



# Youth Impact

**Research on the impact and added value of working with young people at the international level**

*Autumn 2010*



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## *Introduction*

Youth Express Network (Y-E-N) has been established in 1993 and since then organised 40 international projects on the topic of “social inclusion of young people”. For 18 years, Y-E-N involved more than 100 participants per year in international activities, encouraging mobility, promoting intercultural dialogue, active participation and equal opportunities. Most of these youngsters have been involved in an international activity for the first time through Y-E-N.

In all these activities, we have conducted evaluation sessions and follow up surveys constantly in order to measure the learning of participants as well as the benefits of such activities for young people with fewer opportunities. After years of experience and knowledge, with the need expressed by our members at the local level as well as with the feedback received from other international organisations, as Youth Express Network, we have decided that a research should be conducted in order to look at the different aspects of impact of international activities on young people.

We also agreed that it would be important to enlarge our scope and extend our look at different international projects, instead of focusing only on the ones organised by the Youth Express Network. The idea was to investigate the impact and added value of international youth work, using both quantitative and qualitative research-methods.

Recently, many youth organisations have witnessed decrease in funding opportunities for activities at local, national and international levels and have had to prioritize the use of resources. This has meant that certain activities have become difficult to justify, including working internationally, without evidence of effectiveness.

While there are numerous evaluation projects that have addressed the success of individual international activities, there are comparatively few projects that have addressed the question of the impact and added value of working internationally with a group of young people.

Furthermore, most of the programmes focusing on youth nowadays insist on the justification of “impact” of international projects on participants, either in the application for grants or in the final report.

However, there are few remaining questions, such as: “What can be described as an impact in a participant’s life?”, “How this impact could be experienced by participants?”, “Which are the facets of that impact?” etc...

In order to investigate those issues, in 2008, the Youth Express Network submitted an application to the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe for the research project titled «Youth Impact». Upon the acceptance of our project application, a long and tough process started. We had many questions in mind and we tried to reach many young people to ask these questions. After months of hard work with young people, we have finished the research and this is the report of the findings of our research on the impact of international youth activities in Europe.

At the end we believe we managed to find some clues, but there are still many more questions to be answered. We hope that our findings will pave the way for the discovery of more answers in the future.

We would like to thank the EYF of Council of Europe for their support, our member organisations in different countries who helped us with the focus groups and dissemination of the survey and to the colleagues from other international youth organisations, who have supported us during the research and kept ideas and suggestions flowing. However, above all, we would like to thank to all the people who have given us their time to share their experiences and assessments. They were not only the subjects of our research but also the most important contributors.

## Youth Express Network

Youth Express Network works since 1993 for the inclusion of young people in Europe. It federates 30 youth organisations from 18 different countries. From homeless young people and African immigrants, to young people having problems at school or Roma youth, our member organizations have different target groups, according to the needs of their community. What unites the network is its priority, young people with fewer opportunities, but also its values:

- Equal opportunities for all young people
- A tolerant society
- Human rights
- Equal access for information
- Active youth participation

Y-E-N organizes training courses; study sessions and seminars; work experience in a foreign country; cooperation and cross-border projects for youth workers and social workers.

We undertake actions of awareness raising and advocacy and we publish magazines and newsletters.

In 2008 the founder and director of the network, Brigitte Ludmann, was awarded the bronze medal from the French Ministry of Youth and Sports for returned services to the Youth.

“Youth impact” is in line with the mission statement of Youth Express Network for the period of 2008-2011, which is to create links at international level for organisations working at a local level with youth and inclusion and help these local organisations to develop more inclusive youth policies inspired by good practices of other youth organisations in Europe.



## General findings

Findings of the assessment of the impact of international projects in participants' lives:

- One out of two participants says that participation in the project increased the sense of European Identity
- 92% say that taking part in an international project helped them to take personal or professional initiative
- Significant positive impact on the lives of young people in terms of better understanding towards individuals coming from other cultures
- Increased interest in different social issues and problems
- Improved communication skills in general and communication in a foreign language specifically
- Building up a very strong belief in the international youth work
- Improved skills in team work

## The team

Eylem **CERTEL** is a youth worker involved in local and international level youth work for the last 18 years. She is currently working as the National Director of Youth For Understanding Turkey as well as being a freelance trainer at the European level. She also works as a volunteer for Genc Gelisim Dernegi, a local youth organisation in Ankara, and Youth Express Network. Besides her intensive work with young people in the field, she is also involved in youth research. She has received her MA degree in Social Work with her thesis on "impact of youth organisations on the social development of young people" in May 2010.

Asst. Prof. Dr. Ozgehan **SENYUVA** is one of the writers of the T-Kit 10: Educational Evaluation in Youth Work and has been working as a youth worker and free lance evaluator at national and international levels for the last 10 years.

SENYUVA is a member of faculty of International Relations department of Middle East Technical University-Ankara and is affiliated researcher in the Centre for European Studies of the same university. His main teaching and research topics are quantitative research methodology, intercultural learning, public opinion and elite studies. He is the author of several articles and books on these issues. He has been a member of Youth Express Network for ten years.

Sara **ZAMBOTTI** is a Doctor in "Information Society" at the University of Milano Bicocca where she teaches a course on Anthropology of Media in the Faculty of Intercultural Communication. Her recent research interests deal with the representation of health and illness through media and with ethnographic research on audience. Besides the academic work, she is involved as a free lance author for the public TV and Radio in Italy. She is part of the Bureau of Youth Express Network since 2008.

Manuela **COSTEIRA** is currently working in the coordination office of the Youth Express Network as communication officer. She has received her MA degree in Anthropology after an ethnographic research in South India. She took part in a research on youth and information financed by the University of Strasbourg and the municipality of Strasbourg. In 2010, she attended the training course for facilitators in non-formal education for young people in the field of social inclusion, organized by the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe.

## **Methodology**

Youth impact research was based on both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

**The first stage** of the research was the development, administration and analysis of an online questionnaire, composed of mainly close-ended questions, targeting young people who had a variety of experiences in international activities. The survey was distributed through a link created specifically for this research, but also through a pop-up window that was placed on the web page of the Youth Express Network. All the members of Y-E-N in different countries, as well as other international youth organisations, youth workers & young people themselves took an important part in the distribution of the survey.

In addition to the usual demographic and administrative information such as age and sex, background and type of activity, the survey also addressed some of the issues of the added value and perception of international youth work, such as:

- How would you describe the overall experience in an international group? (frustrating/difficult/interesting and challenging/good/extraordinary/)
- Overall, did the international youth experience contribute to improve some of your personal skills? (not at all/some/average/quite a lot/very much)
- Overall, do you believe that being part of an international activity positively contributed to your life? (not at all/a little/some/significantly/contributed very significantly)
- Would you say that the project helped you to take personal or professional initiatives? (yes/no)
- Do you believe that participating in a European project contributed to your understanding of Europe? (yes/no)
- Please explain how: (I learnt more about similarities and differences of different Europeans/I discovered some aspects of European cultural variety/It increased my sense of European identity/I discovered more about European values/I learnt something that I did not know about European policies/It increased my interest in European affairs/other)

In addition, there was a table showing a list of 16 fields in which the respondent should measure the impact on his/her life (see page 23).

After cleaning and controlling the responses, we have had 190 workable responses. Only the respondents that have completed minimum 80 % of the survey were taken into analysis.

**The second stage** of the research consisted of a qualitative investigation of the data issued from the online survey. In particular, 7 focus groups have been organized in order to achieve an in- depth understanding of the results of the survey. 7 focus groups moderated by Y-E-N trainers have been organized in 7 countries (one focus group in each country): Italy, Romania, France, Turkey, Bulgaria, Armenia and Lithuania. An average of 7-8 participants took part in each focus group. Participants were asked to answer 5 questions, which have been the same for all the countries and were shaped as an in- depth investigation of the previous questionnaire.

All the answers have been collected and analysed together. The research hypothesis was not interested in making emerging “national” differences but rather to identify common representations of the impact of international projects both on the personal and professional level.

### **Focus Group Methodology**

Focus group is a qualitative research methodology useful for various aims, such as: diagnose problems, stimulate new ideas or identify new relationships, generate hypotheses, evaluate programs. Focus groups present some very important strengths: they provide concentrated amounts of plentiful data, in participants’ own words, on precisely the topic of interest and they allow researchers to analyze the interaction of participants, which adds richness to the data that may be missed in individual interviews. All these steps enrich the analysis of the quantitative data.

## Organization of the focus groups

There are different types of focus groups that can be adapted to the purpose of the research. In our case, since our aim was to collect data on the same questions in different countries, we chose the traditional format. In this way, giving a strict guideline and common questions, we have avoided the risk of collecting a fragmentary material that could not be compared.

Indeed, the guideline was structured as such:

- 6-10 participants
- Under direction of trained moderator
- Formal, directive, structured
- 60-120 minutes
- Supplemented by field notes

## Questions

- In the questionnaire it was asked if the experience contributed to the improvement of some personal skills. This was the result (show the result “personal skills”). In which answer do you recognise yourself the most? In answering, can you explain why?

- Do you feel that in some ways the experience changed your life? If yes, can you give some example?
- In your opinion, which are the fundamental elements for a good project? The content, the participants, the team, the location, etc...
- Did these international activities make you think differently about your country and your friends / family?
- Was it possible for you to “multiply” what you have learned in the projects? Have you had the chance to share what you learnt with your friends / associations / colleagues? If yes, how?

## *The research*

### **FIRST STAGE: QUANTITATIVE PART**

#### **The survey**

The Youth Impact Survey was designed by the research team in spring 2010. The team met on different occasions and cooperated through internet in the design, testing and analysis of the survey.

The survey was a structured-self administered survey, composed of mainly close ended questions. On certain questions, a logic pattern was applied, changing the order of questions according to the responses of the participant.

For the dissemination and administration of the survey, an internet based professional software was used. The survey was distributed through: a) a link created specifically for this survey b) a pop up window that was placed on the web page of the Youth Express Network. The questionnaire was prepared in a youth friendly language, and the form was in English.

The survey was finalized in the first week of April 2010, and tested by a group of volunteers. No major obstacles were faced during the testing of the survey, except for a small loop in the logic of a question. The survey was made public online on 18<sup>th</sup> of April 2010 and the first response was registered on 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2010.

The administration of the survey took in average 25 minutes. As it was an internet based survey, a privacy filter was in place to ensure the protection of the data as well as the identity of the respondent. In addition, in order to avoid multiple responses by the same individual, it was programmed that each PC could administer the survey only once.

Conducting an internet based survey has a number of advantages, especially for a research at this scale. It ensures the participation of a larger number of young people from a much wider geographical scope. It also gives necessary time and space for the respondent to answer the questions at a time of their own convenience. However, it should always be taken into consideration that this was a survey based on volunteer self-selection. The self-selection to participate problem indicates that who has chosen to participate in this survey might be a homogenous group who already had a predisposed (either positive or negative) opinion on the issue, thus the team always kept a possible bias in check during analysis.

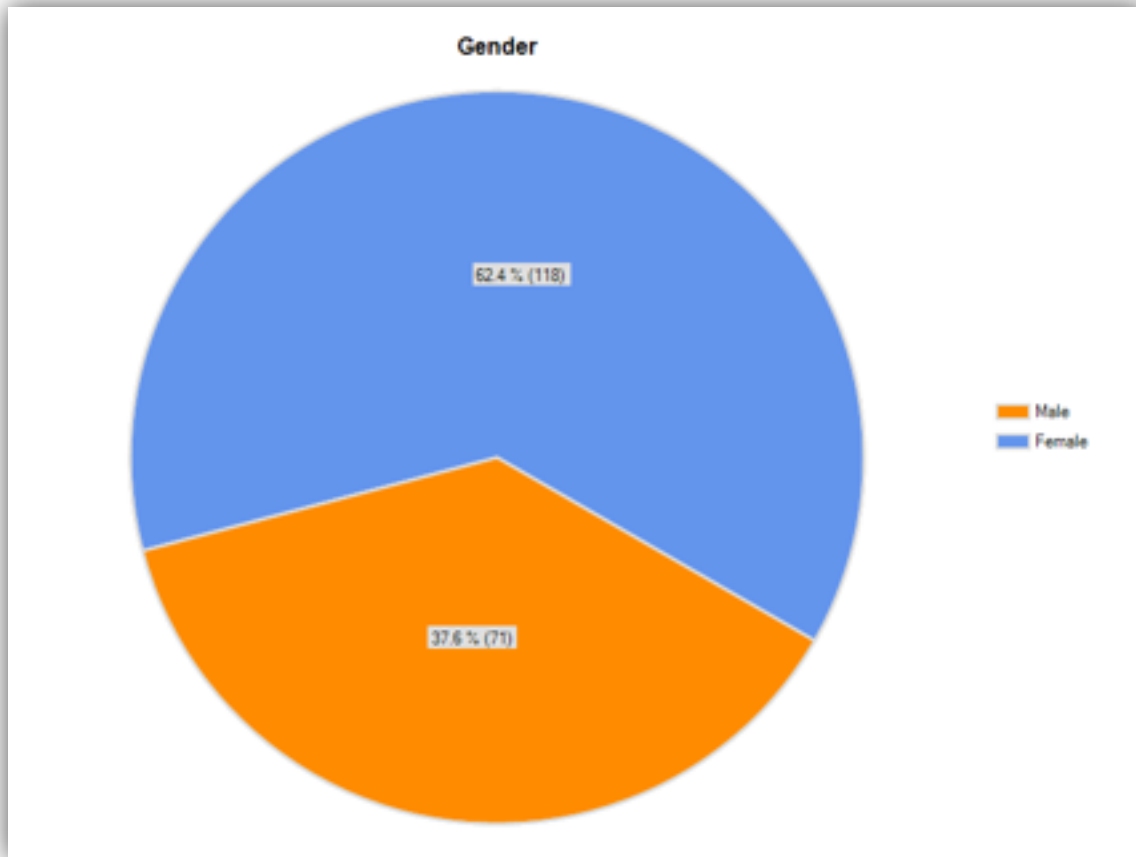
The population of the survey was chosen as any person who has participated actively and full time in an international youth activity that took place in Europe. In order to check the short term and medium term impacts, a time limit was not placed. In the responses, the earliest project that someone has participated in took place in 1999.

The survey was online until July 2010. After the cleaning and controlling the responses, we have had 190 workable responses. Only the respondents that have completed minimum 80 % of the survey were taken into analysis. Out of 190 respondents, 176 of them have reached the survey via the internet link (/YouthImpactSurveyYEN) and remaining 14 through the pop-up window on the Youth Express Network web page.

The average age of the respondents is **31 years**. The youngest participant in the survey was **18 years old** and the oldest was **57 years old** (a youth worker).

In relation to the gender distribution of the respondents, the percentage of female respondents (62.4 %) is more than the male respondents (37.6 %). This goes in line with the general picture of European youth projects, in which the number of female participants is higher than male ones.

**Figure 1: Gender of respondents**



The geographical distribution of the participants is very diverse as well. The respondents were asked the question *Where are you from?* regardless of their citizenship or country of origin.

We were pleasantly surprised to see that young people from different countries and even different continents who live in European countries also participated in European level youth projects, and as it will be discussed later on, such participations have contributed to the integration to the society they live in.

**Figure 2: The country of origin of respondents**

Country of origin (number of respondents)	Country of origin (number of respondents)
France 26	Russia 2
Italy 14	Turkey 19
Estonia 1	Iceland 4
Netherlands 1	Germany 4
Bulgaria 17	Bosnia and Herzegovina 4
Poland 6	Armenia 1
Serbia 2	Croatia 4
Vietnam 1	Hungary 5
Slovenia 3	Romania 18
Switzerland 1	England 5
Sweden 11	Greece 4
Lithuania 4	Cameroon 2
Portugal 8	Montenegro 1
Cyprus 2	Macedonia 4
Belgium 2	Finland 1
Czech Republic 1	Georgia 1
Bolivia 1	Belarus 1
RD Congo 1	Scotland 1
Cape Verde 1	Indonesia 1

## **Empirical Analysis and Findings**

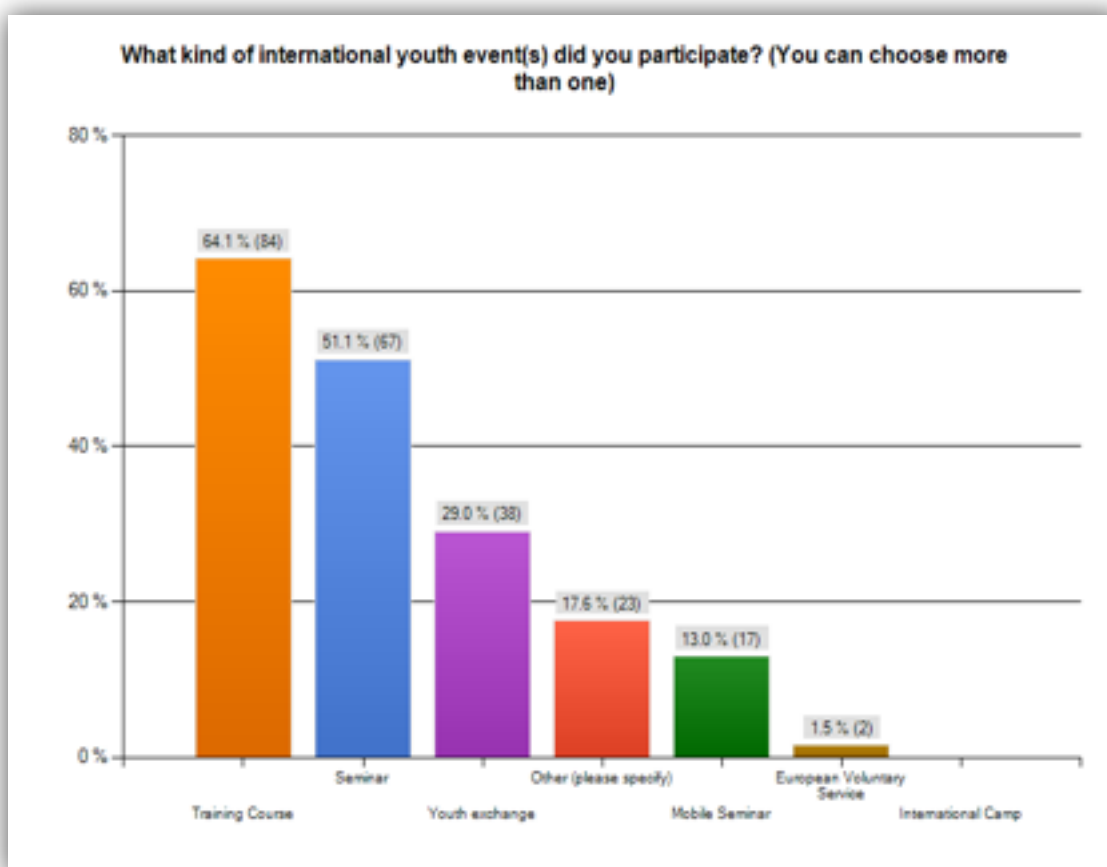
In order to have a better profile of our respondents, a series of questions about their involvement in European youth projects were asked.

The first question was related with the types of activities they have participated in. In order to avoid confusion, the question was formulated in a way to allow the respondents to make multiple choices. The outcome revealed that the majority of the respondents have participated in a training course (84 people) and seminars (67 people). The number of people who have participated in a youth exchange is much lower (38) and only 2 respondents have had the European Voluntary Service (EVS) experience (Figure 3).

Very recently in Caucasus and in the past years in other regions, Youth Express Network has organised mobile seminars in which a group of international participants take part in a series of youth activities in a series of countries.

The distribution of the respondents per activity was in line with the main activities of Youth Express Network, which mainly focuses on improving the quality of youth work through training courses and seminars. As the major channels of distribution of the survey were Youth Express Network's own resources, it appears that there was a higher return rate from people who have participated in a Youth Express Network activity in the past.

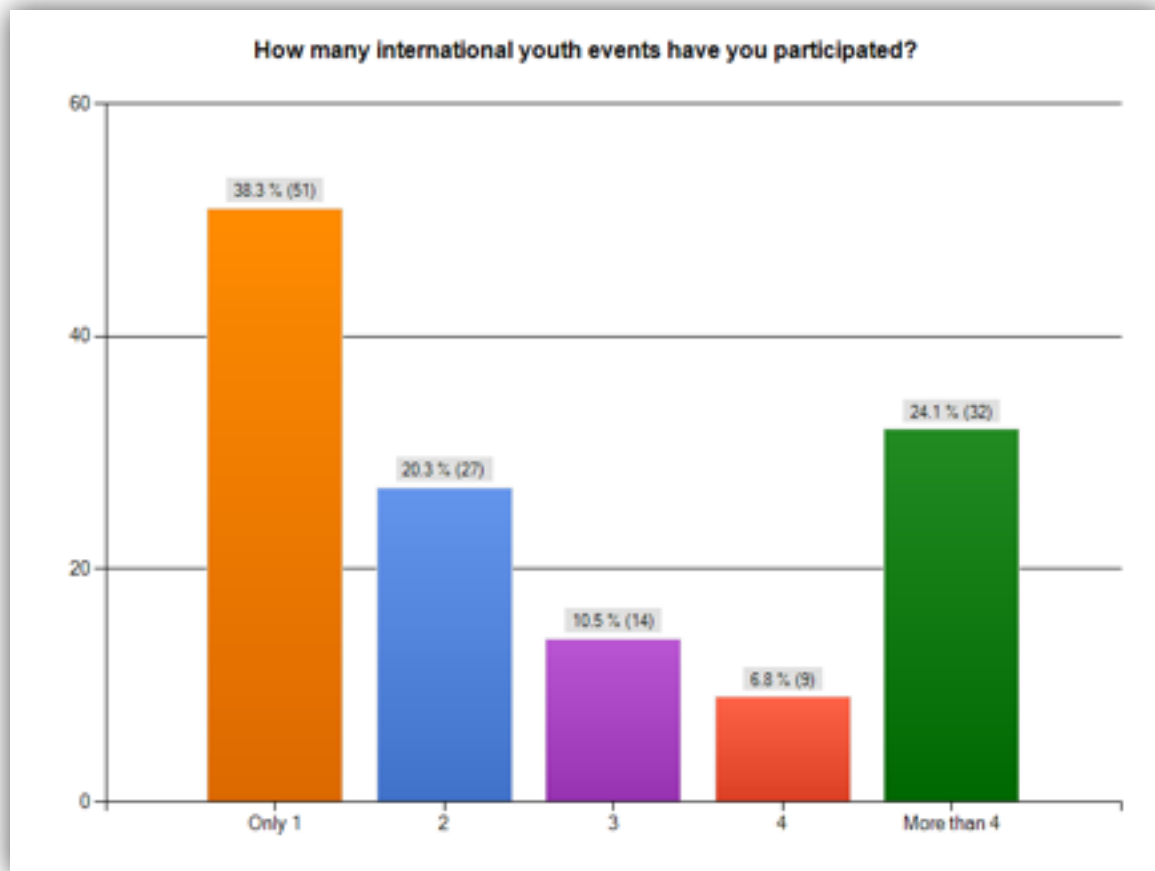
Figure 3: Type of activity



We have also wanted to inquire about the respondents having participated in a number of different projects. Thus, we have included a question on the number of European projects they have participated, regardless of the type of activity. The results revealed that slightly more than 50 % of the respondents have participated in one or two activities.

38 % of the respondents have participated in only one activity, 20 % participated in 2 activities. The percentage of the respondents who have participated in 3 or more activities was around 42 % (figure 4).

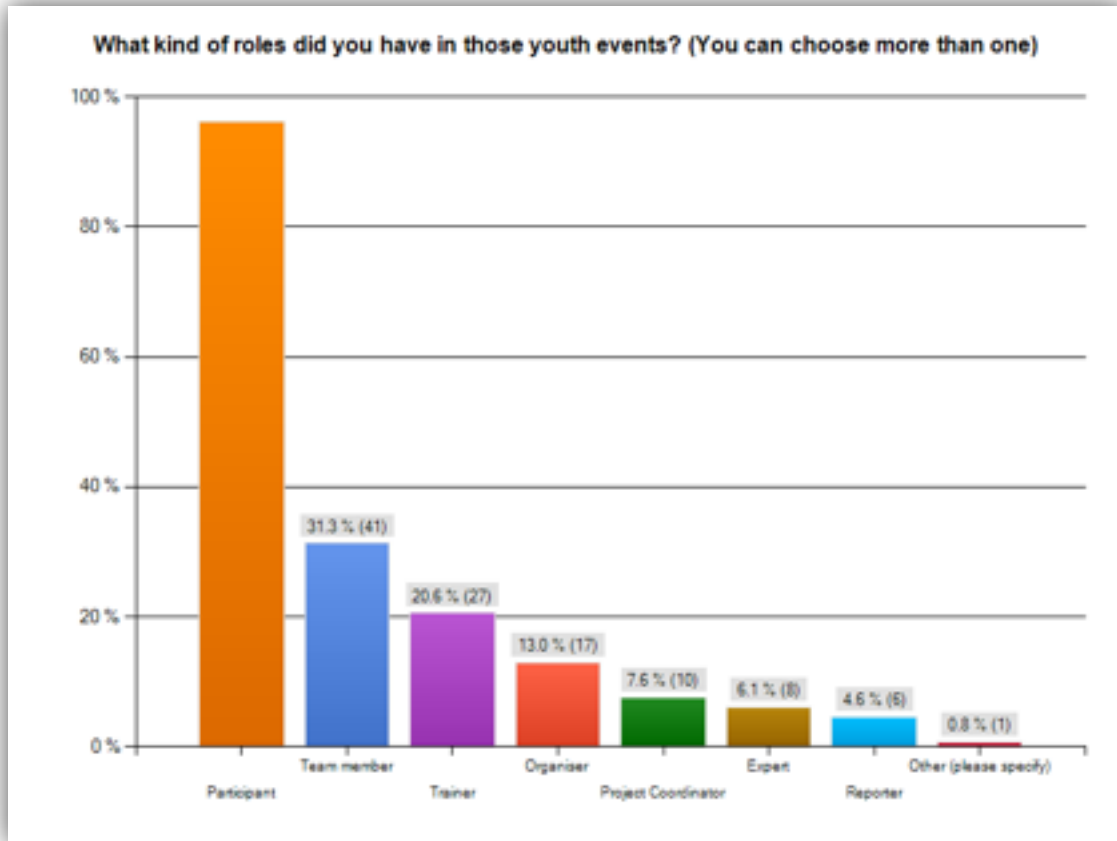
**Figure 4: Number activities participated**



The impact of participating in a European project is closely related with the role of the individual in the project. It is also known that people tend to change roles over the years, i.e. start as a participant in a project and act as a team member in the future projects. In order to profile the roles played by the respondents in the projects, a distinct question was included in the survey.

In the analysis of the responses, it appears that being a “participant” is the most common mode of participation in European projects. Almost 97 % of the respondents stated that they had been involved in a European project as a participant, while 31 % acted in the capacity of a team member and the rest in different roles (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Roles in activities



When the questions on number of activities and the roles played were put into bilateral analysis, it appears that there is a path and strong relation between these two issues. People generally start as participant, and over time change roles in the future projects, switching to different roles as team member, organizer, and project coordinator.

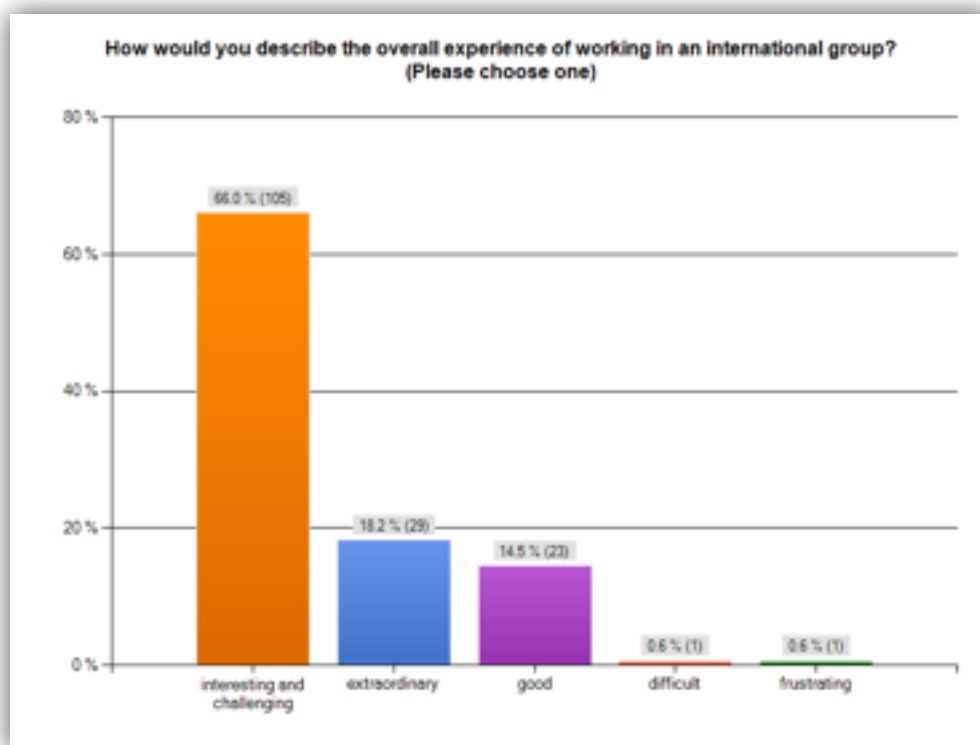
One aspect that we did not observe was the role of expert, who did not follow such a path. The transformation of roles appears as an interesting issue that deserves further analysis.

### *Being a part of an international group*

The international youth projects taking place at the European level offer the opportunity to meet, mingle and work together with young people coming from other countries. For many young people there are not many possibilities to be in or be a part of such an international group. If the content and structure of youth activities are taken into consideration, it is also clear

that the impact of the international dimension on the young person will be significant. On this issue, we asked the participants how they would evaluate their experience of working as a part of an international group. A clear majority of the respondents (66 %) stated that they found the experience interesting and challenging, while only marginal minorities have made negative evaluations (1 person *difficult* and 1 person *frustrating*) (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Working in international groups**

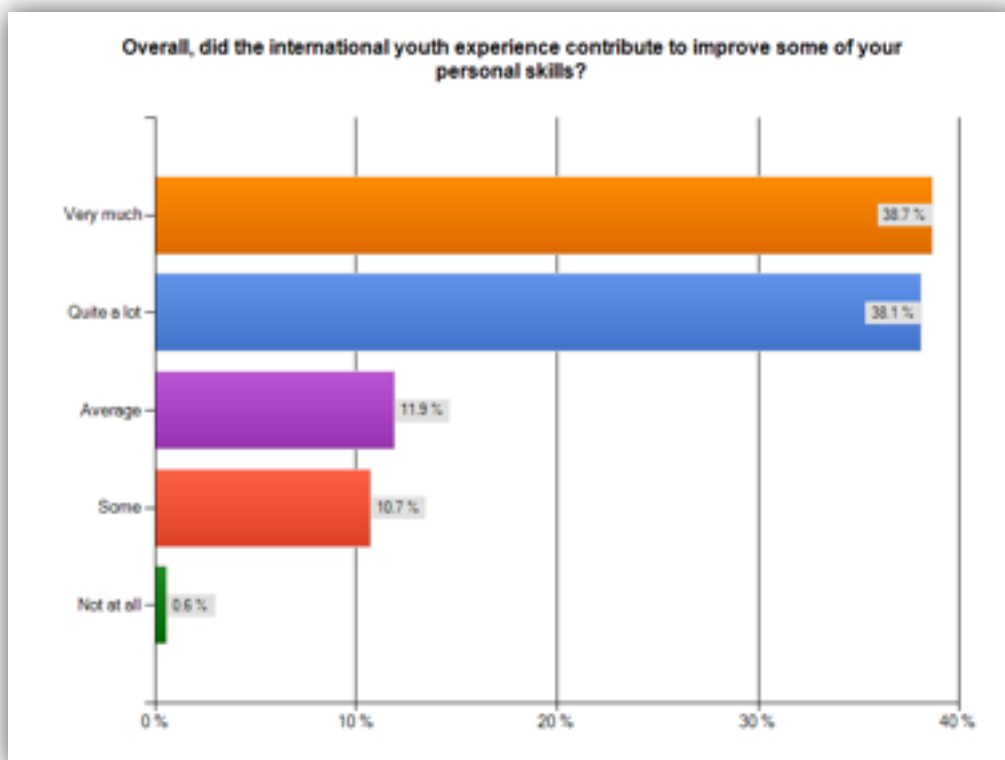


### *Personal development and future initiatives*

One of the working hypotheses of the research was the impact of participating in an international activity on the personal development of the young people. Therefore in the survey the respondents were asked a series of questions to make a self-assessment of their personal and professional developments.

When asked whether they believe that participating in an international youth activity had an impact on their personal and professional developments, the assessments of the respondents were in general positive. A clear majority of the respondents (76 %) stated that being a part of an international youth activity has contributed significantly to improve some of their personal skills (Figure 7).

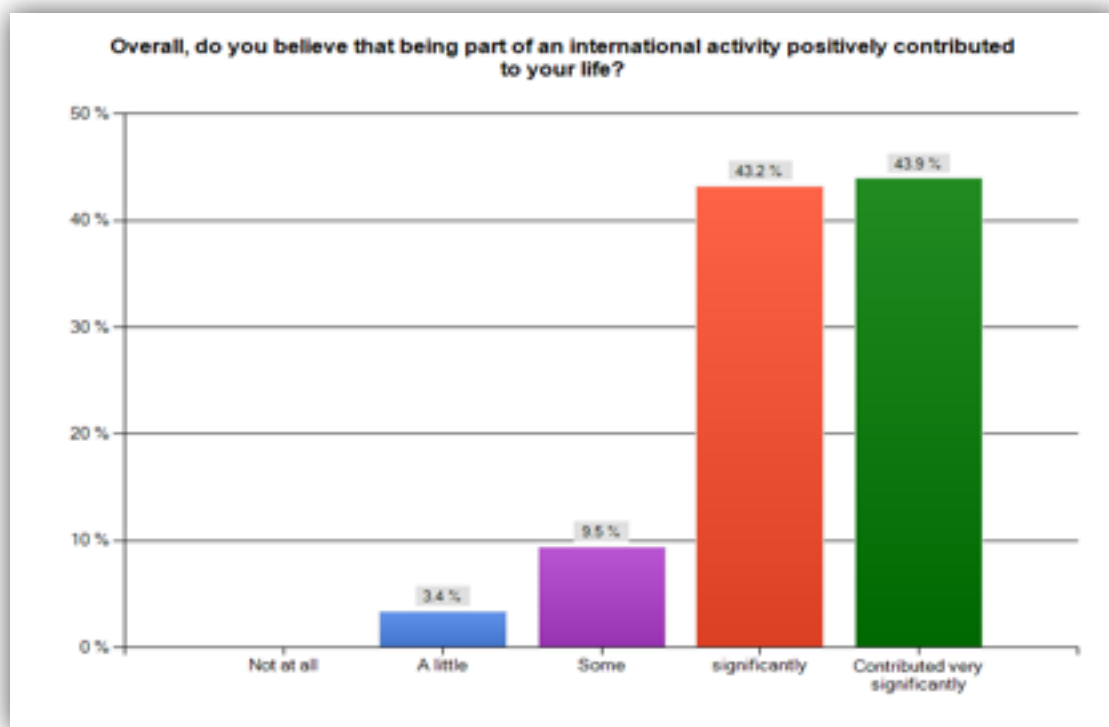
**Figure 7: Improvement of personal skills**



In another question, the participants of the survey were asked to elaborate more on the contribution of the experience on their lives in general.

Almost all of the respondents believe that this experience contributed positively to their life (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Contribution to life**



In order to get more detail on the contribution of the experience of participating in an international youth activity, an index of different issues has been presented to the participants, and they were asked to rate the impact on different dimensions. The results are presented in Figure 9.

**Figure 9: Impact on life (Number of participants)**

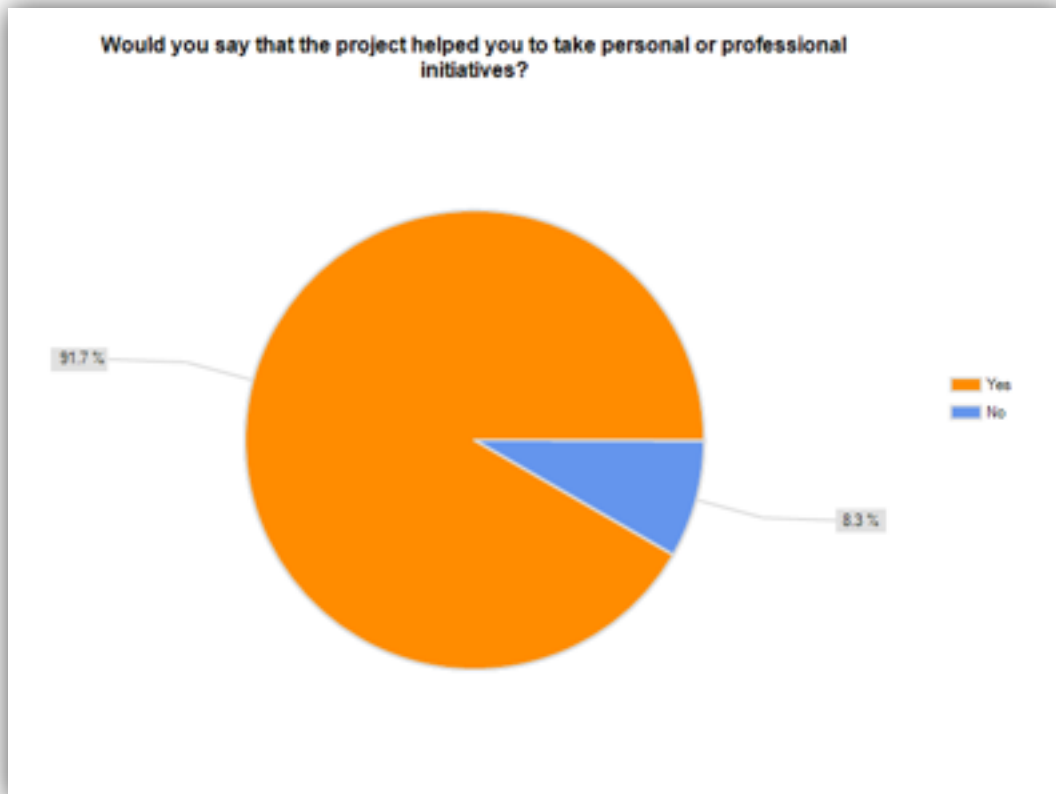
Overall, how would you rate the impact of participating in an international youth event in your life on following statements?

Answer Options	No impact at all	Very little impact	Some impact	Significant impact	Very significant impact	N/A	Rating Average	Response Count
1. Better understanding of values, attitudes and	0	2	20	58	67	1	4.29	148
2. Awareness of your own culture	4	10	37	47	49	0	3.86	147
3. Interest in different social issues and problems	0	4	24	63	56	0	4.16	147
4. Project preparation and management skills	2	11	35	47	50	1	3.91	146
5. Innovation and creativity	1	6	36	49	53	2	4.01	147
6. Personal plans for the future	2	13	39	44	46	3	3.83	147
7. Self confidence	1	8	33	53	51	1	3.99	147
8. Ability to take initiatives	0	11	35	57	40	2	3.88	145
9. Willingness to take responsibilities	1	12	36	44	52	1	3.92	146
10. Communication skills in general	1	5	21	56	63	1	4.20	147
11. communicating in a foreign language	2	7	15	50	71	1	4.25	146
12. Working in a team	1	4	22	51	65	2	4.22	145
13. Improving skills in the field you work in	1	10	31	52	50	1	3.97	145
14. Belief in the necessity of international youth work	0	1	16	50	75	2	4.40	144
15. Job opportunities	12	30	47	26	26	4	3.17	145
16. Willing to live/work in another country	12	19	32	34	47	2	3.59	146
							answered question	149
							skipped question	41

As the Figure 9 indicates, the biggest impact appears to be on believing in the necessity of youth work and on the issue of intercultural communication and learning. The high average rating of believing in the necessity of youth work may be one of the explanations of the high return rate of individuals, that is, why they get engaged in different projects in different roles.

The participants were also asked to share whether the project(s) they participated in encouraged or assisted them to take further personal and/or professional initiatives. A dominant majority (91 %) of them said that the project helped them to take initiatives in their lives in general (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Taking Initiatives**



We have also asked the participants to share the examples of initiatives they were engaged in. The responses were very wide, ranging from personal career plans to the development of a local youth centre. The complete list of answers is given in the annex of the report. Some selected examples of the personal and professional initiatives of the participants are below:

- My personal follow up is a position in the European Youth Foundation. There I am working with different projects
- Expert of National Fund of Disabled Rehabilitation - after projects I am able to check the other projects
- I shared my experiences in my country with some people to motivate them to do something new, something different than before
- I started to use the new methods in my work as a trainer
- European Voluntary Service, establishment of youth NGO in Georgia, opening of a new Youth Center in Georgia

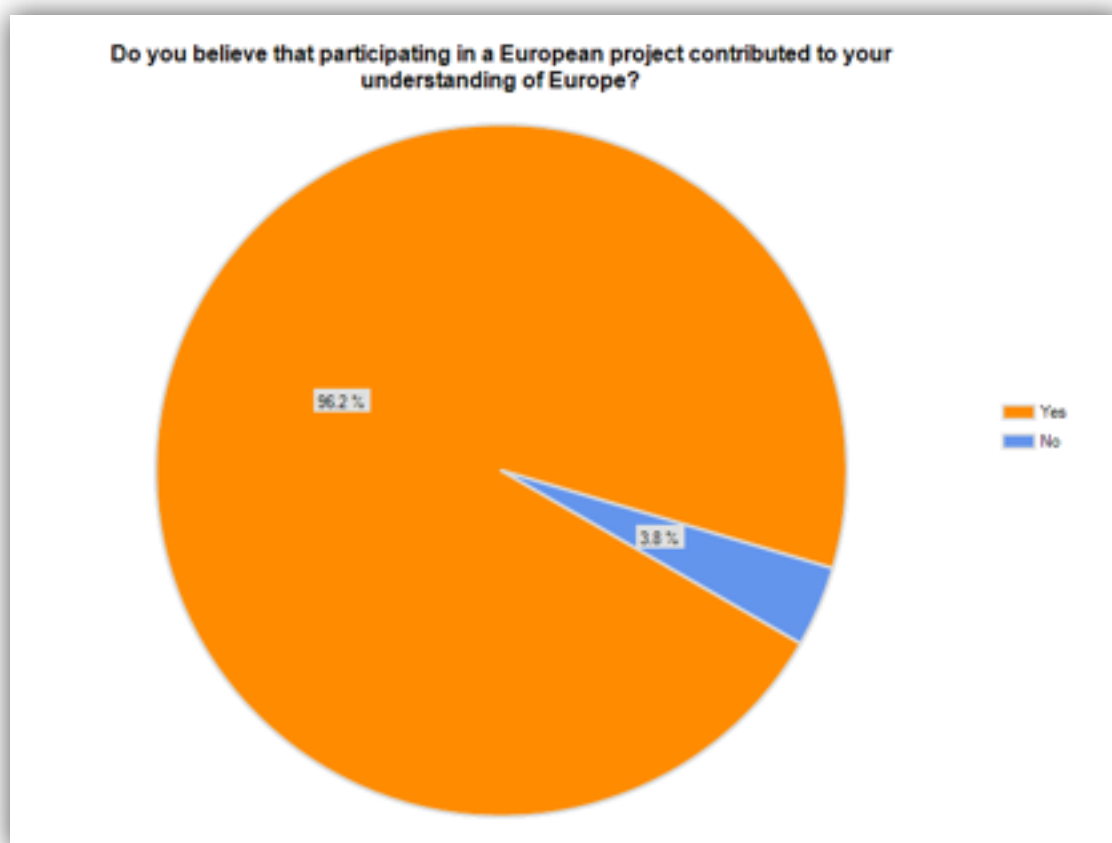
- It helped me to be more confident to speak in English
- It helped me to be more confident on my professional decision
- It helped me to know how to work in group and to share experiences....
- Development of training course on Gender equality and LGBT rights
- Regional collaboration and project on Children's Rights between Macedonia, Bulgaria and Serbia
- I'm working as a Project Manager and expert/consultant in EU service and grant projects. I believe, the experiences I have gained through the youth projects I have participated in or acted as a trainer (over 30 activities), established the basis of my professional skills.
- une famille européenne (!!!)
- Since it's accomplishment I was more confident in my abilities when communicating with people of different ethnic and religious group, as well as people from my own.

## *European Dimension*

As the main focus of the research was the international youth projects that take place at European level, the European dimension of these activities was also investigated.

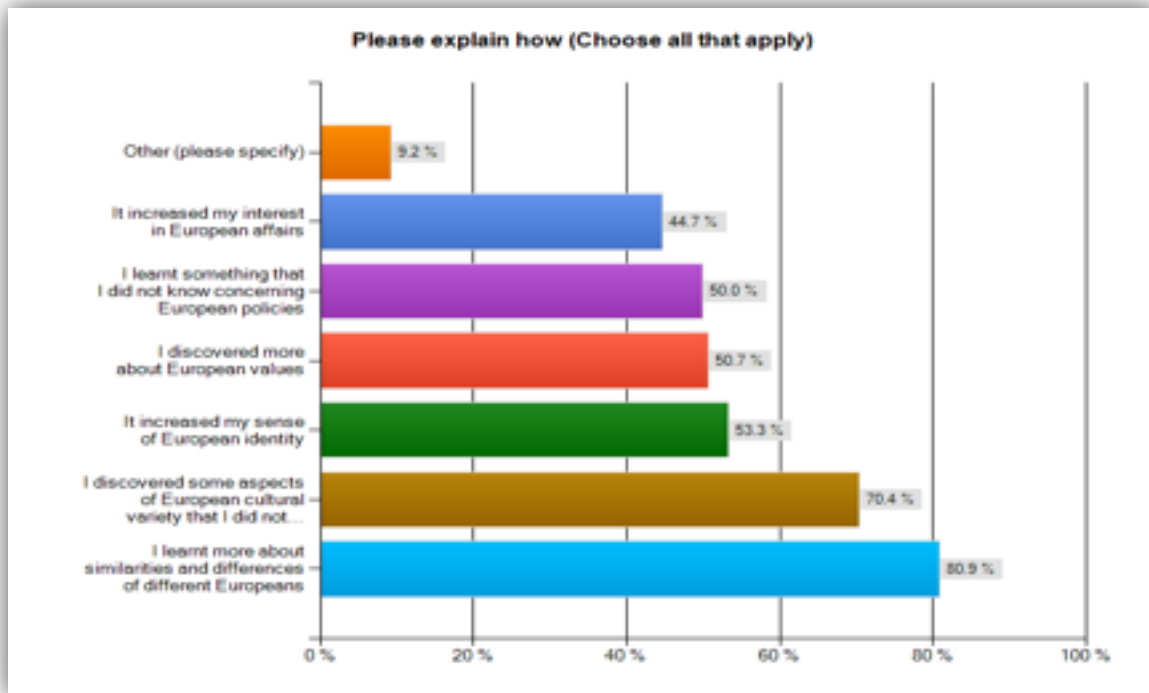
Almost all the participants (97 %) said that participating in a European level project contributed to their understanding of Europe (Figure 11).

**Figure 11: European understanding**



As the term 'Understanding of Europe' is highly abstract, we have provided the participants with a list of items to operationalize the term. The results are presented in Figure 12.

Figure 12: Effect on the European Understanding ?



As seen in Figure 12, the intercultural learning dimension is the strongest. 80.9 % of the participants said that through the project they have learnt more about the European cultural diversity, while 70.4 % believe to have discovered aspects of European cultural variety. A very important issue is that slightly more than half of participants believe that participating in a European level youth project increased their sense of European identity and helped them to discover more about European values.

## **SECOND STAGE: QUALITATIVE PART**

### **Methodology and objectives**

The second stage of the research has been conceived as an in depth investigation of the outputs from the survey. As a follow up and deepening of the quantitative survey, a qualitative investigation is useful for highlighting the meanings that people give to their answers. In this perspective, we involved seven focus groups from seven different countries: Italy, Armenia, France, Lithuania, Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria. From each country, there were 7-8 people, making 52 people participating in the focus group work in total. The participants have been chosen among youngsters and adults who took part in at least one international project, as it was for the online survey. A moderator presented the research and the questions, and led the discussion. The data issued from the survey have been taken as a starting point for the discussions so that the participants of the focus groups had the feeling that they were taking

part in a larger research project and they were informed about all the stages of the research. Focus groups functioned as a group evaluation method and had been the stage also for individual evaluation as it becomes clear from the answers.

The analysis of the answers is not looking for cultural differences since the focus groups represent a very narrow sample. Differently, the 52 in-depth interviews give important traces concerning the feelings and the memories of international projects. Furthermore, the analysis is conducted question by question.

### **ANALYSIS OF THE ANSWERS**

#### **1/2 - Impact on the personal dimension and changes in life**

The most frequent dimensions occurred by the experience of an international project accounted by the participants are:

- an influence on the “self” represented as way of thinking, self awareness, trust, energy and cultural identity;

- an influence on the “self” represented as professional profile;
- an influence on the “self” as cultural identity, such as an opening from a local dimension to an European one;
- an influence on the “self” as personal competences, skills and opportunities,
- an influence on the “self” in terms of relationship with the others.

Focusing on these different perspectives, it is possible to notice that concerning the representation of the “self”, in general people account for changes as: *a very deep change in personal life, such as becoming more tolerant and open minded, curious, responsible, organized, emphatic, with broader horizons, more tolerant, flexible, self confident, more active, standing up and speaking out instead of keeping silence, sharing with the others, having less stereotypes.*

This kind of change is also evident by the way in which people speak about it; i.e. in a very emotional way.

Many told that during the projects they

started a process of self evaluation concerning their position towards the family, the culture and their aspirations for the future.

In terms of work aspirations: participants discovered the possibility to access the European dimension. They are surprised to discover that in other European countries young people have better opportunities, in terms of funding of youth activities and trainings, than in their home country. Many liked that they could overcome economic problems and have the opportunity to travel, to get to know youngsters from other countries that may open new possibilities for the future.

Indeed, some of them discovered the possibility to become trainers and in general to get actively involved in youth work, voluntarily or professionally. In other words, participation in international projects provided the opportunity of discovering their interest towards youth work; as a result, some became trainers, project coordinators and youth workers.

In terms of learning process, concerning skills, most of the participants were satisfied with the possibility to improve their knowledge of foreign languages (mainly English but also Spanish and Turkish languages). Some spoke about “concrete” skills such as making souvenirs for other participants, cooking, dancing, singing and juggling.

Intercultural evenings and activities which require participants to present their country to the rest of the group involve a process of self awareness and learning of national and cultural identity. Since participants have to present their countries to the others, they have gained some information about their own culture, something they do not normally practice in their daily life as everybody else has also been sharing the same daily routines in their own country, and this process stay in their minds.

In the relationship with the others, many stressed that through international projects they became more active, less shy, more open towards the others both

in terms of overcoming cultural stereotypes and also developing social skills.

Some spoke also about the limits of these projects, which are related mainly to time: *one week is too little time for reaching a real change*. During the process people feel a real change but *as they come back, after some time, they start acting again as before*. This limit occurs in the context of youth exchanges, seminars and trainings, but it doesn't include long term projects, such as EVS and Leonardo.

Another limit concerns the idea *that these projects stay too theoretic and do not go really deep in a concrete approach to problems*.

### **3 – Evaluation of the projects:**

The participants of the focus group have been asked to define the fundamental elements of a good international youth project. It was seen that they focus on the team members and participants the most.

In particular:

- The team members should be able to: challenge the participants with interesting topics, to facilitate the process smoothly without domination, to pay attention to the human resources and properly select the participants, be aware of the personal goals of the participants, be able to overcome linguistic barriers between participants, involve all the participants, give a strong concept to the training, bring something new to each seminar.
  - The participants: should be well informed about the topic, their nationalities should be balanced, the cosmopolitans are the most motivated, interested and motivated participants are crucial for a good project.
  - The method: to use non formal education method, to leave one day free.
  - The theme/ topics: should be modern and clear, should conform to the participants' demands.
  - Location: many stress that they like very much when the projects are organized in the nature, far from the town and when participants can cook for themselves, the location should be in line with the topic.
  - Results and the outcomes: focus group participants think that the results and materials available after a project are very important in order for them to play a multiplier role back in home.
  - Partners: should be trustworthy.
- They think the best project is a project where there are enthusiastic participants, a challenging theme and team members that are able to facilitate the process smoothly without domination. Some think that the theme of the activity is not very important as long as the organisation is good and the participants are right. Some disagree with this idea and state that most often anybody can get selected in a project as there is usually lack of participants that might be due to lack of information. Most people stressed that the content and the participants should be related for a project to become a “good” project.

#### **4 - Impact of International projects on the perception of own country and friends/family**

The focus group participants have been asked to define the impact of International projects on their perception of their own country and family / friends. For some, the perception about own country and family / friends has changed significantly, while for some others it didn't change much. Most of them highlighted the impact in terms of:

- *Increased empathy with parents: as a result of taking an active role in projects, increased sense of responsibility & understanding towards the parents' concerns. This change is also appreciated by the parents and their perceptions on the kids have also changed; i.e. increased trust.*
- *Increased desire to live in another country: comparing own countries with others resulted in some young people realizing the better opportunities provided in other countries; some young people after seeing other countries would like to live in Europe for some time (studying, working, etc).*
- *Change of thinking/attitude: Both towards friends and family as a result of increased empathy. Also helped to overcome some prejudices & stereotypes; after participating in projects, it is possible to think differently than the general thinking tendency in your country. The concept of "very important" and "not important at all" have changed significantly for some people after encountering with different realities, as a result of increased sensitivity towards people with less opportunities. Some mentioned that they can now socialise with marginalised groups which wasn't the case before participation.*
- *Change of perception of their youth and social work: they start to see the problems not as local problems anymore, but they realize that all over Europe there are similar issues.*

- Increased consciousness about one's own country: experiencing the different, people start thinking more about their own country, values and culture. While some participants started to criticize things about their countries; some others started to appreciate things in their countries more, such as way of life, language, parents, etc...

- At school: becoming more proactive at class (as the topic of the project was "participation", started to participate actively in school as well)
- With family: talking about the experience all the time

Even though the participants have all expressed that they shared their learning with their peers and others when they were back, they also mention that it is sometimes difficult to try to tell the others about the benefits of International projects in concrete terms; however most often people realise the positive change on them and start asking questions automatically. Some stress that it is very difficult to share their feelings and how the projects changed them, that they try to "promote" the experience, however they feel the frustration of the limit of communication. One of the most relevant multiplying action, mentioned by most of the participants, was that they have encouraged their friends that have not taken part in any projects to start volunteering in local organisations.

## 5- Acting as multipliers after the projects

The young people have been asked whether they were able to multiply what they have had learnt in projects. All the young people taking part in focus groups have acted as a multiplier and they shared their learning with the friends, family and colleagues, mostly in an informal way.

- With friends: communicating with them about the project and opportunities for youth at the European level; they became motivated to take part in International projects and developed interest in other cultures as well as in becoming volunteers in the local organisation.
- At work: using increased knowledge about Europe, using some skills developed and tools learnt through the project.

## Conclusion

After completing the field work and the analysis of the data generated, we believe that we have discovered some important indicators regarding the impact of participation in international youth activities on young people. The direction and strength of different changes have been presented in this report.

However, the single and most important conclusion we would like to underline is that *international youth activities work*. They offer important opportunities for young people to self develop their social skills and contribute to their self esteem. Furthermore, it appears that international youth activities contribute very significantly to broaden the perspectives of young people on other cultures and to a better understanding of European values and identity. These last issues are only possible at international level.

In an ever changing world, the young people have to deal with overlapping realities, local, national and international.

With the growing interdependence between countries through communication, trade and global issues, young people face tremendous opportunities as well as challenges. Young people need to develop their intercultural skills and equip themselves accordingly in order to become active and productive individuals within this complex interdependence in which the cultural, economic and political borders are becoming much less clear cut.

We believe that taking part in international youth activities provide a crucial perspective on the changing world for young people which can not be attained at local and national levels only. Through increased international contacts and development of a strong intercultural understanding, the young people are getting better equipped to become active global citizens.