



research based analysis of **youth in action**

# LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF ERASMUS+: YOUTH IN ACTION ON PARTICIPATION AND CITIZENSHIP

**DRAFT INTERIM TRANSNATIONAL ANALYSIS 2018**

**MAIN FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS AND SURVEYS  
BETWEEN 2015 AND 2017**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The promotion of active citizenship and participation in civil society and democratic life is one of the key youth-specific objectives of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. Therefore, the RAY Network is conducting a research project 'Long-term effects of Erasmus+ Youth in Action on participation and active citizenship' (RAY LTE study, 2015-2019), involving RAY Network partners in ten countries. This research project aims to explore how Erasmus+ Youth in Action (E+/YiA) contributes to the development of citizenship competence<sup>1</sup> and what the long-term effects related to participation and active citizenship are, in particular on participation and citizenship practice.

The research project is designed as a longitudinal study with a mixed-method approach, using quantitative and qualitative social research methods: standardised multilingual online surveys and guideline-based interviews, which are conducted with participants and – in the case of online surveys team members – of E+/YiA projects at various stages before and after the core activity of the project. In these surveys and interviews, a number of questions on indicators for participation and citizenship competence and practice were asked in the same way at each of these stages in order to measure how the responses vary. In the first survey and interview after the project, participants were also asked about *perceived* effects they considered to be results of the project participation.

This report provides the interim results of this study: 2,403 participants and project leaders/team members of E+/YiA projects were invited to multilingual online surveys starting in 2015; 481 of them completed questionnaires before, two to three months after and one year after their E+/YiA project.

Furthermore, 117 participants were interviewed before and one year after their

E+/YiA project. A final wave of online surveys and interviews will be conducted during the second half of 2018, and a final research report is scheduled for 2019.

The outcomes of the study suggest that E+/YiA projects do contribute to participation and citizenship competence and practice of the participants involved:

- on the one hand, a large majority of participants indicate in the survey after the project that they perceived effects of the project on their participation and citizenship competence and practice<sup>2</sup>. This is a subjective self-assessment and does not give an indication how strong these perceived effects are.
- on the other hand, a development can actually be measured through the surveys for certain areas of participation and citizenship competence and practice and for certain groups of participants. The measured changes are relatively small – but this could be expected, since most E+/YiA projects have a duration of only a few weeks compared to many years of socialisation and education contributing to participation and citizenship competence and practice.
- furthermore, the interviews confirmed most of these developments, describing them as eye-opening and awareness-raising effects, a better understanding of societal and political processes and interrelations, a deepening, updating and/or strengthening of existing knowledge, skills, attitudes and values as well as stimuli and motivation to participate in civil society and democratic life.
- finally, the interviews also indicated developments of some areas of participation and citizenship competence and practice, which obviously were too small to be measured in the surveys.

<sup>1</sup> In this study, competence is understood as a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values (see also Hoskins & Crick 2008a: 4; cf. Crick in Hoskins & Crick 2008b: 313), complemented by identity (Hoskins et. al 2006; Hoskins et. al 2008; Hoskins in Hoskins & Crick 2008b).

<sup>2</sup> This is also confirmed by the findings of the RAY research project 'Research-based analysis and monitoring of Erasmus+: Youth in Action' (Bammer, Fennes & Karsten 2017)

- a research project on the long-term effects of E+/YiA on participation and citizenship of the actors involved, in particular on the development of participation and citizenship competences and practices (RAY-LTE);

For some indexes/indicators of participation and citizenship competence and practice, the quantitative data also shows a slight decrease between the first survey (before the core project activity) and the second survey (two to three months after the activity). This can be interpreted as a learning process: the participants learned

more about the scope of the themes they were asked about in the surveys and, therefore, realised that, before the project, they were relatively less informed, interested or active than they had thought then and that they had rated themselves too high in the first wave. Consequently, they rated themselves more realistically – and lower – in the second survey after the project.<sup>3</sup>

According to the detailed results, participation and citizenship competence is fostered in the following competence areas:

## VALUES AND ATTITUDES

Throughout the whole measurement period of the three online surveys, an increase can be observed for 'democracy values'.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, many interviewees report about a recall or update of their already existing awareness with respect to many single 'democracy values' or values such as the importance of voting, the protection of human rights or "the principle to

always see people in the centre of a democratic state".

Interest in social and political issues is slightly fostered according to the qualitative research strand, partly with a more proactive attitude being the result, especially of the participants who were already interested before the project.

## KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge relevant for participation and citizenship was acquired by various sub-groups of participants, e.g. male participants, participants aged 21 to 30, participants in Youth Worker Mobility projects, participants with a tertiary level of education, etc. Knowledge on how to engage in Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) was acquired by the whole sample in a statistically significant way. The latter

was confirmed by interviewees reporting an increased knowledge about how to participate, about the functioning of NGOs as well as about the understanding of the terms active citizenship and participation. This is especially the case for interviewees who had participated in projects with a focus on participation and active citizenship or had a respective prior knowledge for other reasons.

## SKILLS

According to the qualitative study, the participation in E+/YiA projects made participants more aware of their existing skills related to participation and citizenship – and these skills were developed further. This is especially the case for participants with a

tertiary level of education, in particular those whose studies were not related to social or political science or the like. Furthermore, this is the case for participants who had not been abroad very often before the project.

<sup>3</sup> It needs to be noted that there could also be influences on the self-assessment through the surveys which are not linked to the participation in E+/YiA projects. In particular, political events such as the refugee movements in 2015 and beyond as well as personal circumstances such as work- or education-related issues might have affected the attitudes, actions or behaviour of the respondents.

<sup>4</sup> Values inherent to democracy, such as equal rights, solidarity, freedom of assembly, participation in democratic processes, etc.

## PARTICIPATION AND CITIZENSHIP PRACTICE

Between the surveys before the project activity and a year after it, an increase in *general participation in civil society* can be observed for the whole sample as well as for numerous sub-groups, such as male participants, participants aged 21 to 25, 'sending' participants (going abroad during their E+/YiA projects), participants who are members of a youth organisation/association, participants least active in political participation, and other sub-groups. An enhanced participation in discussions about social and political topics can be seen in quantitative as well as qualitative data.

Furthermore, male participants, EVS participants and participants who were least active before the project in the area of conventional political participation all exhibit a profound increase in engagement in *environmental activities*. A strong engagement in environmental protection and sustainable development can also be found in the qualitative study as well as a positive shift in this area resulting from the project participation.

In the *information gathering* domain, only participants of YWM projects show an increase in the quantitative measurement after the projects. At the same time, interviewees who report about keeping themselves better informed as a result of the projects, are also participants of other than YWM projects.<sup>5</sup> If applicable, interviewees are mostly searching more for information on current issues in the country in which their project took place, or on topics their project focused on.

In summary, both research strands show similar results and confirm each other: for some areas of participation and citizenship practice, an increase can be observed a year after the project, in particular for participation in civil society and in environmental activities – and not for conventional or non-conventional political participation. According to the findings from the interviews, the changes happen in many ways, for example, in the form of a greater engagement in the social sector, of a stronger focus on a certain citizenship activity, a reinforcement of a former engagement in the civil society sector, or going abroad again.

The findings also show that active citizenship and participation is fostered for two different groups of young people: for the ones with a certain prior knowledge of or previous experience with participation and active citizenship (cumulative effect) and for participants who were less active and had little experience and no special education related to participation and active citizenship before the project, who attended such a project for the first time or who had rarely been abroad before the project.

The positive development of participation and citizenship competence and practice of participants who are less active or experienced with participation and active citizenship when entering the project is supported by both research strands. Furthermore, interviewees attending such a project for the first time express a general enthusiasm about the project and experienced it as motivating in terms of their wish to participate in civil society or democratic life. This suggests that, with respect to an activation potential, E+/YiA projects are pushing some of those who are rather passive at the beginning of a project to becoming more active afterwards. This demonstrates that these projects contribute to the achievement of key objectives of E+/YiA: the participation of young people with fewer opportunities in civil society and democratic life.

A cumulative effect with respect to participation and citizenship competence and practice can be seen for participants who were already active before the project, had prior knowledge and previous experience in this field, in particular participants with a tertiary education and/or a specific education in the field of social/political science: They acquired knowledge relevant for participation and citizenship; they became aware of related skills they already had and deepened them; they fostered participation and citizenship practice. This is in line with the 'Mathew effect' frequently appearing in the context of education and human capital. Nevertheless, this contributes to the objectives of E+/YiA and could even do so even more if these participants would become multipliers in the youth field.

<sup>5</sup> There are only 11 interviewees in the sample of the qualitative study who attended a youth worker mobility project.