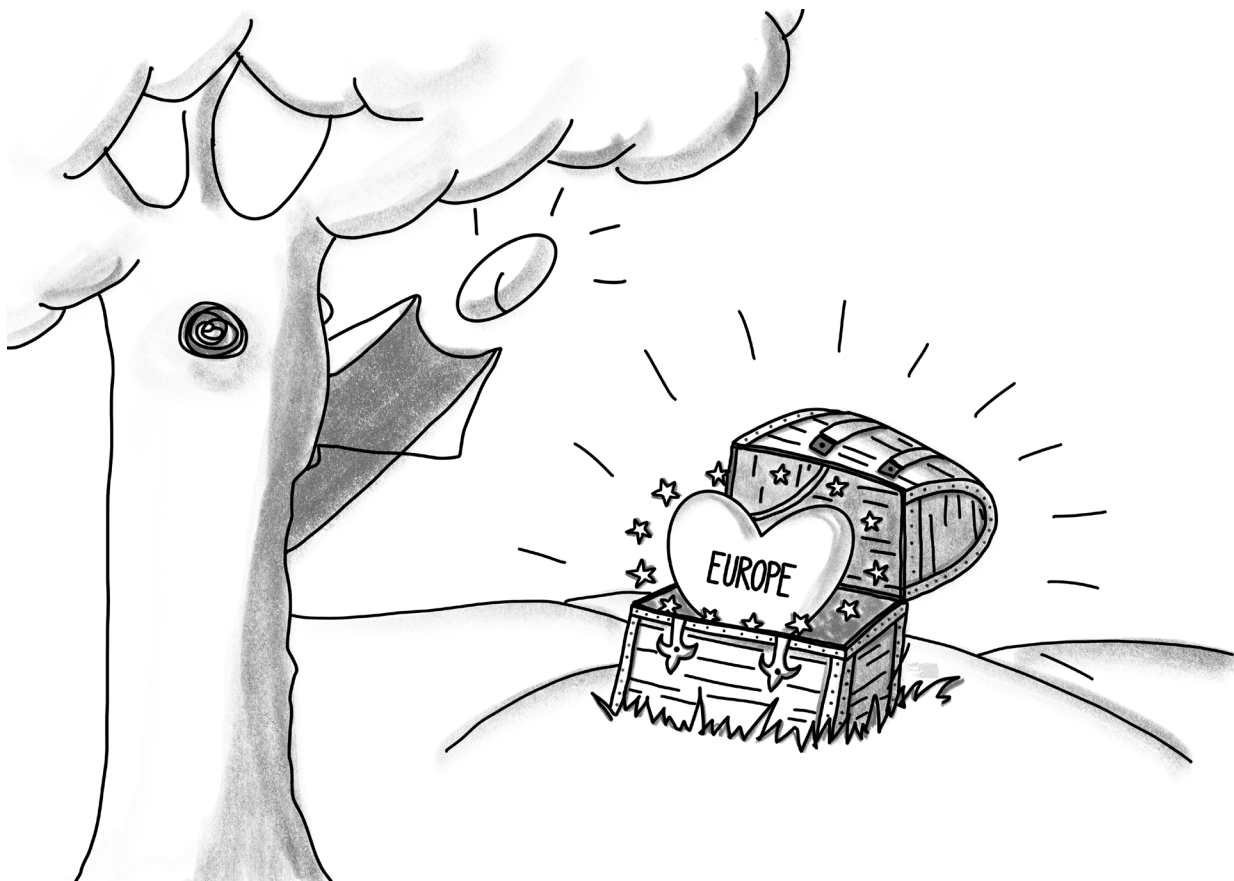
If you want to continue, it is time to reach out...

2.1 WHAT DOES EUROPE HAVE TO DO WITH THIS?

A good question to ask before reaching out to potential partners is why you need European cooperation and funds to deliver the project. If you could reach your goal equally well at the local or national level, it is worth asking if you are on the right track.

What makes Youth Exchanges unique in the world of international youth work is that they have a specific focus on Europe. This goes beyond the fact that Youth Exchanges consist of partners from (primarily) European countries. In the Erasmus+ Programme, Europe is not just a geographical entity but also a value-based political idea, which should be reflected in all projects.

Youth Exchange aims at fostering young people's engagement in society and active participation, with a specific European dimension to it. This sounds big, often too big to grasp even, but in the end, it is really about getting interested and becoming aware of how people, communities and



societies in Europe are interdependent, how this interdependency impacts the lives of all Europeans and what can be done with the common matters.

In a Youth Exchange, young people get also a unique opportunity to start discovering their European identity – what it means to be European. You can stimulate this by including the core European values (in the context of the European Union, they are: human dignity, freedom, equality, democracy, rule of law, and human rights) and the principles of unity and diversity in your activities from the beginning. Again, these are big concepts, but they come to life in small encounters between people. For example, a Youth Exchange, in which people from different backgrounds cooperate, can provoke young people's prejudices and stereotypes. But with guidance and proper reflection, the Youth Exchange can also work wonders in breaking them, and creating a new feeling of togetherness, new friendships, new common goals, and new collaboration. This already taps into many of the European values listed above and is exactly what the Erasmus+ Programme envisions.

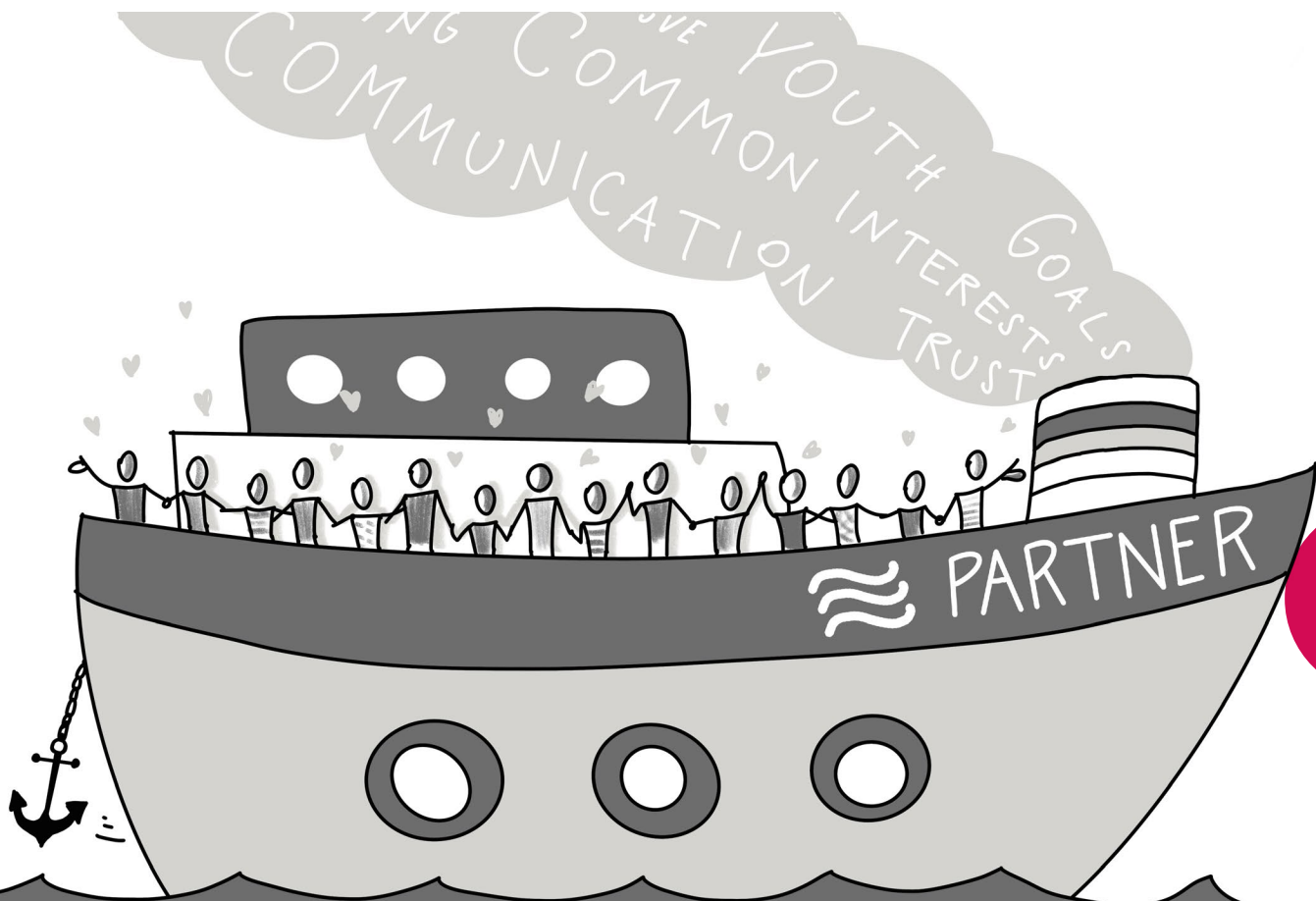
A more straightforward way to address the European dimension in a Youth Exchange is to raise young people's awareness of the political, social, cultural and historical heritage of Europe, and how it manifests in their daily lives or through their interests and aspirations. A very concrete example: citizenship of the European Union grants young people the freedom of movement with the possibility to choose to live, study, and work in another EU country. Travelling and experiencing new places, whether for tourism or something more long-term, is usually very appealing to young people, and in the European Union and particularly in the Schengen area this, has become relatively easy.

It is worth mentioning here that many common European matters such as the freedom of movement, concerns European Union citizens particularly, and if the

young people in your Youth Exchange come from a country outside of the European Union, talking about them might be confusing or even frustrating for them, since they might feel excluded. There is, however, another way of looking at the issue. Certainly, the Erasmus+ Programme promotes the European idea, as it is articulated in the European Union – there is no way around it. This does not, however, mean that everything that the Programme promotes or stands for, such as the European identity, sense of belonging, commitment to European values or the value of the vast historical legacy and heritage the values derive from, are limited only to the context of the European Union.

2.2 CREATING A CONSORTIUM WITH PARTNERS

The search for potential partners is the point when your local group starts to open up to the outside. Partnership has a very important place in a Youth Exchange. The group leaders of your partner organisation(s) and the young people they involve in the Youth Exchange are the people with whom you will give wings to your initial idea. All together, you form something called a consortium. In brief, partnership is the base, the process and the outcome of a Youth Exchange. The group's own interests and needs are to be coupled with the interests and needs of others. It is very important to invest time and energy in finding suitable partners, and to develop good cooperation with them.



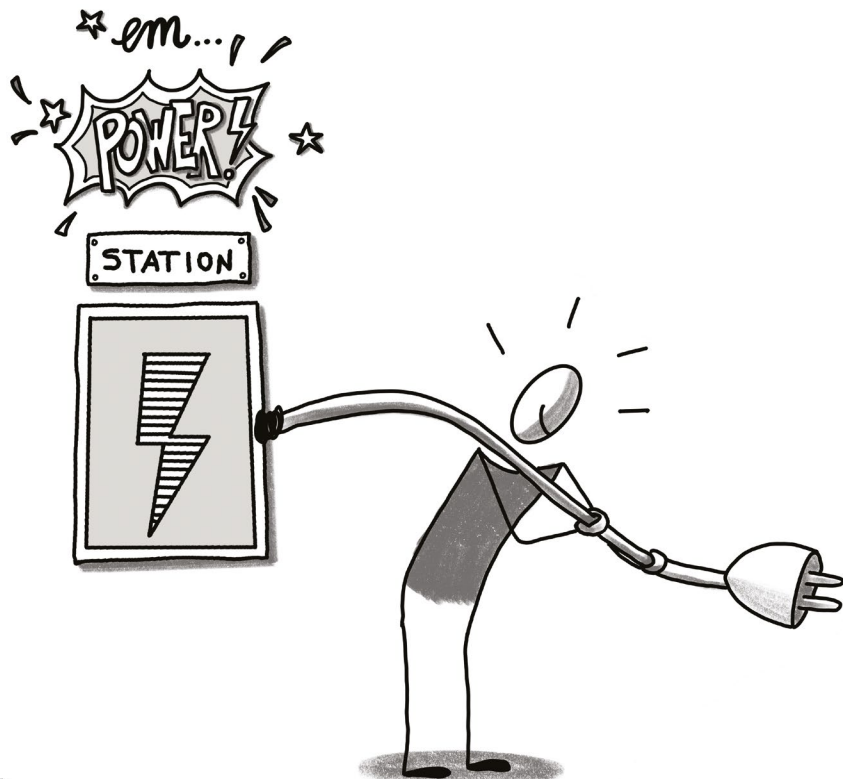
2.2.1 Examples of how to find partners for a Youth Exchange

There are several ways of going forwards in finding partners for your project.

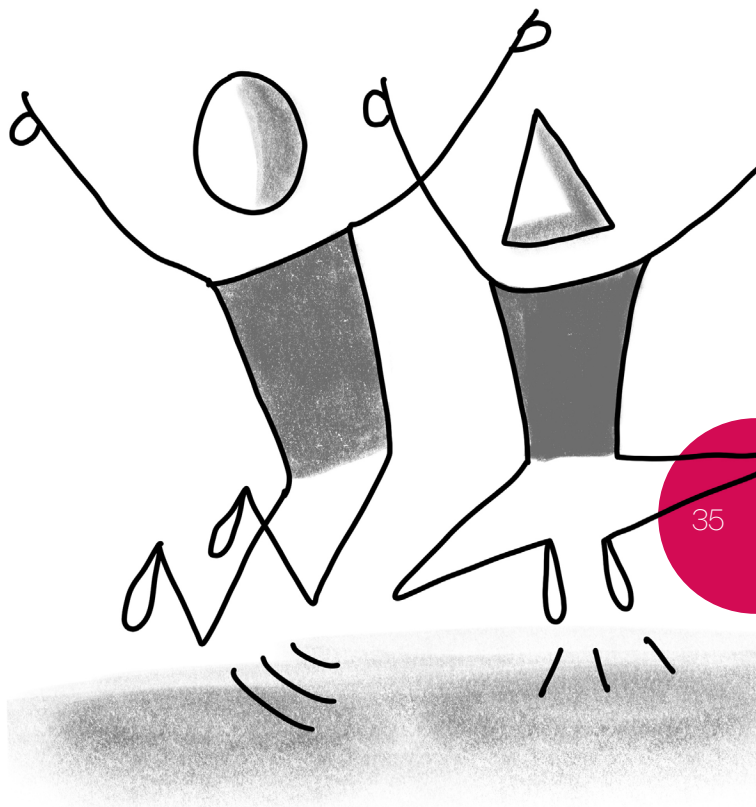
- Has your youth centre, organisation or group already been involved in international projects? Maybe your existing partners abroad or their local partners in the same field could be interested in this Youth Exchange?;
- Or maybe this is your first international project idea. Sometimes you do not have to go far to get ahead. Maybe your trusted local partners have already taken part in Youth Exchanges or oth-

er international projects and could connect you with organisations relevant in your field of work abroad;

- It is also common to look for partners within local, national or international networks of organisations operating in a particular field. Maybe your youth centre, organisation or group is part of a larger network dedicated to some topic (such as environmental protection, volunteering or advancing the rights of ethnic minorities) or are you in the scout movement, youth wing of a political party, youth council or part of an international organisation?;



- You could take part in a partnership-building seminar which is specifically focussed on finding project partners. The National Agencies responsible for the Erasmus+ Programme in your country organise such activities. You should contact your National Agency to find out more;
- There are also other international activities organised by the Erasmus+ National Agencies or other actors in the field of youth, which might interest you because they address the topic relevant for your Youth Exchange or other fields of work relevant for your youth centre, organisation or group. In such activities, although they would not focus on partner-finding, you could find like-minded people for further cooperation;
- The SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres maintain the OTLAS partner-finding tool, which allows you to match with other organisations, see their descriptions and previous experience, and to contact them immediately through the database. And if the organisation knows about OTLAS, chances are they have already been active in the Erasmus+ Programme;
- There are numerous social media groups established for finding partners for Erasmus+ projects, but be aware of the risk of not knowing too much about the partners that you can connect with this way;
- The Eurodesk network offers information services to young people and actors



in the field of youth on European opportunities in the education, training and youth fields, and the involvement of young people in European activities.

2.3 THE ART OF CHOOSING THE RIGHT PARTNERS

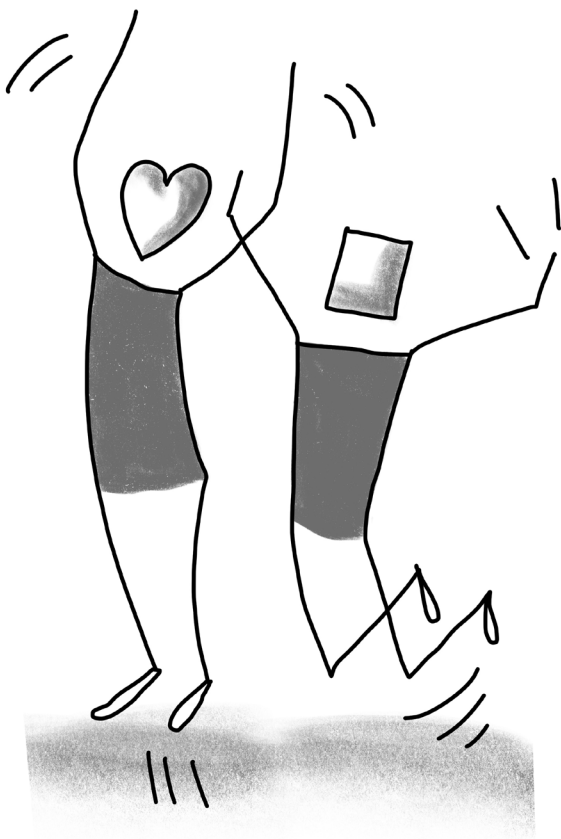
When you with your group are considering potential partners, you should also think carefully about what requirements you have for the partnership, and why. You might have some initial wishes regarding the countries in which you would like to find partners. Or maybe some organisation you have come across in a partnership-finding seminar or database seems good, because they have a lot of experience in the Erasmus+ Programme, do numerous local activities, and the group leaders who are active there seem nice. Such considerations can of course take you forwards, but the most important thing when choosing a partner is whether the organisation and the potential group leaders share your key values and whether they can commit to the goal you have set for your Youth Exchange. You do not have to agree on everything in order to become partners, but it is good to have the basic values aligned, since they might have an impact on all levels of the project, even practicalities such as which accommodation and food is chosen, not to mention issues like how you communicate, where the emphasis is in the programme, what kinds of working methods you choose, and so on. How you and your group present yourselves and the project idea plays an important role in connecting with organisations and groups with similar goals. Again, your ideas do not have to be identical. In any case, the final concept should be made jointly by all partners, but it is important that you agree what kind of outcome you would like to have for the project. As in any other partnership, no partner is 100% ideal – and it also depends on the matching between different partners.

You should also consider if the potential partners have experience and competence that are in some way complementary to yours and correspond to your expectations. Maybe you are a newcomer in Erasmus+ but they have a lot of experience and could guide you? Or maybe you are both / all newcomers and share passion and enthusiasm for finding out everything in the process and getting your first project proposal through? In any case, it is good to reflect on what each partner can bring to the project and cooperation.

If you already have experience in Youth Exchanges and international cooperation in youth work in general, it is worth considering whether you want to work with existing partners, new partners, or a mixture of both. The decision-making around this will depend on what the focus, aim, and objectives of your project are. Partners you know personally may bring trust and friendship that strengthen the cooperation and make it more pleasant, and you can avoid a great deal of work with additional adapting. However, meeting new partners will expand your existing network, and bringing new ideas, expertise, and opportunities. If you cooperate with new partners but which come from thematically or otherwise related organisations, you might get both benefits. You increase the probability that the core values match, but you also get some new input and energy in the cooperation.

A good idea would be to do a little exercise before entering any kind of partnership to identify the key elements that your partners should have and see which ones best match this.

A sign of a good partnership at an early stage of the cooperation is that the communication is reliable, open and sufficiently assertive. Watch out if there are too many unexplainable delays with answering messages or emails, sending relevant documents, or respecting agreements, or if you feel like the questions



you are asking and issues you are bringing up are not being responded to or otherwise addressed. At the same time, remind yourself and your group that you have now moved from your local working context to an international one, and there might be some differences in working cultures, communication styles, concept of time, and so on, which you are just about to start discovering. Do not judge all differences as bad intentions or neglect, but at the same time, respect your principles and limits.

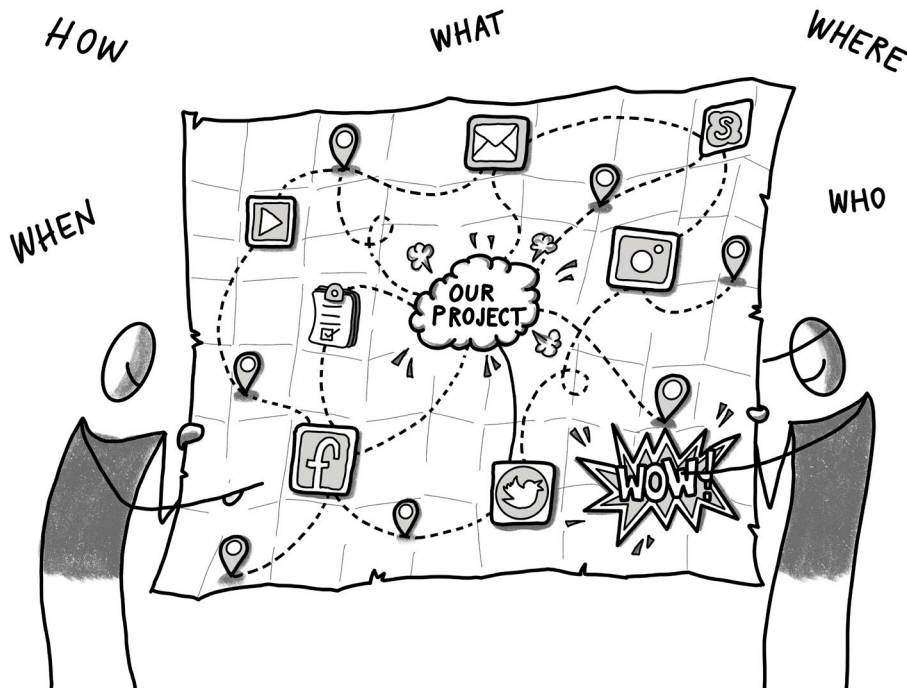
Does this sound complicated? It is, because you have just levelled up for the next stage of intercultural learning, reaching out to people and organisations you do not know and who function in an environment that might have a set of rules and customs unknown to you. But do not worry, going international is just a continuation to what you are already encountering in your local environment. It is just that all of the differences and negotiations in your local context are so familiar to you that you do not even notice them anymore. Have faith in yourself, your group, and your potential partners! Intercultural learning is addressed in detail in Chapter 4.

Be prepared for searching for partners and finding common ground to be demanding and time-consuming. However, do not lose hope and patience in the process, if your proposal is rejected because potential partners already have their hands full with work from other projects with other partners. Every existing partnership has been new and freshly established at one point. You and your group will get there too!

Once you have managed to find your partners, make sure that you inform the rejected potential partner in an appropriate manner, and on time, in order to avoid unnecessary costs and misunderstandings.



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shops or the social programme.

Invest in communication as a way of getting to know your partners and establishing clear, open and efficient lines of communication. This will help to form part of your culture as a consortium, and will be based on your developing knowledge of one another. Check how your different partners are used to communicating, what works well for them – you can start, for example, by asking everyone what they can bring to the consortium. Be aware that different organisations and individuals have different preferred methods of communication. Try to agree a primary and secondary mode of communication, whether it is email, project management programmes, social media, or direct contact channels.

2.5 ALIGNING THE IDEAS

What will the Youth Exchange be all about? What is it going to look like? What will you achieve with it? Answering these questions will help you to formalise your idea, visualise the project, and put it in a wider setting. When all of the partners agree on the basics, you should start discussing exactly how you can get to your goal. The ideas that you had and that looked similar can turn out not to be so similar with some scrutiny and discussion. It is also obvious that an idea can be implemented in various ways. Note that these negotiations with your group and partners take time.

2.6 IS THE FINAL IDEA (STILL) GOOD?

An idea for a Youth Exchange is good if it is relevant and interesting for the young people, they have a clear role in it, they will learn from it, and it has a local, transnational and particularly European dimension it. A good idea has a clear answer as to why it should be carried out. Remember that the Youth Exchange

should also pose an appropriate challenge for young people. Exchange ideas that are too simple will produce limited ideas for activities. On the other hand, an idea that is too challenging will probably see young people give up. When you come to this stage, you can start developing the idea towards a concrete project proposal.

2.7 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim and objectives of your Youth Exchange provide the foundations for the whole project, and once a general idea is established on the basis of the identified needs, defining them should be the next step. The aim is “a purpose or intention; a desired outcome”. In essence, what you want to achieve or the overall goal of your Youth Exchange. This you already know by now.

When developing a Youth Exchange idea, it is positive to have a focussed project concept with just one specific aim. This should be realistic and achievable within the scope of your Youth Exchange. You can define it as a general sentence with expressions like:

- ➔ Raise awareness about...
- ➔ Increase participation...
- Develop competences in the target groups...

Objectives are shorter, more specific, quantifiable, and verifiable – these explain how the aim will be achieved. If the aim is the strategic goal (“to win the football match”), the objectives are all of the intermediate steps to achieve it (“to score at least one goal in the first half”, “to always have the markers in place”, and so on). You should try to set up a maximum of five objectives. When defining objectives, the acronym SMART is often used.

A good objective should be:

- **Specific:** As in the opposite of vague. It is important to define and limit the scope of what you want to achieve. “To host three workshops about entrepreneurial competence development” is a specific objective. “To discuss entrepreneurial learning” is not specific.
- **Measurable:** Numbers and metrics help you to define a good objective and to evaluate if it has been reached or not. “To involve ten young local entrepreneurs in the development of the programme of three workshops” is a measurable objective. “To have many visitors” is not measurable.
- **Achievable:** A goal that can actually be reached. It has to do with resources, experience and knowledge of the context. “To host 60 young people from ten countries” is specific and measurable, but when the only hostel in our area can accommodate a maximum of 35 people, we are setting an objective that cannot be achieved.
- **Relevant:** What is relevant for the project in relation to the aim. If the project is about raising awareness of how local companies should involve young people in their decision-making structures, an objective “To have a campaign about the environmental impact of fossil fuels” might be interesting but is not relevant to this project.
- **Timely:** Time indicators contribute to defining a good objective. “To publish a blog post illustrating the young peoples’ learning outcomes every third day of the Youth Exchange activity” gives everybody a valuable indication on how to measure if the objective has been reached or if a plan B needs to be put into action.



Setting an aim or objectives that are not achievable or cannot be measured or do not make sense for the project can cause frustration and decrease motivation, as well as making the project appear unsuccessful in the evaluation process. On the other hand, you must be careful of setting the bar too low – a project must have at least a bit of a challenge in it or it will not be rewarding.

Setting an aim and objectives is one of the toughest and most time-consuming aspects of a project, and coming up with a strong aim and objectives is a skill that takes years of experience. This is an important part of the process, and if you do not have a clear and strong aim and objectives, it could cause issues down the line. So if you are struggling with the process, why not try working through it and coming back to it at a later date or do it as a collaborative activity with your group. You can also adapt and update your aim and objectives as the planning process goes on, as they should be viewed as a live tool at this stage.

2.8 SETTING INDICATORS

This phase is tightly connected with the aims and objectives. Young people often have a vision for a positive social change or at least something inspiring that will happen at a personal level or in their local dimension. At this stage, it is important to define this “something” by going back to the needs analysis and setting expected goals that can be measured, in other words, indicators. By setting concrete and realistic indicators, you can measure the project outcomes and the project’s success. These are some examples of possible indicators that can be used to measure impact at different levels:

- ➔ **Number of local events** implemented by the young people in a set time frame;

- ➔ **Number of participants** in a set of activities (or % increase);
- ➔ **Number of follow-up projects** submitted/implemented;
- ➔ **Number of students** in the local school that register for the organisation’s newsletter;
- ➔ **Number of visits and interactions** with each partner’s websites and platforms;

These were mainly quantitative indicators. You can also think of qualitative indicators, which often tell more about the actual social impact:

- ➔ The extent to which young people developed new competences during the Youth Exchange;
- ➔ Level of participation of young people in the Youth Exchange;
- ➔ Level of overall satisfaction of the young people at the end of the Youth Exchange;
- ➔ ...and many more.

This data works best if it matches with the information collected during the needs analysis, and it should represent concrete examples of how to define the desired impact and how to assess the outcomes.

There are various ways to measure the impact. This topic is addressed in detail in Chapter 5.

2.9 REFLECTION ON LEARNING

Although learning happens all of the time, it works better when it is planned. Learning objectives should be considered from the very beginning. Questions like “What will the group learn from this?” and “How can we make sure they use this opportunity?” can

foster a reflection on the learning process throughout the Youth Exchange. Remember, learning in non-formal education is participant-centred and flexible. This means that you as a group leader are not expected to be a “teacher”; only a facilitator of a process whose role is to create opportunities, let the young people make choices, and provide spaces for reflection to capitalise on the experience.

When setting up a learning plan, it is good to consider the following:

- ➔ It is better not to set strict goals from a top-down approach but rather to let the young people define their personal ones;
- ➔ Leave space for flexibility and changes;
- ➔ Leave enough downtime between activities and space in the programme for reflection, evaluation, and informal learning;
- ➔ Everything, even mistakes and apparent failures, can be great learning opportunities.

Recognising learning, even if unplanned and emerging, is vital within non-formal education journeys. Although non-formal education is not officially certified or externally assessed, recognition of achievements and the learning of the young people is an important moment and it can impact their self-esteem and confidence. Participants are entitled to receive a Youthpass in all Erasmus+ projects, but parallel to that, there are also other recognition tools – such as offering digital badges and integrating gamification within your Youth Exchange – that can support the recognition of learning.

2.10 YOUTHPASS: MORE THAN JUST A CERTIFICATE

Youthpass is a tool that has a double nature – it is a reflection tool and a recognition certificate at the same time. It can help you to define the learning strategy from the beginning of your planning, and there is even a section about it in the Youth Exchange funding application form. Youthpass can be approached at different intervals during the Youth Exchange. Primarily, it is used at the end of the Youth Exchange activity, but it can also be used in the earlier phases.

Youthpass allows the young people to describe their learning experiences and learning achievements, and therefore it encourages them to reflect on their learning through the process. It also empowers them to be in charge of their own learning, since it is based on self-assessment and not on the external assessment.

Each Youth Exchange participant will be issued with a Youthpass certificate that will be printed and prepared by the coordinators, which can be distributed at the end of the Youth Exchange activity or sent by post afterwards.

2.10.1

Eight key competences for life-long learning

The competence-based model of learning is a type of learning that results in change related to a concrete experience. A competence is seen as the ability to act in a specific way in specific life situations, professional or general, and this ability is grounded by a required set of knowledge, skills, and attitude. In the European Union eight key competences for life-long learning have been identified and Youthpass is based on these competences. The key competences are transferable and can be used in different situations. Many of them overlap and interlock.

The eight key competences are helpful in translating the learning that takes place in Youth Exchanges in order to make it transferable to young people's lives outside of the Youth Exchange. This is very helpful, because sometimes the hardest part of facilitating learning is to help people realise what they have learned and how they can use it outside of the Youth Exchange framework. These competences are the bridge that links their experiences and learning outcomes gained to other spheres of their life, such as in their studies, employment or even conversations with their extended family about the experience.

The eight key competences are:

- ➔ **Multilingual competence;**
- ➔ **Personal, social and learning to learn competence;**
- ➔ **Citizenship competence;**
- ➔ **Entrepreneurship competence;**
- ➔ **Cultural awareness and expression competence;**
- ➔ **Digital competence;**
- ➔ **Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering;**
- ➔ **Literacy competence.**

2.12 PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES

A first draft of the programme can consist of the main features of the activities, and does not need to include the description of each specific method. Make sure that:

- ➔ **The activities correspond to the aims and objectives of the project;**
- ➔ **It is clearly in line with the Erasmus+ objectives and priorities;**
- ➔ **It has internal coherence (what designers call 'the red thread': a logical order that connects all of the activities and makes sure the programme flows from A to B to C).**

A full description of the programme of activities has to be included in the application form. The programme submitted with the application will probably not be the final version that the young people and group leaders will experience, but it is the one the evaluators will read and (hopefully) see as worthy of support. Keep this in mind when moving to a final version of the programme. If changes are made (and in non-formal education, they are expected to be made based on the ongoing reflection and evaluation of the process), it is good practice to explain why.

There needs to be enough time dedicated to each activity and all of the necessary breaks, meals and free time need to be incorporated. Timetables are often approached by first defining the activities related to the basic needs (sleep, meals and rest). In the same manner, you then schedule the process-related activities (arrivals, departures, socialising, concluding, reflection and evaluation processes, etc.). In all of this, you should not forget that the young people need informal time for good group dynamics to develop. The rest of the content is arranged in terms of what

should come first and what should follow, so that the programme of activities all in all makes sense.

There are a few tried and tested “Youth Exchange classics” that are almost guaranteed to take place during a programme. These should be kept up-to-date with fresh approaches and methods, but as they have proven to be valuable for the group process during a non-formal educational journey, you might want to consider them.

- ➔ **Getting to know each other activities** – this is both to break the ice and build up group dynamics, and to get comfortable with the venue. Make sure to include some name games and break the barriers by setting an informal, playful atmosphere and letting everybody know that they can relax and be themselves in the group. However, too many games and too much “silliness” grows old fast. Encourage the young people to explore the venue and its surroundings a bit too. This could be something like a mini treasure hunt! There are many possibilities, from the old classics (you may want to consult more senior youth workers to find out more) to more hi-tech ones that require smartphones and GPS locations;
- ➔ **Energisers** – these are short games of two to ten minutes that can bring a quick boost of energy to the group, and are meant to be energetic, funny, inclusive, and can incorporate creative arts, sports activities, games, and so on. Energisers can be controversial, with some people loving them and some hating them. Remember that, for example, being in physical contact with another person has a different meaning from one person to another; some might find it inappropriate and uncomfortable. Emphasise that energisers are voluntary and young people can always opt out;
- ➔ **Intercultural evening** – often, the practice is that

they are partially organised and partially informal evening events in which each group presents some elements of their country or local environment, whether food, drink, clothing, music and/or a performance. A word of warning: very often, intercultural evenings end up reinforcing stereotypes instead of breaking them down if they focus too much on the myth of a unified national culture and the stereotypical expressions of it. There is nothing wrong with a nice party, but be mindful about opening a space for critically reflecting on the concept of culture and how it is expressed. Instead of presenting the mainstream national traditions, you could encourage the young people to reflect on the personal, local or, for example, European dimensions of culture they identify with and why they identify with them. Another concern over the “traditional intercultural evening” is that often a lot of alcohol and food unknown to the young people is brought and served, which can lead into problems. Underage young people might drink illegally, or young adults could drink too much. Also there might be allergies which have been taken into account by the group leaders in the meals planned in advance but which might cause problems here. That is why, Intercultural evenings should be planned and supervised by group leaders;

- ➔ **Community event** – this can be an important programme element and the idea is to make the Youth Exchange relevant to local community instead of just having an event to show that something happened. To do so, involve the community at the earliest stage possible, decide together what kind of event is in the best interest of everybody or would suit the place better. For example, this could be a school event where children and young people can learn something unique on the topic of the Youth Exchange through non-formal

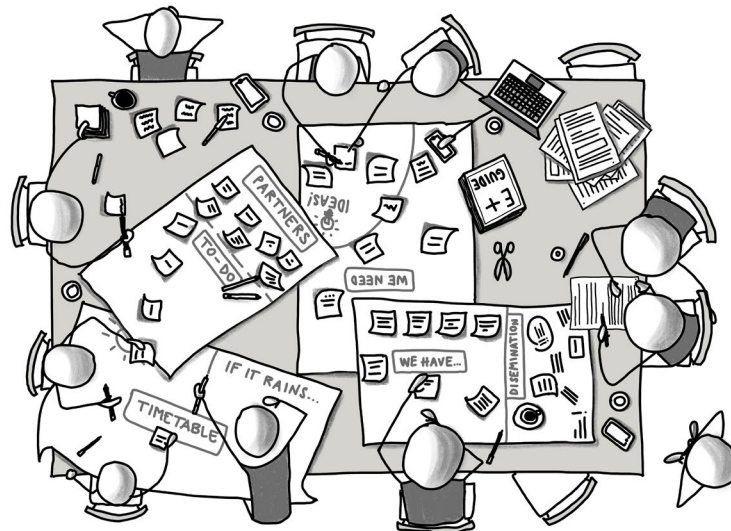
education. Or you could organise a theatre play in a retirement home, come up with a fun day of sporty activities in a local kindergarten, or clean up a local beach as a part of the Youth Exchange. More about involving the local community comes later in this chapter;

- ➔ **Reflection groups** – It is good to reserve enough time in the programme every day for reflection, where the young people are split into smaller groups. It can be beneficial to keep these groups the same throughout the Youth Exchange, so that a trust dynamic can be built up to create a safe space. This allows people to express tension in a healthy setting and collect opinions and feedback for the leaders about the programme;
- ➔ **Free time** – there is no specific indicator for the number of workshops or amount of free time that there should be in the programme; the right mix is down to you and your team. An important part of a Youth Exchange is learning informally from each other, and this happens in the free time sessions,

especially if it is self-organised by the young people. If they ask for more fun and free time, listen to the group's needs, but it is important to make it clear that you are running an educational programme funded by public money with some objectives to achieve. One day off is appropriate for a one-week programme where you can organise a sightseeing trip, arrange an outdoor activity like a hike or bike ride, or give the young people downtime;

- ➔ **Closing ceremony and farewell party** – this is where you can close the Youth Exchange, and celebrate the bonds that have been made. Part of this can be having a session where the young people share memories, stories or compliments, followed by a social evening suitable for the group and the atmosphere of the Youth Exchange.

Additionally, there should be other sessions which reflect on your specific aim and objectives for the Youth Exchange.



At a later stage, you should develop approaches and tools to reach some of the objectives. For example, a generic 'Getting to Know Each Other' activity, 1 hour and half on the first day, can be further developed:

- 09.00 – 09.15: first group activity: 2 different name games will be played.
- 09.15 – 09.30: sharing in couples: 'What are you bringing with you? And what do you want to take from this experience?'
- 09.30 – 10.30: walk in the woods around the area, getting to know each other and the place. Several questions will be asked to facilitate the group building, and a few ice-breaking games will be played.
- 10.30 – ...

It is good to detail the programme keeping realistic timing for each activity in mind. While it is not necessary to describe every single name game or energiser, some examples can be given. Make sure to describe the main "blocks" of your programme, especially if you are using definitions from sources or disciplines that may seem too technical to a first reader. For example, if you are planning sessions based on "World café" or "Theatre of the Oppressed", it is a good idea to include a short description of these methods, possibly with a few links for further reading.

If your Youth Exchange project is composed of more than one activity, for example; a Preparatory visit and an activity with all of the groups of young people, each should be described separately and have its own specific programme.

2.14 EXTERNAL PARTNERS AND POSSIBLE CO-FUNDING: HOW CAN YOU INVOLVE THE LOCAL COMMUNITY?

Do not forget: The Erasmus+ Programme is a political tool, a mechanism to put European policies into practice, funded by public money and aiming for public benefit. It cannot exist in a vacuum. The communities in which you live, the decision-makers at various levels and the business and media world need to be involved and informed. There may be several other stakeholders in your Youth Exchange outside of the project consortium and each has their role in the project.

Examples of some of the different local actors that you could consider involving in your Youth Exchange as external partners:

- Local government, municipalities;
- Other non-governmental and civil society organisations;
- Local businesses and cooperatives;
- Schools and universities;
- Digital and print media.

When considering external partners, you should think about how their involvement links to the purpose and goal of the project, and what their meaningful role in it could be. External partners just for the sake of having them will not enhance a project. There are different ways external organisations could support your Youth Exchange and get some valuable input back. For example, decision-makers could be reached regarding certain policies or topics relevant for the young people in your local community for which the Youth Exchange participants could share their vision and key messages. Or a local civil society organisation could

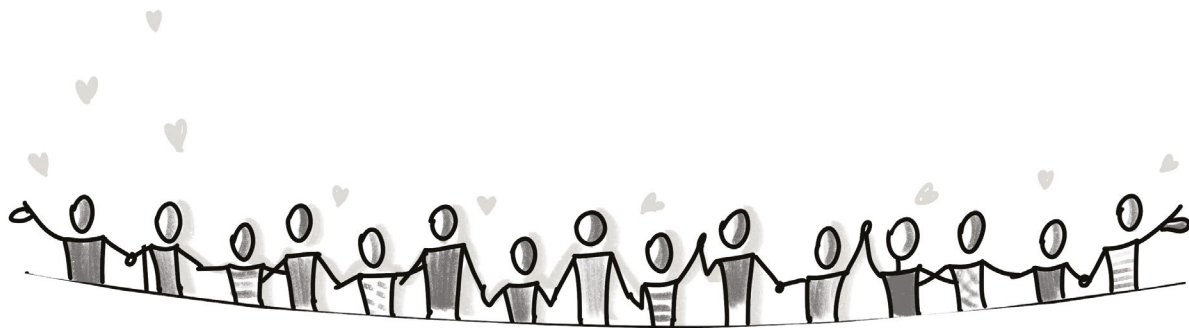


hold a workshop for the young people in the Youth Exchange on a particular topic that they focus on, and in return the young people could help the organisation by distributing flyers about their activities or volunteering for the cause they are trying to advance. Consider give and take – what can you give a stakeholder in exchange for what they give you?

Do not forget also that in addition to the great learning goals you want to achieve, a Youth Exchange requires practical arrangements. Soon will come the time to consider how you will organise the accommodation and food for the group, where the venues for the activities will be, what materials you will need, and whether you will need local transport or not. Youth Exchange is primarily funded by the Erasmus+ Programme, and although there is no official requirement for co-funding, the grant will not cover 100 percent of the costs. You will therefore need to find other means

to cover the gap between the grant and what will be the total expenses of the project. Sometimes the gap is covered by the participants' contributions, but this is not necessarily the best solution, since it makes participation conditional on having sufficient funds, and therefore puts some of the young people at a disadvantage. Also, by simplifying this stage, the young people would miss a big learning opportunity. If you nevertheless need participants' contributions, make participation cost-free for those who really need it or set up a sliding scale.

Seeking for co-funding is a process where you have a chance to establish relations with different stakeholders. You must accept the expectations or framework of those providing the funds, but this cannot compromise the framework set in the Erasmus+ Programme or the aim and objectives of your specific project.



Some examples of getting co-funding or support in-kind for your project:

- You could organise different types of fundraisers, for example selling your hand-made products or organising street performances. Be creative with your young people;
- You can approach businesses for discounts, donations or sponsorship, like, for example, negotiating a group discount with a restaurant, or approaching a local shop that is about to have an end-of-season clearance sale. Maybe they would be interested in donating something in exchange for publicity;
- You could look for donations and sponsorships or try crowdfunding such as 'Kickstarter' if you are innovating something in the project;
- You could request sponsorship in-kind benefits. The municipality could help with the transport or provide a meeting space. A local school could let you use the gym (during the summer when the school is closed) and organise it into dorms. As the public sector functions differently from the private sector, you need to think differently about

what you can give back to it. It will be easier to get support if the project concerns a topic or a field supported by the city, or, for example, if you are cooperating with a group from a twin town. It is also helpful to present to the local authorities how the local community will benefit from hosting young people from another country, if you are hosting the Youth Exchange, or how the local young people can contribute to the community when they return from another country;

- At the national or international level, you can apply for funding within programmes for international cooperation of young people (other than Erasmus+, to avoid double funding). Funding can also be obtained from different national or international foundations.



There are also other reasons to involve the local community than how they can support your Youth Exchange in cash or in kind. By involving it, you enable its citizens beyond the group of participating young people to witness the European experience and benefit from it. As was mentioned at the beginning of this subchapter, the Erasmus+ Programme runs with public money, which means taxes. In other words, you might get the funding, but the local community as “the people” has paid for it. The best thing you can do to return the favour is to do something for the common good. Many Youth Exchanges include a community event, which is addressed later in this chapter.

Digital and print media could support the visibility and improve the impact of your project, and these relationships should be fostered early on in the Youth Exchange process rather than just leaving it until later

on. For visibility and to broaden the impact of your future project, you definitely want all of the media coverage you can get.

As part of the Youth Exchange, you will also work with different people who are not your project partners. These could be, for example, the young peoples’ parents, your co-workers and other youth work-related networks, the owner of the venue where the activity will take place, a web designer, the town mayor, and so on. These are still stakeholders in the project, although they do not directly take part in its implementation. They can help you in the implementation of the project or hold you back, so it is important to establish good relationships and communication with them early on.



2.15 HOW SHOULD YOU COMMUNICATE WITH EXTERNAL PARTNERS?

Often, public engagement is considered something that you do at the end when you have achieved all of your goals and want to tell the world about it. It is better, however, to approach it as a strategic resource, which will enhance your impact all of the way through your project. In any case, if you want to involve other stakeholders, you need to explain to them what you are doing and why. This is why you need to think about strategic communication right from the start, even before the project is approved. Public engagement can also be an exciting role that can be taken on by young people interested in communication and the media.

Examples of questions that will help you get started:

Who are your potential stakeholders, and why would you want them involved? Think also about why they would potentially get involved. What is in it for them? Be realistic and humble, and remember that these stakeholders are not there to serve your Youth Exchange. They have their own agendas, interests and their own stakeholders to respond to. If you manage to communicate the added value and the mutual benefits your Youth Exchange could bring, the chances are you will get further;

What are the key messages about the Youth Exchange that you would like to communicate to them? (This is a good time to check if the key messages have become clear to you already, or if you still need to work on them);

How should you contact them? The local news agency will probably respond well even to an informal Facebook message. The municipality or school will need to be addressed by phone or with an official introduction email. For the local senior group or cultural association, maybe a visit in person would work best. Do not be lazy and just spam the same introducto-

ry message to everybody – nobody likes that. Use a personal approach, and your local stakeholders will appreciate it much more;

Who will communicate with them, how and when?

2.16 FORMALISING THE PARTNERSHIPS

Once the Youth Exchange partners and all of the other stakeholders are chosen, it is a good idea to develop a partnership agreement. This should be a document – a contract is probably not necessary for a Youth Exchange, but it is your choice – which describes all of the activities and responsibilities, task division, cost division and payment plan, common strategies (for example, for fundraising or communication), deadlines, key milestones, and so on.

2.17 WHAT IS A PREPARATORY VISIT?

A preparatory visit can be applied for in the funding application for a Youth Exchange. It provides an opportunity to bring together the partner organisations (either one leader per group, or a leader and participant per group) prior to the Youth Exchange activity, so they can meet in person to ensure quality planning. In the case of Youth Exchanges activities with young people with fewer opportunities, the preparatory visit should enable the participants to ensure that the specific needs can be catered for. Preparatory visits take place in the country of one of the receiving organisations before the start of the Youth Exchange activity. The visit gives the partners an opportunity to get to know each other, get to know the venue, agree on policies and a code of conduct and discuss logistical aspects. As part of ensuring a healthy and safe environment, the preparatory visit provides space to share specific obstacles that your young people are facing or might face, and to come up with ways to

overcome them. This could be something related to their reduced mobility or a health condition preventing them from participating in certain activities, or a life experience – a young person may be a refugee or has suffered abuse at home – that could make them more sensitive to certain issues.

The Preparatory visit can also be a platform to develop and shape the programme, and to allocate responsibilities and work out how to communicate going forward. It is not a compulsory part of a Youth Exchange – and may not always be granted – but it can be a useful tool to help you prepare. The preparatory visit should be in the country of one of the receiving organisations, and a good idea is if it takes place in or near the venue of the Youth Exchange, to facilitate the planning process. A Preparatory visit can also be a test run for a Youth Exchange – you can see the areas that still need to be worked on, prepared, and agreed on through the Preparatory visit planning and delivery.

2.18 FINANCES AND BUDGET

As was mentioned before, a grant offered for a Youth Exchange is not intended to cover 100% of the costs, although there is no formal co-funding requirement. Different ways of seeking co-funding were presented, but remember that Youth Exchanges are not allowed to make a profit for the partner organisations. Budgeting and financial management is a vital part of the project, to make sure that the partner responsible for the grant (coordinating organisation) does not make a significant overspend or underspend.

The funding offered by the Erasmus+ Programme for Youth Exchanges is largely based on unit costs – i.e., a fixed amount. The budget is divided into “organisational support” based on the number of young people, “travel” based on the number of participants including leaders, facilitators and accompanying persons

and travel distance, “individual support” based on the number of participants, including leaders, facilitators and accompanying persons and “inclusion support” based on the number of young people with fewer opportunities. Exceptional costs based on real costs can be included for special-needs support and to include young people with fewer opportunities.

2.19 APPLICATION FORM

A friendly reminder: In case you are wondering whether it is time to stop reading after this subchapter, apply for the grant, then continue reading until the selection results are out, it is not. The rest of the publication contains a lot of content needs to be reflected in the application, even if it will only be organised in the project later on.

You will need to apply for the Youth Exchange through an online application form. The application form can be developed by the young people, with or without support of the group leader, or alternatively, by the group leaders with significant contributions by the young people. In ideal conditions, it is the young people who are in charge of the application process. However, this part of the process can seem intimidating, and therefore it is a good idea that the young people, if they are writing it, do not see the application and all of its questions for the first time at this stage.

Before you begin, you will need to make sure your organisation has created an online profile related to the Erasmus+ Programme that is verified by their National Agency. Multiple people can access the e-form, so an application can easily be completed collaboratively. It could be a good idea to divide the writing process into smaller, more easily manageable parts. This is also a very good way to share the workload between the young people and group leaders within the partnership. While this approach can be effective,

do not forget at the end to put all of the different bits together. It can be useful to appoint one person who is responsible for coordinating the application writing process (contributors, tasks, internal deadlines), and in the end giving the application a cohesive voice. A good application is coherent and shows cross-references between sections: aims stem from the needs analysis, the working methods respond to the objectives, and so on. Reserve enough time for finalising the application. It will make a big difference.

The application form has many automatic functions that assist the process. The system will guide you with a series of questions and you will not be able to submit the application until all of the information has been completed. There are character counts for each question, so you can keep on top of the character limits. It is important to complete the form in good time to allow for any incomplete information to be finished and to account for extra time in case of issues with the online system. The form has an auto-save function but it is always a good idea to save an offline copy in case of system issues – there is nothing more frustrating than losing content you have worked hard on writing.

The budget is automatic once you add the information about the different organisations and number of participants – just make sure to do a final check to make sure you have not missed something or added an extra zero! The human element (meaning you) still matters in deciding if and how to apply for exceptional costs, since it is based on real costs. Keep your estimates realistic and provide short and clear explanations for each item. The Programme Guide specifies which costs are eligible and which are not.

Applications are to be submitted to the National Agency of the applicant country. In most cases, if the Youth Exchange is hosted in your country, you apply. However, sometimes, for example if you are based in a third country, your partner might apply on behalf of the consortium. Your application can always be written in the language of the country where you are applying (for example; if the project is submitted in Greece, you can write in Greek). Sometimes, other languages are allowed, such as English, French, and German. Check with the specific National Agency to which you are applying.

Finally, when you are applying for funding for a Youth Exchange, remember that someone else (with limited time and a tight deadline) will have to read and evaluate your application. Your goal is to write as clearly as possible, with the most relevant information in each section described in detail. It is important not to make any assumptions about what prior experience or information the reader will have or know. Why not ask someone who has not been involved in the project development process to read and give feedback on the final application to make sure everything is clear to someone outside of the project? Many useful tips are available here² and you can get familiar with model application forms here³.

2 <https://www.leargas.ie/blog/erasmus-application-tips/>

3 https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/applicants/forms_en



Examples of what to consider before the deadline:

- ➔ There are two application deadlines every year. At the time of this publication (2022), they are in February and October. It is important to check the latest version of the Programme Guide for the most up-to-date information;
- ➔ If it is your first application, give yourself at least a month, preferable 90 days, to plan your project and write the application. You will face many challenges – you really don't need time pressure on top of them. After the first time, things will get easier;
- ➔ Finding new partners can be challenging, and it will require more than sending a few documents just before the deadline. Plan ahead. Finding partners should be your first step in the process (60–90 days before the deadline);
- ➔ When the deadline is approaching, everybody gets very busy! Some people will find it hard to answer last minute emails, read drafts, and respond. Again, plan ahead;
- ➔ The first programme draft should be ready around 14 days (or more) before the deadline. This should leave enough time for all of the partners involved to be ready with their contributions;
- ➔ Try to keep the last three to five days before the deadline for harmonisation and proof-reading of the application – and to allow for any glitches in the online system to be resolved.

Examples of what to consider regarding the timeline from the deadline to the Youth Exchange:

- ➔ Plan for your Youth Exchange project (not the Youth Exchange activity where the groups meet) to start at least three months after the submission

deadline. There are certain rules as to when your project can start relative to the submission deadline. Check them before applying in the Programme Guide;

- ➔ Keep in mind that the project is not the same as the activity, which means that your project can last for six months even if you will only have the activity for one week. After the beginning of the project, plan from one to two months for the communication, organisation, and logistical aspects before the first face-to-face activity. This time will be necessary to consolidate the groups of participants, book the travel tickets and define all of the logistic details. You will also receive the contract from the National Agency, sign it, and you can then receive the first instalment of the grant. You should be aware you cannot make any payments for the Youth Exchange until the project start date, otherwise the payments will be ineligible;
- ➔ With this information in mind, it means that the activity can usually safely start from five months from the submission deadline, although this time could be longer. You will have to submit a report two months after the project finish date. The finish date is also the end of the project, which can include evaluation and communication of results, not simply the end of the activity.
- ➔ A Youth Exchange is not over until it's over. What happens after the Youth Exchange is an integral part of the whole project. So, if you want your application to be approved, you need to ensure that you plan how to share the results. Allow yourselves up to six months after the residential activity is finished to complete the sharing of the results, the financial obligations (collect the travel documents, do the reimbursements, and so on), and to write the final report.



2.21 THE APPLICATION HAS BEEN SUBMITTED!

It usually takes two to three months to get the project results, but the time can be shorter or longer depending on the National Agency, the number of applications, and the specific deadline. Often, the evening after a deadline is a time to relax and celebrate. But as soon as the post-party haze settles, you may be left with the realisation that you have at least eight weeks to wait before knowing if your application was successful. Could this time be used productively for the benefit of the Youth Exchange? Note, however, that if your project is approved you will receive a contract from the National Agency, which you will need to sign before the project can formally start and before you receive the first instalment of the grant. Therefore,

whatever you do, avoid generating costs, since they cannot be included in your project yet, even if it gets approved later on.

Examples of how to make the most of the time in between:

- ➔ It is good to reflect the process so far and recognise the learning outcomes and other achievements with the young people, especially if you set mid-term goals;
- ➔ Do not leave your young people alone waiting. They are probably even more impatient than you are to get the results and start the action. Do something useful and goal-oriented with them in order to sustain the group cohesion and the feeling of common commitment;

- ➔ Start some preparation work. Maybe make that phone call to the venue manager that you did not have time to do while writing the application, further plan the sightseeing tour, or learn more about methods used in non-formal learning settings;
- ➔ Practice makes perfect. If you are planning a workshop that you have never tried before, this could be a good opportunity to rehearse it or even test it with some other youth groups. Involve the local youth group, the feedback will be invaluable;
- ➔ Keep in touch with all of the partners and stakeholders. Send an email to the partners, just to say hi from time to time, and if you involved other local partners, get in touch with them too. Just like with the young people, it is good to keep up the good spirit around the project together while waiting;
- ➔ Make a plan B! Being optimistic is important, and if you did well in your preparation, the chances are good that the project will be approved. But what if it is not? Use this time to think about a “what next” scenario. Apply again? A few useful suggestions regarding that are included in the following sub-chapter;
- ➔ Finally, if the application is accepted, congratulations! The countdown for the wonderful activity starts here.



2.22 AND WHAT IF THE APPLICATION IS NOT SUCCESSFUL?

Not all applications will be granted, and this can happen for a number of reasons. Remember that the application process works on a points-based system, and even if you get a good score, your result is dependent on the other applications. It could be that your National Agency has fewer funds for a given deadline compared to another, or there may be a higher number of applications than usual. In some cases, your project may be added to a reserve list if not immediately granted. You always have the option to re-submit if you, your group, and your partners wish to – just make sure to give yourself enough time if re-submitting an application for the next deadline.

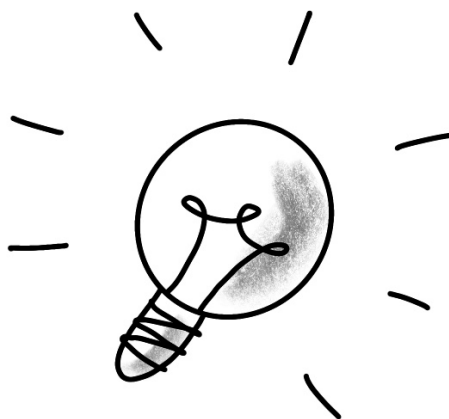
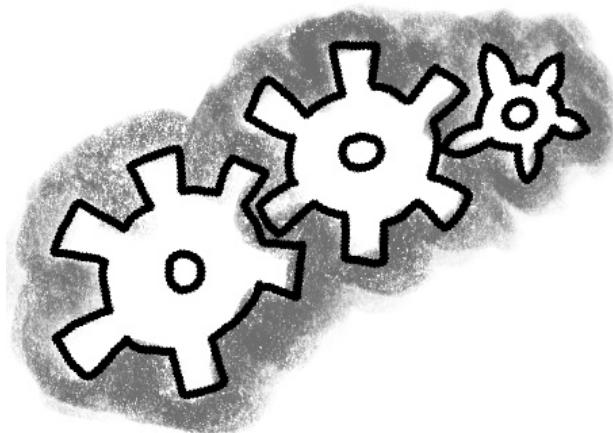
Nobody can deny that it is a big disappointment, however, sometimes things simply do not work out. There is big learning potential in rejection, and it is an opportunity for reflection and development. When you tell your group that the project was not successful, explain that there can be many reasons for it. Try to avoid telling the young people about the results in a manner that would make them feel like they have personally failed. It can be useful to hold an evaluation meeting with the group. This is much better than a mere phone call, or a text or chat message. It is important to offer them space to express how they feel, which could be disappointment, a sense of failure, anger or other negative emotions. Once the young people have had a chance to let off steam, bring their attention to the positive side of how much progress they have made, which will by no means go to waste.

Feedback is the base to proceed further. The evaluating committee of the National Agency will send you detailed feedback about the application, underlining the critical aspects. This can be a valuable basis for improvement. If you want more detailed feedback, feel free to contact your National Agency directly

and ask. Or, in some cases, you can even organise a meeting in person. Then read and discuss the notes with your group. What do you take on board? What can be done to address the points raised in the feedback? Try to review each item, give it some thought, and break it down into small, concrete actions to improve the project, in case you decide to apply again with the same idea.

You also need to inform your partners. Write an email to all of them and let them know about the results and at the same time thanking them for the cooperation and the hard work. If they want to know why the project was rejected, brief them on the reasons. If you are thinking about applying again, ask for their opinion. Some may still be on board, others may have other plans: in this case, do not take it personal, and be ready to move on. That is why a wider network of partners has advantages. Go back to the partner search phase and work to bring your consortium back to full power.

You may decide not to re-apply, or you can look at other ways to implement the idea either in its entirety or in a scaled-back way. Project partners could decide to use their own funds, alternative funding could be sought, and/or the project could be supported through community fundraising efforts. Make sure that any alternative plans are discussed collaboratively with other partners and the young people involved.



03 PREPARATION

So, group leader, your Youth Exchange has been approved! What should you do next? It is time to get back to work!



3.1 WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME TO START?

Basically, immediately. Depending on the duration of your project, and especially how soon the Youth Exchange activity will take place, your time to prepare may be limited. Did you apply for a Preparatory visit? If you did, and it was granted, you can leave many details about the activity to be discussed and finalised there. Otherwise, you must rely on communicating with your partners through other means. In any case, there is still quite a lot to do.

3.2 PARTNERS' PREPARATION PROCESS

Inform your partners immediately of the selection results, so that everybody involved can put the next steps into their agendas. Reconfirm the basic elements: dates, place, group size, and what type of preparation is necessary for the group leaders and the young people. Although young people should be involved from the beginning, the details of the participants do not have to be disclosed at the application stage, and it might be that there have been changes in the group composition or some partners might have a practice of forming the group only after the project has been approved. In any case, it is good to give your partners enough time to build or consolidate their group, book tickets, organise insurance, have preparatory meetings with the groups, finalise their contributions to the programme, and work out what to bring with them –and to communicate all of this to you on time. Shared checklists with tasks and deadlines can be helpful to keep everyone on the same page and to support the preparatory work.

If you have a partner who drops out of the process after the application is granted, you have two main options. If there is enough time and the other partners agree, you can search for a replacement. You will have to make additional effort to bring them up to

speed with the preparations. Or you may decide that you are unable to replace them and you run the Youth Exchange with a smaller number of young people, or you invite other partner organisations to bring additional participants. All of the options require approval from your National Agency.

Once the partners and groups have been consolidated, you should **gather the following information**:

- ➔ names, ages and contact information for all of the participants, including leaders. You might want to create a form (something simple, like a free Google form) so all of the information is collected in one place and shared with everybody. Note however that you should treat the data according to the GDPR regulations;
- ➔ for young people under the age of 18, a parental consent form (prepared in advance), must be signed, scanned and pre-sent to you;
- ➔ for each participant, proof of health insurance, or a certificate of personal liability. Do not take risks and do not encourage others to do so. Better safe than sorry;
- ➔ travel information. Before collecting this, give as many details to your partners as possible – where to travel to and the local connections they need to know about – and be specific. Do not assume that people will have the same understanding of even simple sentences like “the activity will begin on...”. Specify the expected date and time of the expected arrival and departure to and from the venue (or airport / railway / bus station) beforehand. Even if the partners' groups arrive directly to the venue, it is useful for you to know when and how they arrive in the country to follow up possible delays or other unexpected circumstances that might occur related to the travel;
- ➔ any needs for additional support or special needs

related to basic survival and convenience, concerning, for example, dietary restrictions, mobility, or medications. You do not want to learn about these things while the residential activity is already going on;

- ➔ any needs related to the programme, such as additional space, materials or equipment that the leaders or young people might have in order to deliver their contributions;
- ➔ set a first deadline. You will be very happy to receive all of the information before...! Of course, later you may need to give more time, but deadlines help people to prioritise tasks and to keep their agendas in order;
- ➔ important: will their groups include young people with fewer opportunities or coming from a background that requires specific attention? Ask for all of the leaders to be informed – confidentially, of course – in due time about any such situation. It can really make a difference for the preparation of your project.

3.3 GETTING THE HOST GROUP READY

Your group (in case you are hosting the Youth Exchange activity) should be the first to be complete as there are many tasks that are to be done where the activity will take place. This is a good time to compile a new list of upcoming tasks, and make another task division, so everybody is up to date with what to do and what to look after.

Examples of preparation tasks that can be distributed among your group of young people:

- ➔ Keeping in touch with the other young people, organising the travel information and collecting the details;

- ➔ Being the contact person with the venue you will stay in;

- ➔ Taking care of the arrangements regarding food;

- ➔ Being the “logistics specialist” – looking after shopping, materials and all of the practical needs like local transportation, free-time activities, etc;

- ➔ Taking care of the public relations and communication;

- ➔ Technical planning of the Youthpass process (and later issuing the certificates);

- ➔ Coming up with inspiring energisers and warm-up games.

These are just few selected examples of the kinds of tasks young people might be interested in taking up at this stage. The full detailed check list and task division depends on what needs to be done in your specific project.

And what about the dropouts and late-comers? As was mentioned earlier, the ideal scenario is to have the groups complete from the beginning or at the latest by the beginning of the preparation phase. But sometimes we live in a less-than-ideal world. If someone drops out and has to be replaced, and someone joins the group at a later stage, it is important to reopen the process of task distribution. Make the new young people feel welcome, and include them in the responsibilities for the preparation. This step may be very important to raise their motivation to take part in and find meaningful something that they so far had no influence or ownership over.

If somebody drops out of the group, avoid creating a culture of judging and blaming, and do not allow talking behind people's backs. If some tasks were not completed and are pending, have a meeting to

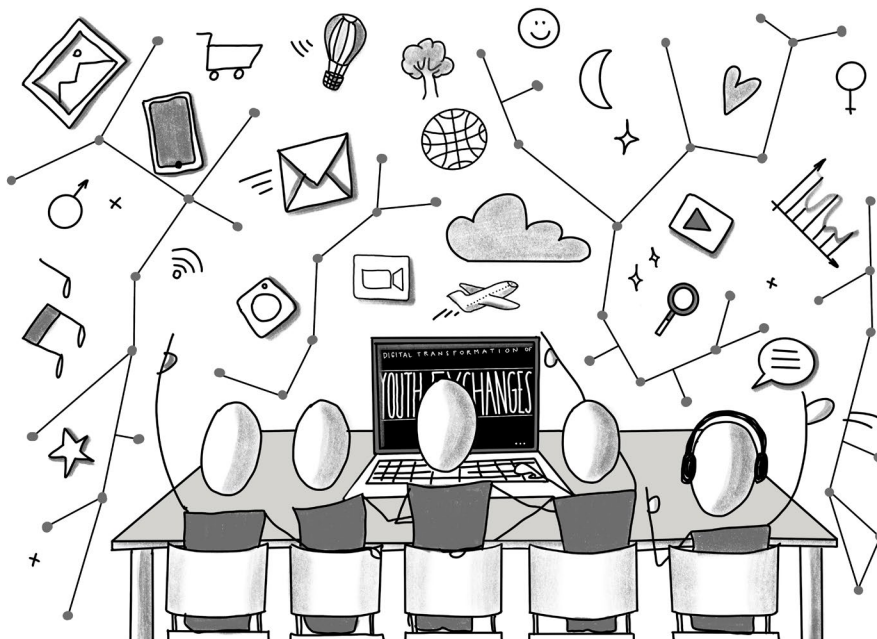
manage the situation and – if possible – share the responsibilities among the other members. In the next meeting, try to discuss what happened, and what may have led the members to quit the group in order to try and avoid it in the future.

3.4 THE POSSIBILITIES OF DIGITAL TOOLS: NETWORKING AND LEARNING CAN START EARLY

In addition to facilitating networking and communication digital tools can be incorporated in a Youth Exchange in order to maximise the opportunities for learning before, during, and after the Youth Exchange activity. In order to emphasise the long-term perspective of learning you could introduce a number of digital tools that can keep young people engaged. If you

are feeling ambitious, you could set up an interactive and engaging e-learning course in order to facilitate learning by using a free e-learning programme such as Moodle or Canvas. The SALTO Resource Centres offer the beneficiaries of the Erasmus+ Programme in the field of youth to establish a course in a Moodle-based HOP-platform. Or alternatively, you could create tasks and challenges via programmes or applications such as ActionBound or Kahoot, or use social media to introduce some interesting questions or spark a discussion among the participants. The added value is that you will also boost the digital competence of the young people which is in accordance with the Erasmus+ priorities.

When considering which platform or online tools to use, be aware of data protection (check the subchapter Protection, health and safety of participants in



Chapter 4). It is also advisable not to have all communication between the group leaders and young people on the same platform. Sometimes, some sensitive information needs to be shared among the leaders, for example about the backgrounds or special needs of some young people, so it is important to have separate channels for that. You have already established some communication channels in the previous phases of the project, and maybe it is wise to keep that separate from the socialising, networking, group-building space. Integrated platforms that can link to file sharing platforms can be useful for the project and task-related communication, and can accompany formal communication via email or other means.

3.5 VENUE(S) AND LOGISTICS

You may have already considered accommodation during the exploration or planning phases. A common solution is to rent a hostel or budget hotel, but there are other options too. Like mentioned before, a school gym can be reorganised into dorms, or you could camp in tents or you could organise home stays. There is a selection of quality youth centres across Europe as part of a programme of the youth department of the Council of Europe – check them out if you want to stay at a youth centre that has approved quality status. If places are booked or too expensive, be creative and use your contacts in the local community. Once the accommodation is confirmed, the room allocations should be organised in cooperation with the leaders and the young peoples' preferences. This could be divided by gender or age or other criteria. It is, however, maybe not the best to divide the participants in their country groups, since in the residential activity, it is important that the groups mix as much as possible to foster contacts with young people from other countries.

This is the time to confirm that the meeting venue(s) are appropriate, organise the food with consideration of the participants' dietary requirements, and organise the schedule of arrivals and departures, and pick-ups if required. There are different ways to handle arrivals. Will you ask each group to organise their own local transport and meet you directly at the venue? Or will you organise a pick-up for all of the groups at once, for example by renting a bus? The decision will have an effect on the travel budget too – in the first case, each group manages their travel costs separately, while in the second, you can pay for the bus and divide the cost by the number of participants. Check also that the venues are suitable. Which meeting rooms can be used and when? Are there enough showers and toilets, hot water, common spaces for socialising, and nature in the vicinity? What is the condition of the sleeping quarters? When is the payment due? You should send out logistical information to all young people and leaders as well as a draft programme. These documents can be shared with parents and guardians too, if needed. This is also the time to finalise what equipment and materials are needed to deliver the programme effectively.

3.6 PROGRAMME RE-CHECK

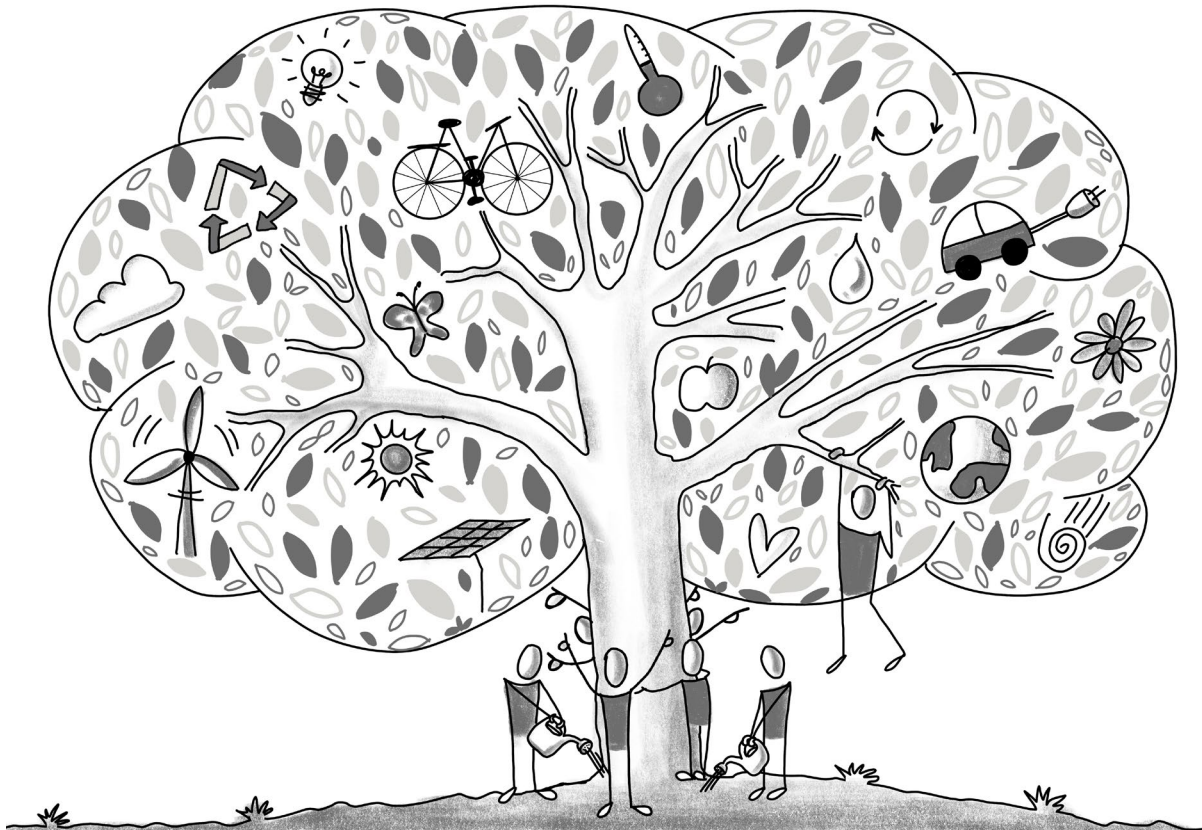
Go through the programme as you planned it in the project planning phase and see if there have been any changes that require action from your side. The timetable and programme should not be set in stone and should be open to change and adaptation. Things evolve quite quickly in the Youth Exchange activity and non-formal learning setting in general. If one session proves too tiring, if the weather is bad for outdoor activities or if the group is exhausted, there is nothing wrong with rescheduling the activities for one or two hours, or just giving everyone some time to re-

lax and regain strength. As long as the decision-making is shared and the reasons for changes are communicated in a transparent way, everybody will have the feeling that the process is in good hands. Take the possibilities for changes into consideration also when planning the logistics around the programme.

3.7 INCORPORATING SUSTAINABILITY

Environmental awareness and concern over climate change have risen rapidly in recent years. Many young people are especially worried about the current state of

affairs and want to do more. As part of the Erasmus+ Programme Youth Exchanges should promote sustainability and increase the young peoples' understanding on the topic. This could be done by raising the issue among the young people as well as by incorporating practices that reduce or compensate for the inevitable environmental footprint caused by mobility activities. A good idea in the upcoming Youth Exchange activity would be, for example, to favour recycling, eco-friendly materials and sustainable means of transport, and avoid excessive use of water and electricity, printing, plastic, and disposable tableware, to name a few ways.



3.8 EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS, CO-FINANCING AND THE MEDIA

The financial plan was already prepared, and when the project is approved, it should be clear how much money will be provided. You can now start making concrete arrangements for getting the additional funding. Possibilities for co-funding and donors have already been addressed in Chapter 2, so you can now start the communication, negotiations and fundraising as you planned.

When the Youth Exchange activity, is approaching, let everybody else in your local community know as well! You can maximise the impact of the communication by getting in touch with local news outlets – newspapers (both in paper form and digital), news agencies, websites, radio and TV stations and so on. Make a list of them. Do not sabotage your own communication plan by thinking “oh, they will never be interested in us”. You cannot know, until you try. Your job is to send the news out, theirs is to be interested.

Write a simple, good quality press release. If you do not know how, you can find a lot of good examples online⁴. The common elements that have to be there are the famous 5 Ws (who-what-when-where-why) and the H (how). Nothing more! There is no need to explain the whole history of the European Union.

A simple press release should contain:

➔ **All of the essential information:**

“The Youth Association Unicorns Together, established in 2015, is hosting for the second time a European Youth Exchange in the town of XYZ, from the 18th to the 25th of June, 2022. 28 young people coming from Albania, Finland, Ireland, Italy and Romania will spend one exciting week together, discussing and working on the topic of wellbeing and how to make our communities healthier.”

➔ **A little extra:**

“Youth Exchange has been co-funded through the European Erasmus+ Programme which since 1994, and has provided opportunities to study and learn abroad to more than 3 million young people.”

➔ **A call to action:**

“The project will include an event open to everybody on the afternoon of the 23rd of June. Our group will have a picnic in the local park. There will be music, food and drinks, so feel free to come along and we will be happy to share the results of our work with you!”

Send your press release to everybody on your list. Unless you live in a very busy city where a lot of events are happening all of the time, there is a very good chance that you will be noticed. A European youth event does not happen every day, after all. Mention also that you would like to be informed when the release will be published. Monitor the media. Check the responses and collect everything. Not only will it look good and make everybody feel proud of their work, you will need it for the final report – this is evidence that you are doing a good job.

⁴ For example, here: <https://expresswriters.com/writing-a-press-release-sample/>

Do not neglect your own organisation's and partners' organisations' social media platforms. Especially if the organisations have been established for some time and have a good network, this will bring a lot of visibility to your project. If you do not have a strong social media presence, hosting a European project is a great opportunity to start. You may need a Facebook page, a Twitter account, and an Instagram account to send out waves. And maybe think about setting up a free blog with Wordpress or Medium, to publish daily project updates.

Since the Erasmus+ is supported with European Union funds, make sure you think about promoting the visibility of the program and the EU⁵.

3.9 WELCOMING (MORE) DIVERSITY

In Chapter 1, diversity was mentioned in relation to incorporating young people with fewer opportunities in the Youth Exchange. However, creating an inclusive environment should not be something that is considered only when a participant or leader identifies

additional needs that come from a disadvantaged background. Everyone has needs related to their individual backgrounds and identities. Therefore, it is important to maintain an open and frank discussion about these needs, and encourage a positive dialogue.

The upcoming Youth exchange activity will pose a new challenge in facing diversity as a big group of people from different backgrounds will come together to spend literally 24 hours a day together. Diversity will not occur only because there are many nationalities in the room. It encompasses differences in terms of a range of issues: political views, music that young people listen to, and the football clubs they support, to name a few.

Respecting diversity means making room for a pluralism of views, opinions, and attitudes. Youth Exchange, and especially the activity in all its intensity, is a place where a lot of diversity comes together. While acknowledging the challenges that it can bring, an environment should be created that encourages learning and growing from it. Important aspects on intercultural learning are addressed in Chapter 4.



⁵ Read more about visual identity and logos here: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about-eacea/visual-identity_en.

3.10 PRACTICALITIES RELATED TO THE NEEDS OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE

The key to being responsive to young people's needs is prior preparation and the ability to be able to adapt. Make sure you know who is coming and what are the needs. Challenges often come when people have not disclosed their needs, which can happen for many reasons – and this is when solutions tend to be reactive rather than proactive.

Collect information in advance about the young people (and needless to say, treat it in a confidential way), their background, lifestyles, and related needs that should be considered. You can also talk to the other leaders for more information that the young people might not find relevant to mention.

It can be helpful to have a number of options on the registration form with tick boxes for special needs (for example: dietary needs, quiet space, step-free access, single-gender room), and a space for open text. This helps the young people to think about different needs, and makes it clear that inclusion has been considered at an appropriate time, rather than as an afterthought. You should also make sure to give options for participants to share their pronouns (a substitute for a noun that denotes someone's gender – for example: she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/them/their, zie/zim/zir).

Check carefully with the venue and the catering, share with them the relevant specific needs of your group. Make sure that the special dietary needs and requirements been shared and understood well. Do not take anything for granted: words like “vegetarian”, “lactose intolerant”, and “gluten free” can mean very different things to different people.

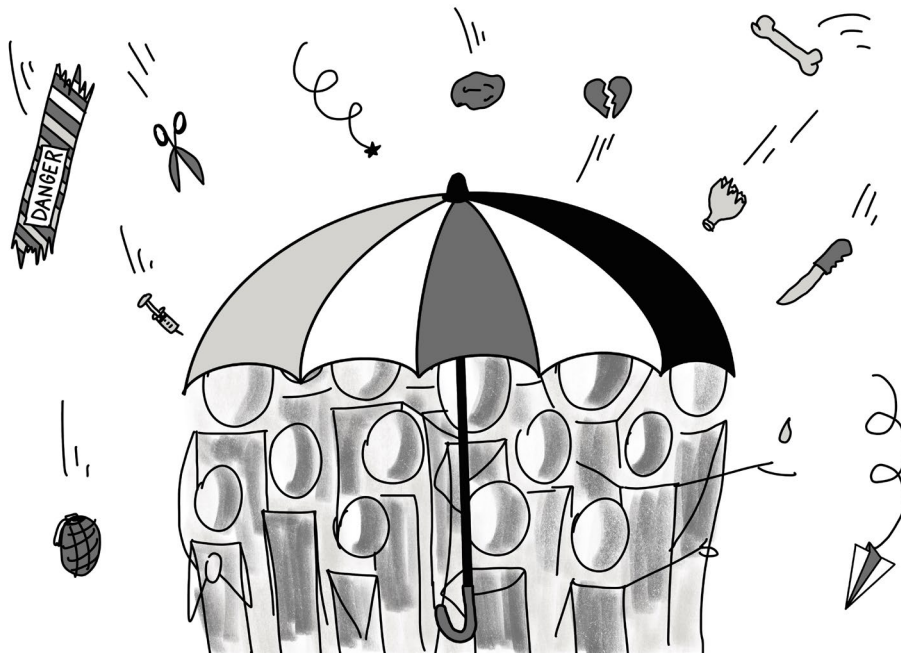
If your team of group leaders does not have experience with a specific issue, be honest about it and provide an open space for dialogue. For example, many

health conditions, disability, mental illness, issues related to sexual orientation, or political situations of the participants' countries can be really challenging to work with. Many of these areas require long and very specific training to become familiar with them. Share your concerns with the other group leaders and possibly involve the young people– or their parent or guardian – in the conversation. You can also consult professionals or organisations with specific expertise.

3.11 PROTECTION, HEALTH, AND SAFETY OF PARTICIPANTS

The protection, health, and safety of the participants is an important feature of the Erasmus+ Programme. This means physical, and also emotional safety. Most of the time, the focus is on the former – securing the venue for the Youth Exchange activity, making sure everyone has the compulsory health insurance, taking into account all of the dietary arrangements, and so on. Nonetheless, emotional safety is just as important. Travelling abroad, being away from home, meeting a lot of new people from different countries, communicating in a foreign language being in a new environment or potentially discussing sensitive topics can be an equally stressful experience and, if not supported properly, can cause very damaging results. The approach to protection, health, and safety should be treated as a holistic issue. The best way to address this is to ensure that all of the aspects of a quality Youth Exchange are thought through, an appropriate risk assessment is performed, and procedures are in place that will minimise the potential risks and ensure effective responses when needed.

A risk assessment is a vital tool to make you aware of, and to monitor, potential risks, assigned by likelihood (very unlikely to very likely) and impact (negligible to severe impact). This should include practical aspects



such as issues with travelling, and pastoral or emotional issues such as dealing with homesickness and culture clash. Actions should be identified to lower the likelihood and/or impact of certain risks, outlining possible ways of dealing with situations in advance. While checking the venue, you should also assess the possible risks in the locality – such as a lake nearby, insects, strong sun, a lot of traffic, and access to bars – and decide how to deal with them by setting out clear emergency procedures. You also need to check where the nearest medical facility is in case of an emergency and ensure there is a first aid kit, as well as at least a couple of people able to provide first aid, among the group leaders.

It is important to agree on common strategies in the consortium – areas of difference in different countries need to be taken into account regarding terms of policies and procedures. You need to make sure that all of the partners are aware of their national laws, that you share them and then agree on a common strategy.

3.11.1 Safeguarding and child protection of underage young people

All people under the age of 18 are classified as minors in the context of youth work, including in Youth Exchanges. Even if you empower young people under 18 to be active decision-makers in their lives and give them responsibility, in the eyes of the law, they are still children. This means that consent and permission is required from a parent or guardian, and the group leader holds loco parentis for the young person – in other words, they are legally responsible. Leaders must take responsibility for the care, welfare and safety needs of all minors in their care at all times.

Depending on the country, the approach to the protection, health, and safety of young people varies. Some countries have clear guidelines and policies including background checks for those working with young people. In other countries, there is no such clear legislation. There is some specific legislation when it

comes to taking young people out of the country in some cases. National laws and policies might be the most relevant for the host country, however some of the rules apply regardless of where the activity takes place. In addition to national legislation, there are some policies that are applicable at the level of youth work practice at an organisational level. For example, some organisations have a no-alcohol policy.

When it comes to the age of consent, and the legal drinking age, for example, it can be a difficult matter on a Youth Exchange activity, as the legal limits may be different in the country of origin and the country of the activity. In these situations, it is advisable to take the highest age considering both restrictions. This would mean in practice that if a group of young people comes from a country where the legal drinking age is 18, but the Youth Exchange activity takes place in a country where the age is 16, the higher age – 18 – would be implemented for that group. The same applies for the age of consent. In the Youth Exchange activity, you may have agreed on a specific policy about alcohol consumption for all ages. It is worth considering the impact on possible minors if alcohol is permitted for those legally allowed to drink alcohol.

It is good practice for the protection of both sides that a leader should never be alone with an underage young person. At all times, they should be close enough to another adult to be within sight and hearing range. If circumstances require that they should be alone with a young person, they should ensure that another adult has agreed to this course of action, knows what they are doing, and how long it will last.

3.11.2 Documentation

Paperwork might be a boring part of any project but there are certain things that are really important in order to ensure a safe and protective environment.

Copies of all of these should be brought in hard and digital copy to the Youth Exchange activity. **The main ones are:**

- ➔ A European Health Insurance Card (for those who are from countries that have one) and comprehensive travel and medical insurance that covers:
 - Travel insurance (including damage for loss of luggage);
 - Third party liability (including, wherever appropriate, professional indemnity or insurance for responsibility);
 - Accident and serious illness (including permanent or temporary incapacity);
 - Death (including repatriation in case of projects carried out abroad);
- ➔ Prior authorisation of participation from a parent or guardian for young people under 18;
- ➔ Health form;
- ➔ Tickets;
- ➔ Copies of participants' identity cards or passports;
- ➔ Emergency contact details.

3.11.3 Data protection

Youth Exchanges are bound by the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which was introduced in 2018. This comprehensive legislation means that personal data should only be used for the reason it has been given, and data must be erased once it no longer has a function. This is especially true of sensitive data, which includes dietary and health information as well as information about religious beliefs and sexual identity. The coordinating organisation and leaders should only ask for information that is neces-

sary for the Youth Exchange activity, and it should only be shared, with the permission of the individual, with those who need it. Participants' contact information should not be shared with other participants without permission. Make sure you prepare photo and video consent documents, so the young people can decide for themselves if they are comfortable with having their visual presence used online and in communications. These must be signed by a parent or guardian for minors under the age of 18 years old.

3.11.4 Unexpected things will happen, something will go wrong

Even in the best planned project, some things will go wrong – a group can fail to find all of the members or a person falls sick at the last minute. Despite your best efforts and preparation, there is nothing you can do to avoid these situations. However, if you did your preparation carefully, the chances are that you have a solution at hand on how to respond and avoid further damage to the people involved or to the project.

3.12 THE ACTIVITY IS REALLY HAPPENING!

If you have your checklists, this is the time to really use them.

A few last-minute things to double-check are:

- ➔ **Have you got the details of the participants' arrivals?** Did you check that the information is clear and understandable for you, and do you really know when they are coming and to where? Did you agree about the transport? Did you agree about the meeting point? Does everyone know how to get there?;

- ➔ **Is everything set with the accommodation?** When did you last visit the place or check in with the manager over the phone? Maybe something has changed. It is better to avoid last minute surprises;

- ➔ **Is the food going to be there?** Are the instructions about special dietary needs really understood? A meeting in person to check all of the little details could be the best idea, since food is a really sensitive issue, and any allergies can have serious consequences;

- ➔ **Is there anyone who has some medical issues?** Do you have a first aid kit? What will the procedure be in the case of an accident? Make sure you studied the health condition of the participants in case you need to act fast. Do you have their emergency contacts that you can reach if something happens?;

- ➔ **Have all of the materials been bought?** (not only the materials directly related to the programme, but also the stationary, toilet paper, soap, cookies and tea bags – whatever you may need).

Once the basic survival of the group is guaranteed, at least you know that everybody will be warm and fed. It is then time to move forward on your **list of priorities:**

- ➔ Is the programme really “ready-ready”? Is every session prepared? Also check with the partners on the state of their contributions;

- ➔ Is everything ready for the local community events? Double-check all of the details;

- ➔ Have the press releases been sent out? Is the information present on each partner's website and social platforms? Is anybody monitoring the coverage?;

- ➔ Double- and triple-check the arrivals and travel information. Is everybody accounted for?

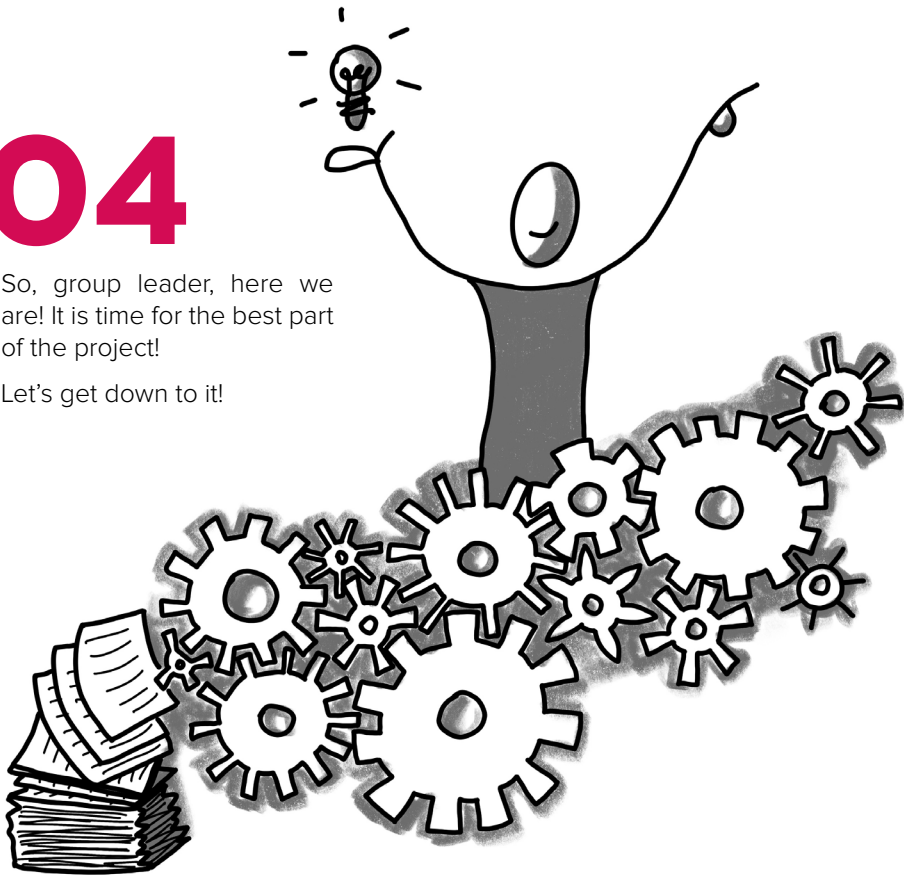
That's it, you are ready to go!

IMPLEMENTATION

04

So, group leader, here we are! It is time for the best part of the project!

Let's get down to it!



4.1 MANAGING THE TRAVELS AND ARRIVALS

The travel to the residential activity starts the most adventurous part of the Youth Exchange for the young people from your partners' groups arriving in your country and local environment. For some of the young people, it might be the first time they have travelled abroad. One of the main points during the travel is the safety of everyone. This makes public transportation the most appropriate choice. It reduces travel costs, and most of the responsibility for safety is entrusted to the transfer companies, which have the appropriately trained staff and appropriate insurance. Handling the travel, namely planning the route, buying the tickets, packing, getting to the station or airport on time, going through the administrative and safety procedures, dealing with possible delays, motion sickness or fear of flying, and arriving in a completely new and unknown place can be tiring and stressful for the young people next to being exciting, and they might need a little time to settle on arrival. It is better not to start the programme too early or too intensively. On the other hand, this is the moment the young people have been waiting for. Waiting for too long for the programme to start would make you lose the moment, where the enthusiasm is at its peak. As a general rule, it would be wise to wait with activities or decisions that affect everyone until all of the groups have arrived.

4.2 OH NO! WHAT HAPPENS IN CASE OF A NO-SHOW?

Even in the best planned project, last minute changes can happen. A partner can fail to gather an agreed number of young people or a person falls ill or has other unforeseen problems that prevent him or her from attending the Youth Exchange activity. This is not

only unfortunate, but it might also have practical implications on the project and the budget.

You may want to contact your National Agency, provide a full explanation and check what to do. As long as there is the minimum number of young people and group leaders for the Youth Exchange to be eligible it is still manageable. If the numbers drop below, either that specific group is out (not eligible to be covered by the grant) or the whole Youth Exchange is cancelled. This is why it is better if groups are designed with at least one more young person than the minimum requirement, and a group leader has a backup. This way, should something happen, the overall project will not be at risk.

4.3 GROUP DYNAMICS

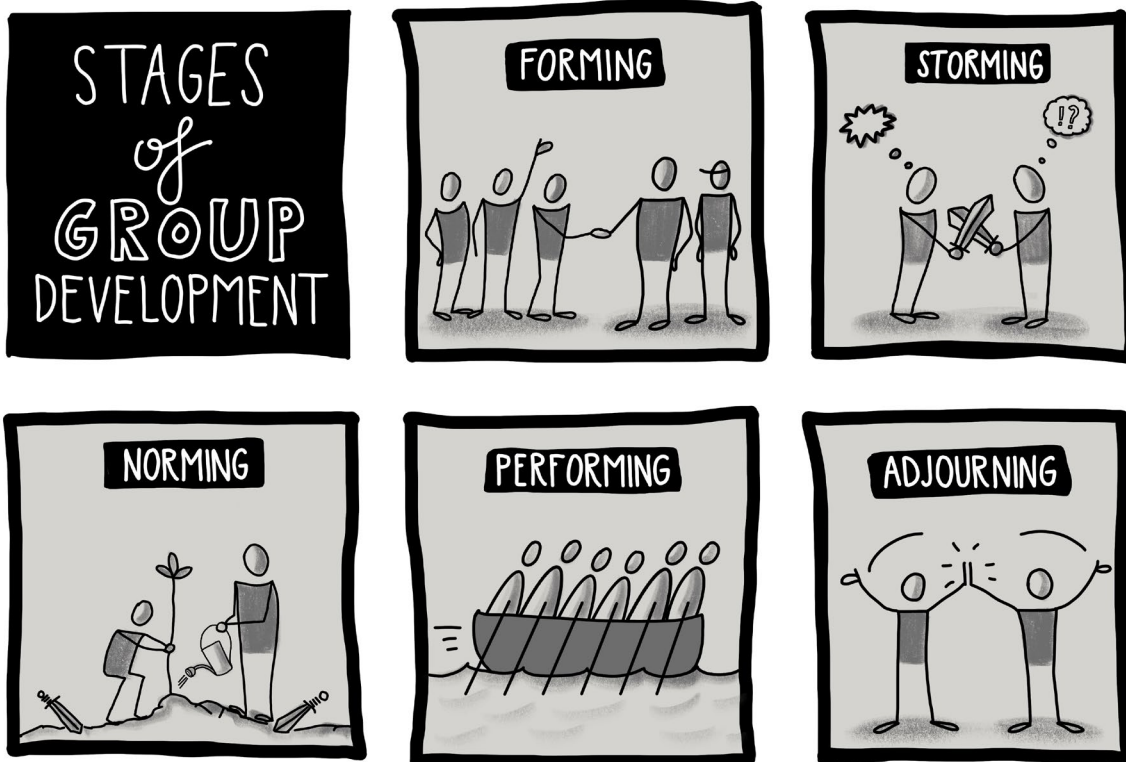
Group development and dynamics are important throughout the Youth Exchange. There are several group processes going on throughout the Youth Exchange, and these processes will run simultaneously. Your group, which is the host group, started to form and learn about each other when the first ideas were put on the table. This group hopefully resolved any tensions and formed a bond and a good level of co-operation while they were preparing for the Youth Exchange activity. Having been through this process will allow your group to work with other groups more easily. After the activity, they will continue to work together and will gradually dissolve after the conclusion of the project and the sharing of the results.

Parallel to this process, similar group processes are taking place in the other group(s), but since the preparation process was different for them, and maybe shorter if your partners recruited the young people at a later stage, it might be that different dynamics have developed between them, or maybe the group has not had a chance to develop at all. It might, however,

happen that once the Youth Exchange activity starts, the young people from the same country might seek support from each other in the beginning, and even those groups that were not particularly cohesive, start turning inwards. Although this is normal, it is important to gently direct the young people to open up to the wider group. There is also the group of leaders which is in charge of the Youth Exchange, and you representing the hosting partner have a key role in that group.

4.4 PHASES OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT

Non-formal learning relies very much on the group, which is one of its main sources. One thing to take into consideration is the stages of group development. This applies from the beginning, but special attention should be given to it in the Youth Exchange activity when different groups from different countries come together. All of the group processes will be more strongly expressed when the time is so intensively spent together and outside of everyone's usual circles and activities.



Five different stages of group or team development can be identified:

- ➔ **Forming:** The first bonds are being formed, but the participants are still polite and not engaging with each other on a deeper level;
- ➔ **Storming:** The participants start getting more acquainted with each other, alliances start to form, tensions, disagreements and clashes occur;
- ➔ **Norming:** The participants slowly learn to interact with each other, establish some ground rules, and learn how to approach conflicts constructively and find their position/role;
- ➔ **Performing:** The group has a common vision, a common goal, they approach each other assertively and are at the height at their performance;
- ➔ **Adjourning:** The moment when it comes time to say goodbye, for the group to separate in a healthy way and the participants continue on their own way.

Bearing this in mind, you should invest in creating constructive group dynamics for optimal learning throughout the Youth Exchange with a specific emphasis on the Youth Exchange activity, and support the different group processes in all of the phases. The “Forming” phase requires that the emphasis is on activities that are aimed at getting to know and getting comfortable with others. Even the “Storming” phase, which sounds like something to just get over with as soon as possible, allows the group to work through tensions and stop being polite and superficial –and learn valuable lessons. You might, however, want to check if this is really happening, and if not, help the group to move forwards to the “Norming” phase by re-establishing the ground rules, reviewing the task division, and engaging in group-building activities.

Sometimes it happens that the group just does not seem to connect, and the energy is low when the group is supposed to perform. Luckily, this is very rare in Youth Exchanges. On the other hand, if the group works well together, it is pure magic, and the “Performing” phase is characterised by strong energy, motivation and commitment. When such an activity comes to an end and the young people are sad to be leaving the next day, it is tough, but you should still complete your programme. The “Adjourning” phase might make them more emotional in the moment, but it will help them move on in a healthier and happier way.

The chance for successful group development and dynamics in a Youth Exchange activity of course also depend on how well the project as a whole has been handled so far. Many issues that were brought up in relation to the topics of inclusion, diversity, protection, health, and safety of the participants in particular influence how everyone feels about him or herself and the others. Also, if young people have frustrations about the programme, accommodation, food, logistics or how the leaders handle all of these, it takes its toll. A well planned and managed framework that young people find meaningful for them builds their energy for what they came for: meeting, connecting, getting to know each other, and learning together.

4.5 WHAT ARE THE CONCRETE MEASURES TO SUPPORT GROUP DYNAMICS AT THIS STAGE?

4.5.1 Group-building activities

As you remember from Chapter 2, group-building activities are usually held in Youth Exchange activities. Group-building activities are playful, mostly warmly welcomed by the young people, and even more importantly, usually do their job. You probably have

planned some in the programme already, but once you meet and get to know the group at the latest, you should reconsider the following aspects:

Do you suggest group-building activities with physical activity or contact? In that case, what are the limitations to participation in different activities? Do you have a person with reduced mobility or who is visually impaired or hard of hearing? Do you have young people who, for whatever reason (religious, cultural or other) should not engage in physical contact?;

Do all of the group-building activities gather the whole group at once? Some people (or a lot of them) might find it challenging to immediately start working in a large group of 20–30 or even 40 participants. As rule of thumb, you can start with tasks and challenges in smaller groups and then slowly increase the number. If possible, it is great to finish with an activity in the whole group, since ultimately that is the safety net you would like to have for the young people;

People learn in different ways⁶, engage with each other in different ways, and develop relationships in different ways. Therefore, the tasks given and the activities for group-building should reflect this and have a variety of different types;

There are a lot examples of team-building activities available, you just need to know where to find them. One example is the SALTO Toolbox⁷;

4.5.2 Get to know the young people personally and respond to the needs that occur

It might be a good idea to get to know each of the young people, not only your group, individually, so you can gain their trust, and understand what they might need to fully participate in the process and feel comfortable. This might give you an idea how to bring the group together, so the ones who find it more difficult to integrate into the group will have their chance. If you already know the group and that there might be some power dynamics that would influence the participation of everyone, you might want to empower the more reserved ones first, before creating the dynamics in the rest of the group.

Also, take a note that the young people in your own group might have different roles and needs here than in the smaller group which was preparing for the Youth Exchange activity. They might be for example less outspoken or assertive in the bigger group, and you should pay attention to why. Maybe they feel insecure speaking in a foreign language or they are shy among people they do not know? On the other hand, some of them might feel empowered by the role as one of the hosts or because the preparation went so well, and feel like in this composition of young people, they can be given a voice that they have not had before.



⁶ Ibid

⁷ <https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/>

4.6 GAMIFICATION: HOW TO MAKE THE ACTIVITIES AND TEAM WORK MORE INTERESTING?

Most people like playing games, and they are a big part of contemporary youth culture. Gamification is the creation of an immersive narrative, and introduces game thinking in non-game contexts to encourage participants in problem-solving, and to increase their contributions. This can create engagement, and empathy, and make an experience more interactive and fun. To create an immersive structure, you need to be creative. There are many tips from the game design world that can help to make this part of the experience more fun, interactive, and engaging. To increase the impact, the spirit of immersion should also be maintained coherently.

You could also introduce levels of voluntary challenge and reward them. This is a very important tip in gamification⁸. Everybody appreciates challenges in a game, though not so much in real life sometimes. Research⁹ shows that the main difference is this: in a game, people choose to be challenged. You could agree on different levels of participation. The task is the same for everybody, but for those who want, they can bring in an extra challenge, and of course, an extra reward. This approach allows the tasks to be done by all, additional stimulation and motivation for those who want it, and a chance for those who find it awkward or uninteresting to opt out without seeming uncooperative.

Rewards can be extrinsic, such as gifts or bonuses (“if we reach our goal, we will go on a canoe trip”), or intrinsic, which are more based on values and recognition (such as a badge, or the ‘Wizard’ title), and sometimes a mix of both.

It’s not always easy to decide what incentives will work better with which group. For example, gamers invest a lot of time to unlock “achievements” in games. These impart absolutely no advantage in the game but represent the players’ mastery. And that is enough to motivate them.

4.7 DOCUMENT, COMMUNICATE AND BE VISIBLE

Now, it is the most important time to document what is happening and spread the news! Make sure somebody in the group is in charge of daily communication. Ensure they are linking with media and social media. It can be useful to have an experienced leader in the team to take over this, since at this stage, it is a very time-consuming and young people are now busy with other things. Take and share pictures, get the young people to write short stories, update the blog, which you might have running for the duration of the project.

Send out regular updates (3–4 times a day on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, even more on Twitter) and try to reach as many people as possible. Send around three press releases to the local news outlets: one at the beginning, one in the middle, and one after the end of the activity. Especially the community event, if you have one, could be interesting to the local media, since it connects the Youth Exchange with the local context in the most tangible way.

Take care, however, that before you share, for example, photos, that you have the young people’s (or their guardian’s if they are underage) consent in writing.

⁸ “the application of game elements and digital game design techniques to non-game problems, such as business and social impact challenges”.
<https://www.coursera.org/learn/gamification>

⁹ “A Theory of Fun for Game Design”, by R. Koster, 2013.

4.8 YOUR YOUTH EXCHANGE LEAVES A MARK IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

You are now very visible to the local community, just by being there, especially if the activity is hosted in a small town or village. A Youth Exchange activity always leaves a mark on the local environment. Part of the mark can be planned, such as restoring a walking path, painting walls, preparing a local festival, or other activities that make up the community event(s), but a lot is happening through everyday encounters of the foreign young people and leaders with the locals at the venue, in the public spaces, shops, coffee bars, restaurants... The impact of these encounters is often neglected in project documents, but they still leave a deep mark on the people.

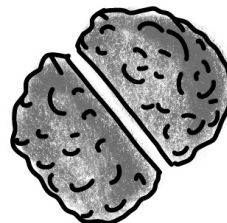
A local community hosting Youth Exchange activities on a regular basis gets used to multinational groups of young people appearing for short periods of time. Shops and bars adapt to the needs of the groups, and interaction with the local environment during the activity becomes less of a challenge. Other local youth organisations can also learn from and get inspired by Youth Exchanges. It will also be a valuable experience for the other national groups to get a feel for your locality, and experience in the everyday life in some other place in Europe. Visiting the main tourist attractions abroad in a capital city is one kind of experience abroad, and definitely valuable, but interacting with the locals provides a completely different kind of insight into the place.

Be happy and proud of your joint efforts. Your local environment is most likely very proud of you too. You are the ones getting some European things done!

4.9 COLLECT A LOT OF FEEDBACK AND DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT

Feedback is an invaluable element of non-formal education programmes as it allows the participants to reflect on their experiences, and provides the basis for adaptations to the programme to make it relevant to their needs and wants. In order to use feedback effectively, you must be able to be flexible and adaptable during the residential activity.

In the residential activity, having reflection groups is a core tool for getting and using feedback. These groups should meet regularly, usually daily, to reflect on the day's programme – this could be independently or with a leaders' support. The feedback from the reflection groups should be input into daily team meetings between the leaders. Leave enough time for debriefing and reflection after every activity, every day. Create safe spaces and smaller groups. This allows people to express tension in a healthier way; sometimes people just need to blow off some steam. You may also want to consider inviting some group members to provide their feedback directly to the team meetings to emphasise that their voice is being heard. It is useful to give updates to the young people on what adaptations have been made in light of their feedback, and if changes cannot be made, explain why to make it clear and transparent. This will enhance the participant-led element of the activity and empower the young people to share their thoughts and ideas, putting participation into practice.



4.10 REFLECTION OF LEARNING AND ISSUING THE YOUTHPASS

As first mentioned in Chapter 2, reflection and evaluation are among the key steps of learning. That is why they are such an essential part of Youth Exchanges. As, in practice, most often evaluations are designed only as a basic gathering of information from among the participants, this lacks a more thorough insight into the processes that took place during the activity.

During a residential activity, in addition to the daily impressions in the reflection groups, it is good to reflect on and evaluate the learning experiences and the outcomes. This could be done in the reflection groups, and part of it could and should be done individually. It is important to recognise the results and elements of learning that relate to the general objectives for Youth Exchanges in the Erasmus+ Programme as well as the objectives of your specific Youth Exchange. Many different methods are available for evaluation, and by using evaluation questions, you can guide the evaluation in the direction you wish to know more about.

During the Youth Exchange activity, Youthpass and the key competence framework, which were described in Chapter 2, also become really handy. Throughout and especially in the end, the young people should be encouraged to review everything they have learnt, and with the help of you and the other leaders, take it to the next level by putting the learning outcomes into the key competence framework. An ideal scenario is:

- ➔ You introduce the Youthpass at the beginning of the Youth Exchange activity, since some young people might not have heard about it so far. It is also good to remind everybody right from the start what a Youth Exchange is and what its purpose is;
- ➔ Then, re-introduce it in the middle to give people the opportunity to take a look back at everything

that has happened so far, to reflect on the learning experience;

- ➔ Give it a good amount of time at the end of the activity, on the last day. It is a great way to review the whole programme, and to assess the learning achievements – including emerging unplanned ones.

Issuing the actual certificate (printed on paper, with signatures) can be done right there, or it can be filled in, scanned or printed and sent later, after the end of the entire Youth Exchange project. It is a choice, some prefer to fill it in a week or so after the end because then they are better able to reflect on the experience.

4.11 HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH AND HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH? – “LIFE BEGINS AT THE END OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE”

Learning can be fun, exciting and rewarding, but the process naturally involves challenges. In a Youth Exchange activity, young people’s learning process intensifies, when every day brings something new at a fast pace. As has been said many times, it is important that young people face challenges, but the process must be monitored and controlled by the leaders, so that the burden does not grow too big.

Learning can be illustrated through zones, where a learner enters at different times. The zones indicate the degrees of personal challenge that a specific experience creates. This differs from one person to another. In the “comfort zone”, no major challenges are encountered, although it might offer a new experience and new knowledge. Personal values, perceptions and convictions remain relatively untouched. In the “stretching zone”, questions are being raised and there are opportunities for changing perceptions, attitudes or behaviours. It is the place that can be reached

through challenging activities and/or where people put their preconceptions and worldviews to the test. By overcoming these anxious feelings, reshaping existing perceptions and integrating new experiences, young people are broadening their “comfort zone”. That is, new experiences that have been reflected on and processed do not belong in the “stretching zone” anymore, but become something where they feel comfortable and safe. In other words, the young people have learnt something.

If the stretching goes too far, the young people might get into the “crisis zone”, and it is in this zone that they are vulnerable. One also learns from anxiety and crisis, and it can be a valuable learning experience when its energy is channelled constructively and only happens occasionally. There is a thin line between the “crisis

zone” and the “panic zone”, and the consequences of entering the “panic zone” are serious. When people panic, they block, the only thing they have in mind is to run back to their “comfort zone”, and learning becomes impossible. At this stage, the young people might undergo emotional processes that cannot be contained and dealt with in the programme.

Your task is to try to encourage the young people to enter the “stretching zone” while trying to keep them away from the crisis, and especially the “panic zone”. But in case a young person slips there, it is important that you and the rest of the leaders address the situation effectively, and restore the participant’s safety and comfort as soon as possible.



4.12 INTERCULTURAL LEARNING

Intercultural learning or learning from diversity is not only an essential process in Youth Exchanges, but also a topic that should be addressed directly by the programme and activities. As described in Chapter 2. In brief, intercultural learning is often misunderstood and simplified. Here, intercultural learning is approached as follows:

- ➔ Every (young) person comes with their own set of behaviours, beliefs, values and worldviews, or some would say with their own culture;
- ➔ Learning from diversity is a long-term process of increasing one's intercultural sensitivity, through questioning inherent behaviours, values and beliefs;
- ➔ It is based on interaction with other people from different backgrounds and with different behaviours, beliefs, values and worldviews;
- ➔ It does not happen automatically in every interaction, but it requires personal engagement, reflection and critical thinking;
- ➔ It is primarily learning about oneself.

In every Youth Exchange, you should facilitate the process of learning from diversity and not expect that it will happen on its own in the Youth Exchange activity. Although the most concrete opportunities for it are there since all of the young people and leaders are together. Some things will happen on their own, because there is so much diversity and so many things to explore that certain insights, reflections and even changes are bound to happen. That said, a much more significant process of learning from diversity will take place if you create an environment for it, as well as organised opportunities for interaction. The important thing is that you should try to avoid basing any related activities on the assumption that the diversities

and commonalities in the group are derived from the participants' nationalities. Encourage the young people also to expand their perspectives in this regard.

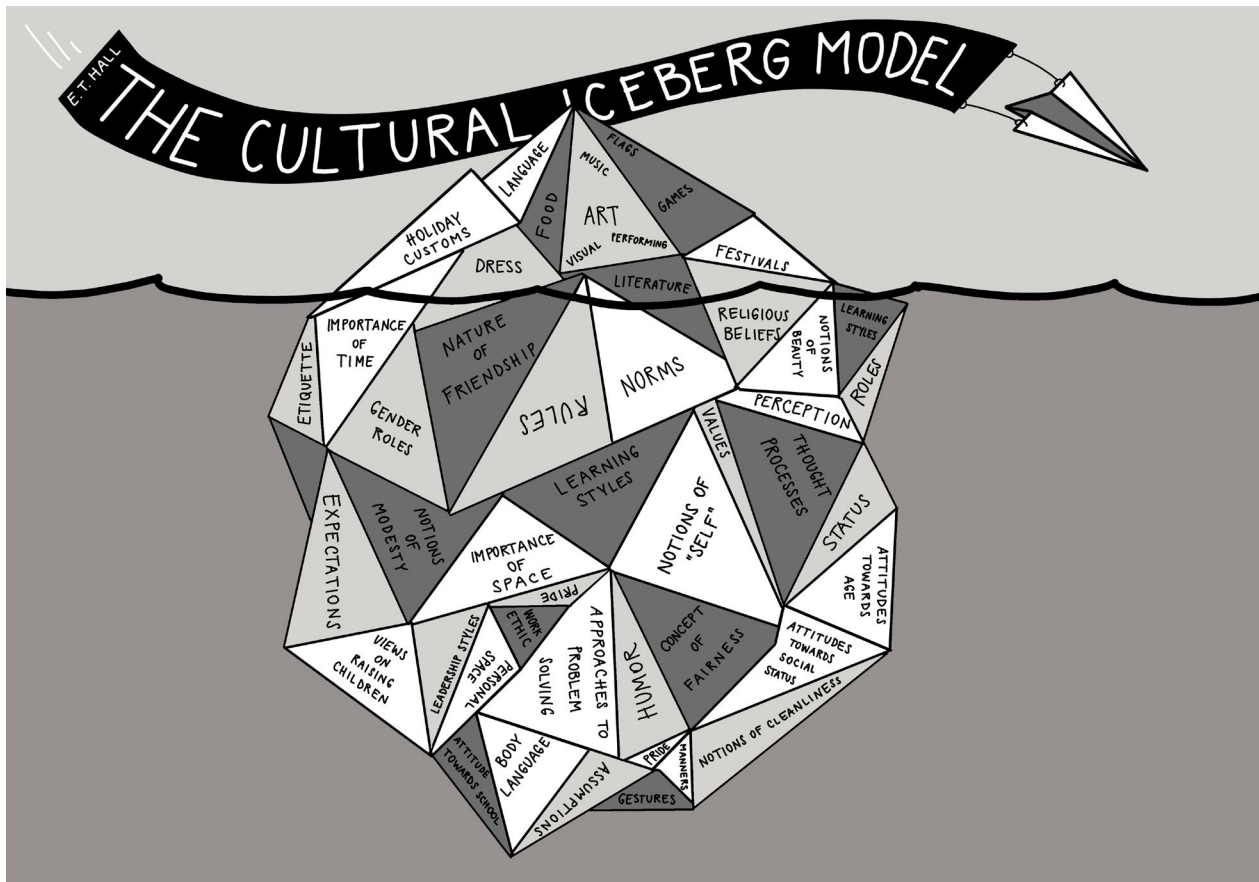
In order to facilitate intercultural learning in a Youth Exchange (in all of its phases), below are some topics that should be included:

- ➔ **Identity:** before meeting the topic of intercultural diversity, young people should be able to reflect on who they are and what makes them the way they are. Youth Exchanges have enormous potential for young people to learn about themselves, and this should be utilised as much as possible. Young people can define parts of their identity when finding similarities with some people and/or differences with others;
- ➔ **Perception of others:** our identity and values, and the worldviews we derive from them, influence the way we perceive reality and the people we meet. At the same time, some perceptions of others are based on generalisations we are exposed to through different mechanisms in the society, such as family, school, religion, the media, and our peers. Young people will inevitably come with a set of stereotypes and prejudices, and when in an unknown environment and surrounded by different people, they might be activated strongly. That is only natural as generalisations help them navigate the complex realities around them, and they are simply part of our coping mechanisms. It is the role of the group leaders to challenge and deconstruct these generalisations and assumptions;
- ➔ **Empathy and celebrating difference:** this should be at the centre of your work with the young people, as essential aspects of embracing and learning from diversity. Whenever possible, you should encourage young people to enter into interaction

beyond the surface exchanges of how they eat in Romania, how the houses look in London or how beautiful the countryside is in Albania. Each interaction that engages the heart and not just the brain is likely to result in more meaningful insights. The essential thing here is to question things, and try to think about things from others' perspectives;

→ **Culture shock:** some of these cultural clashes could be so intense that they could cause culture

shock. While clashes can happen between two (or more) people, they can also happen between a person and the behaviours they observe in a different environment – even without any direct engagement with other people. If there are a lot of differences compared to their own life, this might lead to a lot of frictions and even strong resistance. Be prepared for culture shock or a strong reaction to difference, and be ready to work through this together with the young people;



➔ **Diversity clashes:** culture is sometimes metaphorically presented as an iceberg. To take it one step further, each person can be represented by an iceberg, with their specific behaviours, beliefs, values, and thought patterns under the surface, which goes much deeper than what you can observe from what is presented on the surface. Certain behaviours are considered odd or difficult on the surface, because the underlying reasons for those behaviours beneath the surface are not apparent. This is natural and normal, but the elements below the surface need to be gradually exposed during a Youth Exchange to enhance empathy and understanding of others.

4.13 WHAT RULES NEED TO BE DISCUSSED?

In an environment where young people are challenged, there needs to be rules and agreements. However, everyone should take part when defining the rules, since this creates a common space. If the leaders set the rules on their own, they have much more work in implementing them, and at the same time, the group misses out on a chance for active participation and a learning opportunity for strengthening the democratic process of reaching agreements. Once the rules are set, they apply equally to all, the young people and the leaders. By following the same rules, the leaders serve as an example to their groups.

Rules can always be divided into two groups: the non-negotiable ones, and the ones that are up for discussion. Some rules are related to laws, for example, a smoking ban in closed public spaces, and no alcohol for minors, or rules of organisations, for example, the house rules of the venue might envisage cleaning one's own table after meals or that the rooms must be vacated by 10 a.m. on the day of departure,

so they must be followed regardless of what kind of group you are working with. Other rules may be negotiable, for example, that the Youth Exchange activity is alcohol free, so no one will drink, or only one person speaks at a time. The rules that are up for discussion must nonetheless be in line with the important features of the Programme, as this improves the environment for young people's learning. These rules can be formalised by group agreement.

By coming to group agreement together, the young people and leaders can set down clear expectations about what behaviour is and is not acceptable, and it can be used as an accountability tool throughout the project. You can ask questions and discuss how a group can work together, what rules should be agreed and how to behave towards one another to create the group agreement. The group agreement can be used as a live document and updated throughout the project lifespan. You should have a set of lines about what is not acceptable in any situation, and what behaviours will have a zero-tolerance response (see more about this in the next subchapter). It can also outline how to deal with conflict situations in a way that the group agrees.

Among other things, this will help those who are challenged by ambiguity, by the unknown. For a lot of people, obscurity leads to anxiety, and anxiety is not a very safe place to be. Since there will be a lot of ambiguity in every Youth Exchange activity and project coming from meeting diversity in all possible shapes and forms, you can remove it at least related to operational and technical things. Discussing what happens when and why, and who will take care of it. In the end, it is that simple.

4.14 CONFLICT AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

No matter if planning and preparation had been done perfectly, and all of the rules have been agreed on and clarified, there is still a chance that misunderstandings and disagreements will arise. Conflict can be seen as a threat or an opportunity. In its essence, conflict is an opposition or absence of agreement between two or more parties, and is a way to solve social contradictions. Conflict is inevitable, an everyday social phenomenon, and a natural part of human interaction and a group process, as individuals have differing opinions, clashing needs, and divergent concerns. Despite conflict, we still manage to successfully live and work with each other most of the time. What is not inevitable is when conflict turns into violence. Violence is not only physical, but can be emotional, psychological, verbal, or sexual. You should expect conflict in a Youth Exchange activity and embrace it as an opportunity, but at the same time, it is the group leaders' task to ensure that conflict does not turn into violence.

It is important to allow human emotions to come to the surface. The most important tool to work out why a certain set of behaviour is happening is to actively listen and be open to understanding where these behaviours are coming from. Do not judge, blame or shun people for difficult behaviour, and challenge the behaviour rather than the individual. Being in a Youth Exchange activity in a foreign country can be an overwhelming experience for many people, and can bring to surface issues or problems that may be happening in wider life. It is important to deal with issues and conflicts when they happen without creating unnecessary drama. If something violates the group agreement or is discriminatory, it is important to address it immediately. Whoever is in a leader position receives the power from the group to intervene in such cases,

and it will make the group feel safer knowing that the space is held in firm hands.

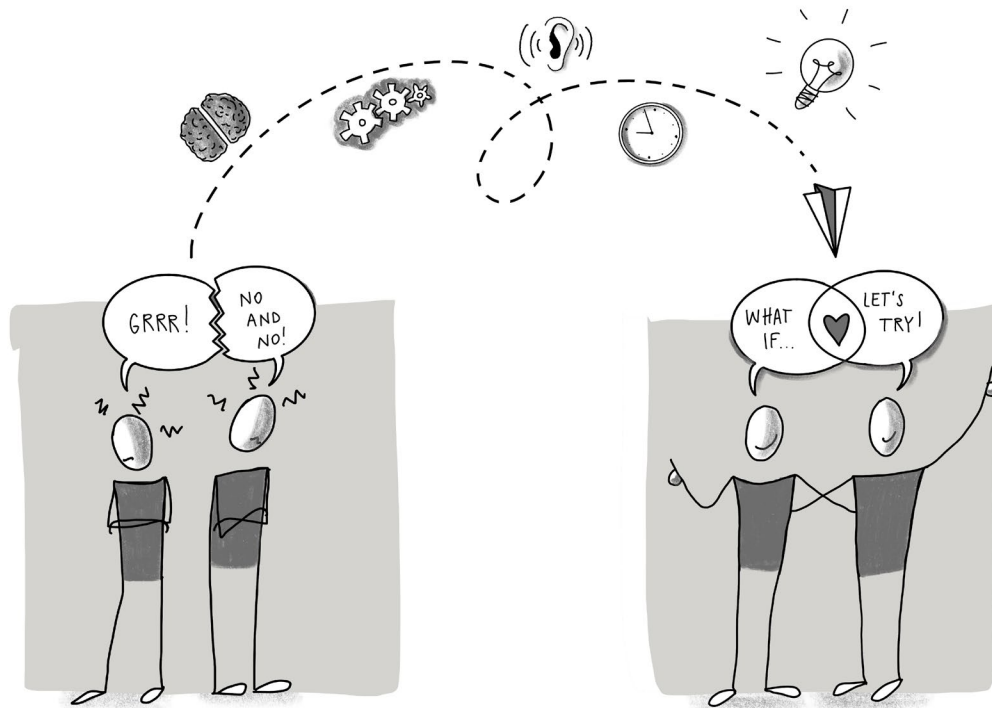
In case of interpersonal conflicts, it is the role of the group leaders to support a mediation process. This might not just involve the young people, but could happen between leaders too. By letting everyone express their feelings and interpretations of a situation separately, it may be possible to bring together the conflicting parties to share their feelings and discuss a common solution. In some cases, it may be best for this to be led by the group leaders, and in other cases, it may be better for those leading the mediation process to have some distance from the individuals involved.

Discuss delicate and personal matters in private, and treat sensitive issues with confidence where appropriate. Although the programme is important in the Youth Exchange activity, people should always come first. So if it makes sense to pause or adapt the programme to allow the group to deal with a conflict situation, then this is okay.

Finally, to ease the tension, take time for breaks, preferably outside. Even in winter, even if the weather is bad and some people may complain, take opportunities to go out. A short energiser, a short walk, or just one hour outside at the warmest time of the day. There are many physical and mental health benefits that come from not sitting in a room and talking all day.

4.14.1 Zero tolerance

In a Youth Exchange, it is recommended to take an educational approach to difficult or challenging behaviours. In some situations, where the young people are endangered or threatened by certain behaviours, there must be a zero-tolerance approach. In cases where the safety of the young people is at



risk, we have to set very clear limits. The consequences of zero-tolerance behaviours must be agreed by the group leaders in advance, and may include being sent home, involving a parent or guardian and/or involving the authorities. These areas must be well communicated before and at the start of an activity so that everyone is aware of the consequences of such behaviour. This may include: sexual assault, physical assault, sustained and unreflected verbal abuse and gestures (for example homophobic, sexist or racist language), bringing drugs to the activity, threatening the life of another participant, grooming (when an adult tries to get close to a child in order to form a relationship), and sex with children under the age of consent, or sex between a leader and a young person. While everyone hopes these situations would not happen on a Youth Exchange activity, it must be recognised that these behaviours take place in a society.

The zero-tolerance approach is enacted in order to create and sustain a safe space for all the young people and group leaders alike.

4.14.2 Dealing with disclosures

A disclosure is when a young person shares with a peer or a leader about an instance of abuse that is happening, has happened, or is at risk of happening. Youth Exchanges are an environment that involves a lot of self-reflection and sharing. Add to the mix that it is intensive Youth Exchange activity paired with the creation of a safe space, and this provides an environment where a young person may feel comfortable and safe enough to share personal experiences of abuse that require escalation.

If a young person discloses that they have been harmed, are being harmed, or are at risk of harm – this can be through behaviour as well as words – you must first and foremost listen to the young person. You must explain to them that you cannot keep what they tell you a secret, as it may need to be escalated, but that you will support them in the process. It is not your role to question or interrogate, but to listen to the young person. You may want to repeat what the young person has shared with you back to them to clarify and/or make sure you have understood the content.

If the young person is at immediate risk, you will need to involve the authorities. If the young person is not at immediate risk, you should involve the leader of the young person's group, if appropriate, as well as the person responsible for safeguarding within the sending organisation, to work out the next steps to protect the young person and deal with the disclosure.

4.15 CLOSING THE GROUP AND THE PROCESS

The end of the Youth Exchange activity does not have to mean friendships are over and the young people are never going to see each other again. But it does mean that the activity has come to an end, and most likely the group in this number and composition will not come together again. The best way to signify this is to plan a proper closure for the group process.

It is important to make sure in this period that the group can finish its mission, close any open issues, and direct its energy into an invitation to new activities. Close all of the processes you started (whatever they are: reflection groups, learning goals or intentions, clean-up groups) and leave nothing unfinished. Have a nice “closing ceremony” for the big group

that suits your style and the project. The activities for the conclusion serve to recognise and celebrate the successes of the time together, and to recognise the good practices that could be repeated in other activities with other groups in the future. If the activity was not successful, go through it together with the group, and encourage them to translate the lessons learnt to other projects.

The young people also need a chance to say goodbye to each other properly, and to get a sense of closure, which is an important part of learning and helps them to move on. It is also important to remind the young people that the Youth Exchange project is not over yet, and motivate them to continue their work with the evaluation and sharing of the project results in their home setting.

If the group wants to, have a farewell party the last evening. Make sure to check with the group, to find out what it is that they really want. Maybe a big celebration can even happen on any other night, sometime mid-week, and the group may want the last night quieter with a softer atmosphere where people can have a few last chats with their new friends.

4.16 EVALUATION

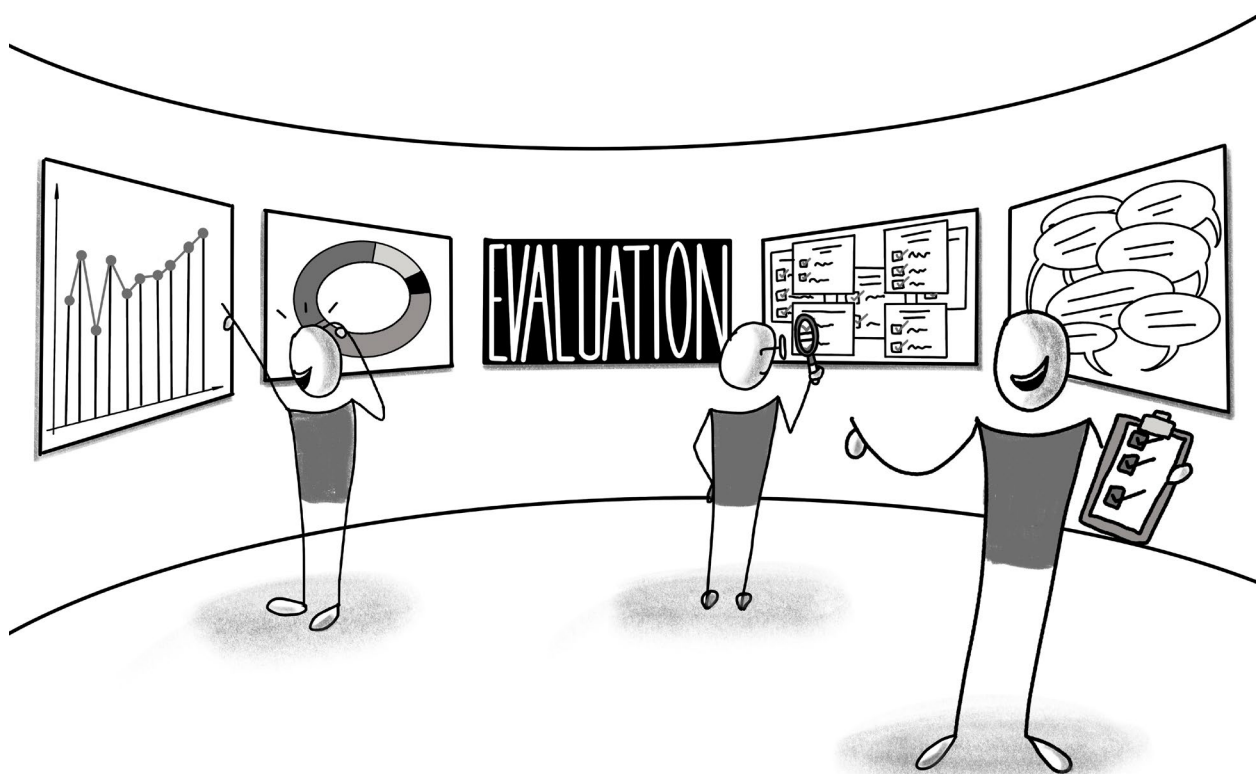
Evaluation is the collection of information and the analysis of the given information as part of a project in order to evaluate the achievement of the aim, objectives and indicators of a project, and to review the outcomes and outputs. An evaluation is a process through a series of actions. An evaluation does not take place as a one-off activity at the end of a Youth Exchange project, but as a culmination of information gathered throughout the process. Since the Youth Exchange activity is in one way the most important part of the Youth Exchange project, it is important to carry out a proper evaluation at the end of it, too.

There are three main elements of evaluation to focus on in the Youth Exchange activity, the logistics, the educational programme, and the group. The logistics includes the venue, communication and information provided. The programme can be evaluated in terms of the programme blocks, learning outcomes, activities, methods and quality of facilitation. Regarding the group, you can evaluate the atmosphere, the support from the facilitators and group leaders, the involvement of the young people, and the diversity of them. The best way to evaluate an activity based on non-formal education is to use a mix of interactive methods with other, more “classical” tools such as a question-

naire. An evaluation should provide you with quantitative data (numbers and defining finite things or giving a rating: ‘on a scale from 1 to 10’) and qualitative data (attributes or properties: ‘What was your most valuable learning achievement during the activity?’). Quantitative and qualitative data are both important, as they describe different aspects of the project.

4.16.1 Participant evaluation

There is value in doing a mid-term evaluation with the young people, around the half way mark of the Youth Exchange activity. Keep it short and simple, in



this way, it will provide valuable information to you on how the project is going and what, if anything, might need to be addressed. It will also remind the young people that they are involved in a learning process, and that their individual and group experiences are being supported. Make sure to ask the young people about their interpretation of how well the objectives were achieved at the end of the project.

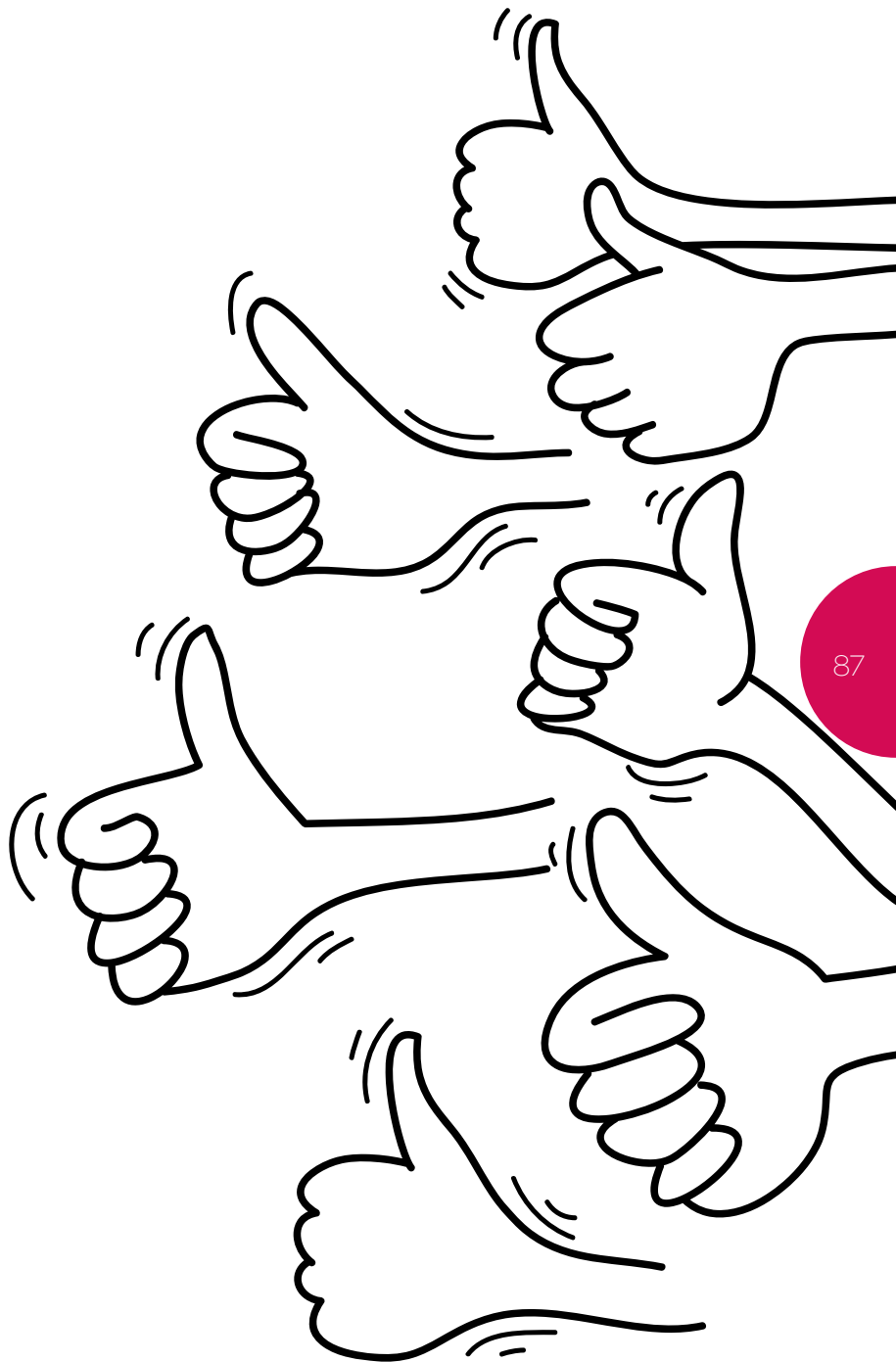
4.16.2 Team evaluation

It is very important that all of the organisers and group leaders find the time to meet and discuss the Youth Exchange throughout, either in person or online, in a final evaluation meeting after the activity, as well as at intervals during the project. Notes from daily leaders' meetings should support the final team evaluation in the Youth Exchange activity. Questions for a final team evaluation could include:

- **Did we achieve the project's objectives?**
- **How was our teamwork and communication?**
- **What worked really well?**
- **What was not so great?**
- **What would we do differently next time?**
- **What will our next steps be?**

4.16.3 Using the evaluation results

Make sure that all notes from team meetings, feedback sessions, and evaluation sessions are taken and saved in a shared place. This will not only help with reporting, but will provide data for future Youth Exchanges and provide evidence in case any issues arise after the Youth Exchange activity. It will also provide a foundation for identifying any additional actions that need to happen, whether providing support for an individual participant upon returning home, or re-writing sessions that were changed for future use. Evaluation should not take place for evaluation's sake. The outcomes should be utilised for the future in order to be meaningful.





05 FOLLOW-UP

So, group leader, congratulations, it is over now!
Or is it?

5.1 CELEBRATE THE SUCCESS

Once the activity is over, you probably need a day or two to catch up on sleep, spend time with your family and friends, maybe go for a jog, or binge your favourite TV series, and reply to all those pending emails and messages that you did not find the time to look at during the hectic Youth Exchange activity.

But once the dust settles, it is time to consider what to do next. Because, remember, although the Youth Exchange activity is over, the overall project is not over yet. There is still a lot to do.

But before that, it is good to celebrate. Celebrating does not have to mean that you need to throw another party, although you certainly can. Take a step back, reflect on what you all achieved, and be proud of it. Success, enthusiasm, commitment, and delivering the best possible results should not be taken for granted.

5.2 RETURN AND REINTEGRATION OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE

Despite being a short-term mobility activity, the experiences young people have in a Youth Exchange activity are so strong that some of them struggle emotionally and need support to go back to their everyday lives. The best way you can facilitate a safe and rewarding return is by supporting their reintegration.

Good follow-up is essential in this process! Not only does it help the young people stay connected to the Youth Exchange, but it also keeps them engaged and hopefully motivated to continue with participation in the local community, and also in future Youth Exchange projects. Remember that the young people with fewer opportunities may need additional tailored support to be reintegrated into their regular environment.

5.3 WHAT WAS THE IMPACT, IF IT ALL?

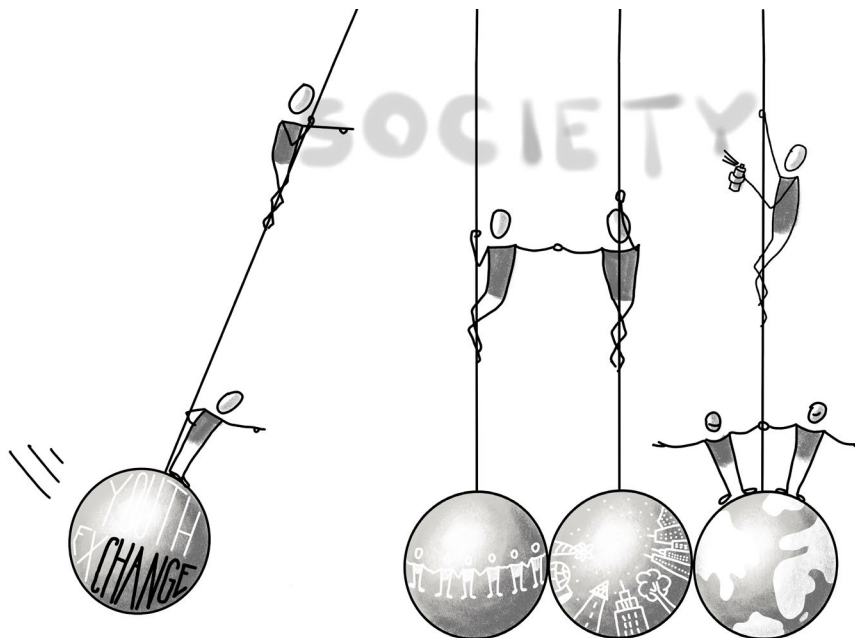
To know which steps to take, it is important to reflect on what has been done so far, and what it has led into. Impact in youth work is the effect that the activities carried out and their results have on people, practices, organisations and systems. Put simply, the fundamental change that happens as a result of an activity. Youth Exchanges are a tool for positive social change, and a better vision of the future. To have a strategic approach to impact in Youth Exchanges means to keep an eye on the bigger picture, to remember why Youth Exchanges can really make a difference in the lives of so many young people and on the communities around them.

Impact can be defined in terms of time – short-term, mid-term and long-term:

- ➔ **Short-term impact** describes more immediate changes, for example in a participant's everyday life or involvement, or in the actions of an organisation;
- ➔ **Mid-term impact** takes place after some months, and reflects more structural change, such as the development of some competence, or a new partnership being developed;
- ➔ **Long-term impact** is about sustainable change, and takes place after a long time, and it pertains to more general levels such as personal development, or societal change.

It can also be defined in terms of beneficiaries – young people, organisations, local communities, and a wider systemic level. All of the stakeholders involved in the project will receive some kind of positive impact from it.

It can be challenging to demonstrate impact effectively. This is why indicators are set at the start of the project planning, to accompany the aim and objec-



tives, as outlined in Chapter 2. To assess the impact, data can be collected with qualitative and quantitative methods. A questionnaire or a poll is an easy tool that can be sent out three to six months after the Youth Exchange. Another solution can include organising a focus group at a similar time period after the Youth Exchange.

In order to measure mid- and long-term impact, the organisers can produce new questionnaires and tools specifically designed to assess the impact after several months or years, or use other qualitative or quantitative methods such as focus group interviews or surveys. During the planned project span, the short-term impact will start to take place immediately, and will have to be measured and documented, while the medium-term and long-term will come after the project end. It is important to schedule reminders to do the longer-term impact measurement even after the project has closed.

5.4 PROJECT RESULTS

Project results are achievements of a Youth Exchange, and the type of result will vary depending on the type of project. Results can be classified as either outputs or outcomes. Outputs are visible and tangible results or products and as such can be quantified. Some examples of outputs in Youth Exchanges are: street events, photos and videos, online platforms, new tabletop games, and reports.

Outcomes are more abstract and intangible. They can be understood as an added value, and are usually difficult to quantify. This does not make them any less important than outputs. For example, they can be: increased awareness about a topic, new methods and approaches, more openness towards diversity, or more readiness to support young people and youth organisations and networks. They can be achieved by the young people, partners or other stakeholders

involved in the Youth Exchange project.

There are different ways to communicate the project results:

- ➔ **Communicating** (circulating, spreading) information about the project results to all relevant stakeholders;
- ➔ **Exploitation** (benefitting, using) the outcomes and project results, and making sure that they are not only useful to the project partners, but also in the wider community.

Communication and exploitation can help the outcomes and outputs of the Youth Exchange go that extra mile, to achieve even more, to reach out to even more people, and to spread the message even further. It can also be a tool to recognise the efforts and participation of the young people in the project, and to publicly celebrate the success of the project. Youth Exchanges are also great opportunities to build the positive reputation of your organisation. Do not forget to involve the young people and partners in these actions!

5.5 CREATING PROJECT OUTPUTS

As for the project outputs, you can start to make videos, and you do not have to have any professional equipment in order to do that. Nowadays, cameras in smartphones are often enough to capture great memories and resources, and there is also lots of free editing software. The following free tools are suggested to create promotional materials and outputs that are attractive and professional:

- ➔ **Video editing:** YouTube, iMovie for iOS, PowerDirector for Android;
- ➔ **Photo compiling:** PicMonkey, Fotor, Powtoon;
- ➔ **E-newsletters:** Mailchimp;

➔ **Infographics:** Piktochart;

➔ **Design work:** Canva.

Be careful when using photos from the Internet or those taken by some of the participants in the project. Make sure that all photographs involving the young people have been approved by the individual, and that photos found online have been released into the public domain under a Creative Commons License (or you could end up with a hefty copyright fine).

5.6 VISIBILITY

There are certain things that need to be done as part of your contractual obligations when receiving the financial support for your Youth Exchange project within Erasmus+. They are mainly connected to the visibility, which states that beneficiaries must clearly acknowledge the European Union's support in all communications or publications related to the project. This must be done according to the provisions included in the grant agreement.

5.7 PLAN TO COMMUNICATE THE RESULTS

It is important not to try to do anything and everything in your communication and activities. As with the rest of the project, it is important to think about impact, target groups, and what you can do realistically with the resources you have. Together with your partners and the young people, you should put together a plan that can be delivered together:

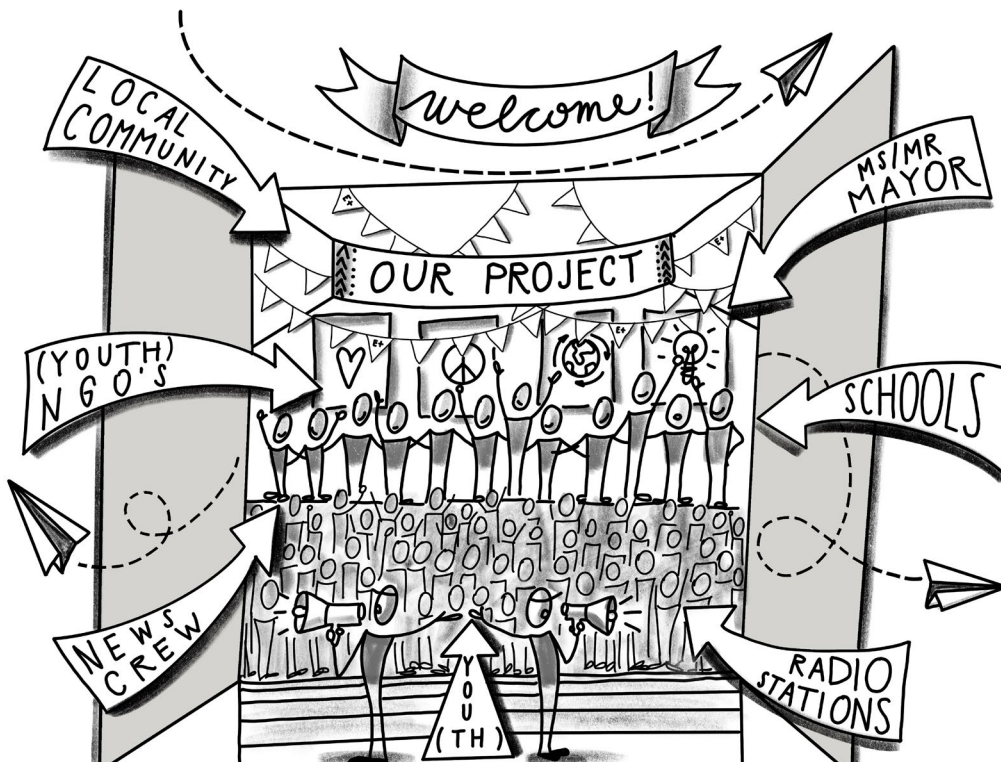
- ➔ **Documentation of project results** – this will be much easier if you make sure that you are tracking, capturing and recording the process of the development and implementation of the out-

come. This will allow you to communicate the results even to those who could not witness, see or play them in person. Regarding outcomes that are intangible, such a process is of even greater importance;

- **Choose your target groups** – decide who you want to target, think about how easy or difficult they are to reach and how much impact it will have to reach them;
- **Define activities and key messages** – what kind of activities you would like to do that are going towards the aim, bringing change to the benefi-

ciaries, directed at your target audience(s), and utilise your Youth Exchange project outcomes;

- **Consider the appropriate communication channels** – such as the Project Results platform, websites, face-to-face activities, social media, and public events;
- **Create a budget and resources plan, and distribution of tasks.**



5.8 EVENT FOCUSING ON COMMUNICATING THE RESULTS AND OTHER FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

An event could be organised after the Youth Exchange is over to promote its results to a wider audience; it is recommended as a quality element. It is a great approach for increasing the impact at the local level for each partner organisation – the best time for it is a couple of weeks after the end of the residential activity. It can also help the young people by giving them something to focus on in the aftermath of the international experience. All things aside, it will be another great opportunity for the members of each group to meet again at another local action. A lot of pictures will be taken and shared with everybody else, which will animate the conversation once again. And if you organise something with educational content, the local communities will benefit from it.

Some examples of follow-up activities are:

- ➔ Simple presentation about the Youth Exchange;
- ➔ Photo exhibition from the Youth Exchange;
- ➔ Performances developed during the Youth Exchange, but now done for the local community;
- ➔ Street actions on the topic of the Youth Exchange.

5.9 LOBBYING FOR POLICY CHANGE

With the results of a Youth Exchange, you can put pressure on the local decision-makers to make changes in the areas that are important for you and the young people you are working with. At a very general level, by showcasing the good results, you can lobby for more space for the participation of young people in decision-making processes. Remember that policy and decision-making happens at all levels of your society, so why not start with your local council or municipality?

5.10 CONTRIBUTING TO QUALITY IN YOUTH WORK

In the case that you have some tangible outputs from your Youth Exchange, some new tools or methods designed by the young people, by sharing them and making sure that they are being exploited, you are directly influencing change and contributing to quality in the youth field. In addition, you can create new partnerships, at the local, national and/or international levels.

5.11 PROJECTS RESULTS PLATFORM

There is a Project Results Platform managed by the European Commission where Erasmus+ projects are showcased. It was established to offer a comprehensive overview of projects funded under the programmes, and highlights good practice examples and success stories. The platform also makes available products, deliverables and intellectual outputs, which are the result of the projects. It also provides a search feature based on particular fields.

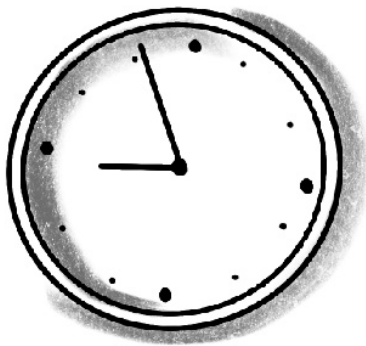
5.12 ANOTHER YOUTH EXCHANGE?

Some important questions for the team of leaders to ask themselves are whether or not they want to work together again, and if there is another set of needs that came up during the Youth Exchange to warrant a follow-up activity or a different type of project. It is worth considering first of all what the needs analysis and the potential aim and objectives of a follow-up activity would be, then whether the same partners would be involved and how the process would work. Essentially, going back to the exploration stage and starting the cycle again. While follow-up Youth Exchanges are generally seen with favour by the project evaluators, remember that funders are always looking for innovative projects and results, rather than a Youth Exchange simply for the sake of a Youth Exchange. In the possible new application based on the results of this project, you need to show how you could make progress.

5.13 CLOSURE OF THE PROJECT

The final report with supporting documentation is prepared by the applicant in cooperation with the partners when the project is done. Each partner can take part in writing the report, or they can each write a part of the answer from their perspective. The applicant is responsible for bringing the text to its final form. Before the report is filed, it should be sent to the partners for them to review.

It is important to thank everyone involved in the project, and everyone who supported the project. With some, you might have already agreed to do a presentation of the results for them, with others, at least a thank-you letter should be sent. If you wish to build relationships further, you can thank them in person and give them a present to show your appreciation. The most appropriate presents are related to the Youth Exchange, such as project results, a T-shirt of the Youth Exchange, and so on. If you prepare a presentation of the Youth Exchange, you should invite all concerned to show them the achievements and outcomes. Enthusiastic young people are most likely to get to people, so they should do the talking. Encourage the youth group to also talk about the informal activities. If needed, the group leader can be present to represent the entire organisation.



5.14 YOUR OWN EVALUATION AND EXPERIENCE

And finally, after all of the dust has settled, the celebrations are over, and agreements have been made, it is a time for a moment of personal reflection for yourself – the group leader who is reading this book.

Use your favourite evaluation method and take one step back from all of the hectic activities in which you have been immersed since the very beginning of the project design. It must have been a fantastic journey. Try to review the whole process:

- ➔ **Can you remember how it started, and when?**
- ➔ **What were the first challenges you had to overcome?**
- ➔ **Did you have a “mentor”, such as a more experienced colleague or a good friend, in your own personal adventure? Who was that person, and what did you learn? If not, did you ask for support when it was needed? Did you receive it?**
- ➔ **Review all of the interesting people you met along the way. What were their qualities that impressed you the most? What did you learn from each and every one of them?**
- ➔ **Are you happy about the role you had in the process? And your performance?**
- ➔ **Is there anything you would definitely change for the next time?**
- ➔ **Was there a moment when you thought “this is going to be a disaster”?**
- ➔ **What did you learn from the experience?**
- ➔ **How are you going to apply the learning?**
- ➔ **What was the hardest part of saying goodbye?**
- ➔ **Would you do it all over again? With something (or somebody) different?**

These, again, are the elements of the “Hero’s Journey” mentioned in the beginning. As was said, every adventure ever made, written or told, follows this structure, more or less. This model can help a lot to evaluate your personal experience, and to help you see things from a fresh and interesting perspective. Like the young people you worked with through the Youth Exchange, you also left familiar territory, encountered challenges, met new (and possibly strange) people, and had an ordeal.

And now, it is done. You gained something, you lost something. You are still the same person, yet something has changed. And as you walk back home, thinking “Would I do it again?”, you think that this is exactly the stuff of legends. Well done!

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