



Participation of young people

Comparative qualitative research using the method of focus groups in 13 European countries



Concept of the project “EYCAcademy”

EYCAcademy is a project of the European Youth Card Association (EYCA) financed with means of the Partial Agreement. It is the follow up project to the research project Youth Builds Europe which started 2003 when EYCA member organisations in 7 countries participated (Austria, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Spain and Wales). 2004 new EYCA member organisations from 4 countries joined the project (Croatia, Cyprus, Hungary and Serbia). In 2005 two additional member organisations from Bulgaria and Turkey joined the project.

EYCAcademy is a combined train-the-trainer and research project. On the one hand an international group of young adults is trained to become trainers for moderators, on the other hand it contains a practical part for qualitative social youth research. The EYCAcademy is built up as a three years trainings course with participants on three levels trained together and in specialised courses.

At the first level the participants are trained in qualitative social research, they are trained to do focus groups with a similar approach to allow comparative social research. The second level participants get more information on social research methods, on customer relation and a first introduction to training methods. At the third level the ongoing trainers get a deeper insight in the role of trainers and in the use of methods.

For all three levels practical parts are obligatory. To reach the second level the participants have to organise, carry out and interpret focus groups, the same on the second level with additional moderation parts during the evaluation meeting, on the third level the participants have to train together with the trainers the level 1 participants.



Concept of the project “EYCAdeMy”

For the research project 2005 the level 1 participants were first trained in April in Budapest.

At this training also the topic of the research and the guidelines for the focus groups were developed. The participants also decided on the sample for the research.

Back in their home countries they carried out 5 to 6 focus groups on the topic of young people and their approach to participation.

At a meeting in Budapest in October 2005 24 moderators discussed the national research outcomes and the structure of an overall report.



Research method: focus groups

A method to gain more information about opinions, wishes and ideas of the youth is the so-called qualitative method of focus groups. The face-to-face discussion with other youngsters and the moderator allows allocating other and more information than quantitative opinion polls like the Eurobarometer.

The qualitative method of group discussions allows learning more about the reasons of the youth's opinions, their expectations, desires and disappointments. The general advantage of qualitative over quantitative methods is the possibility to get answers to "questions which have not been asked": Because of the creativity of the interviewees new points of view and relations between topics which were not been seen in the forehand may come up.

Focus groups are typically composed of 6 to 10 people, but it can range from as few as four up to as many as twelve. The size of groups depends on the discussed topics and is conditioned by two factors: The group must be small enough to offer everyone to share his ideas and yet large enough to provide diversity of perceptions and opinions: When the group exceeds a dozen participants there is a tendency of group fragmentation. Participants, who want to talk, are unable to do so, because of lack of sufficient pauses during the conversation. In this situation the only recourse for participants is to share their opinion by talking to people next to themselves. This well-known phenomenon is a sign for too big groups. While dealing with complex topics, even the size of 12 is too large. Large groups generally limit each person to share opportunities, insights and observations.

The moderator of the groups has an important role. He/she must exercise a mild, unobtrusive control over the group. As the discussion proceeds, irrelevant topics may be introduced by participants and so the moderator must carefully and subtly guide the conversation back to target. The moderators main task is to develop discussions among participants themselves.



Research method: focus groups

The setting of focus groups depends on the participants. The aim is always to provide an atmosphere where the participants feel comfortable and willing to take part in the discussion. So for young people fancy studios for market research are less apt than a backroom of a pub or a youth club. It is not important that moderators and social scientists feel at home but the participants.

The advantage of group discussions of young people in the same age consists in the simulation of real deciding processes. The documentation and evaluation of the results can give attention to dynamic processes within the groups, which enables to generate a more detailed and exact image of the wide spread, different opinions and ideas of European youth.

It is important that focus groups are composed of people that are similar to each other. The nature of this homogeneity is determined by the purpose of the study. These considerations must be taken into account during the recruitment. Homogeneity is sought in terms of age, gender, past use of a program or service etc. People who participate in focus groups do better not know each other. The idea of separating groups by gender is necessary because of a different group dynamic in homogeneous female or male groups. Furthermore sometimes the topics of discussion are experienced differently by gender.

Working language in the groups has to be the inside the group commonly spoken language.

Each focus group is documented by taking notes through an assistant and by recording on tape or video tape. Each group discussion is analysed separately in a report where typical opinions and attitudes are presented verbatim as stated in the discussion. Out of the single reports an overall national report is created in which similarities and differences between the groups are pointed out. This national report will be translated into English and out of the national reports a final report is created.



The aim of the research project of EYCAdeMy 2005

In this years comparative qualitative research “participation of young people” was the research guiding topic.

Participation of young people is one of the main objectives of the “White Paper on Youth Policy”.

Therefor a qualitative research on the topic - especially on the question what young people understand as possible ways to participate - is of high importance for the EU and its member countries but also for the members of the CoE.

By the combination with the topics of leisure activities and deficits in (youth) facilities as well as memberships and active participation in youth (card) organisations this years research becomes not only a “drill ground” for the participants of the EYCAdeMy but it gains importance for EYCA.

A research on that topics shows the needs of young people as well as the possibilities and vested interest of the young generation to change their living conditions in an active way.

Therefor the questions that should have been answered in this research were:

- ▶ What do young people in their leisure time?
- ▶ What are they missing, what do they need?
- ▶ How do young people see their opportunities to play an active role in society and what can they do to make their case heard?
- ▶ What does active membership in organisation mean to young people?
- ▶ How do they see possibilities to influence organisations?



Guidelines and sample of the focus groups



Sample and group split

	Gender	Age group	origin
1.	female	young	rural
2.	female	young	city
3.	male	young	rural
4.	male	young	city
5.	mixed	old	rural
6.	mixed	old	city

young = 16 to the age of possible end of high school

old = 21 to 26

rural = young people **have** to go to an other place to attend high school, university, go to cinemas, find shopping centres, therefor rural can also be a town

city = all kinds of high schools, university, cinemas, shopping centre, free time facilities like spa, sporting hall, discotheques are here.

It should be looked for that - if possible - in **all** groups members and non-members of youth organisations are invited. Both people working or with lower education and people with high education should be included to the research in every country, it is not needed to have a mixture of these people in every group.



Guidelines for the focus groups

0. Thanks for coming / I am ... / this is my assistant ... / we will have a recording of the group, the tape is for our use only and will not be given to third parties / every opinion is welcome, you can't say something wrong here / and it will not be judged.
1. What do you do in your leisure time?
2. Do you do this alone or with someone else?
3. Why do you do it?
4. Do you have enough opportunities/facilities for the things you want to do in your leisure time?
5. (if no: why not?)
6. What more do you need (do you want) for your leisure time? What would you change (*INT: if needed give help: "according the facilities and opportunities that are already here for you"*)
7. Apart of the needs and wishes for the leisure time, what else would you need for your daily life (*INT: if needed give help: shopping facilities, working opportunities, educational alternatives*)



Guidelines for the focus groups

8. We now talked about your wishes and needs, so how do you think you can achieve what you want?
How can you achieve that the things mentioned in the groups are provided for you?
9. How can you generally get your needs, interests and opinions be heard? (*INT: if needed give help: demonstrations, petitions, build a group, elections, street performance, going away, writing to the media, argue with adults, illegal actions (steeling, violence), wearing T-shirts with messages,*
the following should be mentioned and - if not brought up in the group - asked if it is seen as a way of getting heard:
 - ▶ **cultural activity like band / theatre / concerts,**
 - ▶ **writing on the wall,**
 - ▶ **becoming member in an organisation.)**
10. Do you see any effects of such forms of expressing the needs, interest and opinions with other people?
11. Is it different for your parent's generation to get their needs, interests and opinions heard?
12. Where are the differences?



Guidelines for the focus groups

13. We were mentioning organisations before. Are any of you members in any organisation? And if in which organisation are you a member?
14. Why are you a member in this special organisation? / Why are you not a member of an organisation?
15. What do you think of membership in organisations in general? (*INT: help if needed: is it needful, is it outdated, is membership important*)
16. Even if you are not a member in a youth organisation - how would you want to participate in a youth organisation? (*INT: ask if the following is seen as participating in a youth organisation:*
 - ▶ *passive membership (= just paying the fee, just being listed but not doing anything with the organisation),*
 - ▶ *gaining the benefits / using the opportunities / join activities,*
 - ▶ *active membership (= working inside the organisation - like organising activities)*
 - ▶ *elect the board*
 - ▶ *being elected*
 - ▶ *contribute*
 - ▶ *going to to workshops / focus groups like this one after being invited)*



Guidelines for the focus groups

17. COUNTRY QUESTION CAN BE ALTERED TO NEEDS:

Imagine there exists a youth card for different personal benefits of young people. What would be interesting for you.

17a. Which kind of discounts (INT: what shops, what facilities, what offers and to what heights) would you like to have?

18. (*If youth card topic was the last topic dealt with*) How would you like to get involved in influencing the youth card?

Or:

18. (*If youth organisation was the last topic dealt with*): What is your favourite way to participate in the youth organisation?



Results of the research



Structure of the report

In this report clusters between countries and between groups are mentioned to give an overview over the European tendencies on participation of young people in society in general and more concrete in organisations - like youth organisations and the youth card organisation.

Additionally English translations of the national reports on the results of the research will be available.

The discussions in the countries stressed different areas more detailed, so in this European report only comparable topics will be highlighted:

- leisure activities and facilities for leisure time and daily life
- What is participation in society for young people?
- Membership in organisations and interest in active membership
- influence on youth (card) organisations

In total 57 focus groups with approximately 400 young people were carried out.



Leisure time activities

Common for all countries is the importance of friends for the daily life of young people. Going out together with friends was a very important activity for the leisure time in all countries. Sports, computer or hanging out were also important activities in all countries.

Where doing sports and working/playing with the computer are typically male activities; girls and young women are far more determined on activities with friends.

Voluntary work is a popular free time activity in Hungary, Luxembourg and Turkey - but for different reasons. On one side voluntary work is seen as an important approach to alter the things and to “better one self” on the other side being active in an organisation is a good reason to be allowed to be away from home and to be with friends.

Reading books is popular in Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Serbia and Slovenia. Working is mentioned as particularly popular activities in Croatia, Wales and Poland and sleeping in Turkey and Cyprus.

The main reason for all chosen activities is the search for fun and relaxation. Female youngsters sometime state the lack of alternative possibilities for shaping their leisure time.



Facilities for leisure time and daily life

The analysis of this topic showed quite interesting results. It turned out that in all countries the group that stated the need of more facilities for the leisure time strongest are young girls from the countryside. Beside other they commonly miss opportunities to go out and meet with friends - they look for pubs and clubs, but they also want more cultural activities in their surrounding. On the other hand the group that showed the most satisfaction with the available equipment are girls from the city.

General a tendency can be determined throughout the participating countries: In the cities people are more content with the opportunities for the daily life and the older people get, the more satisfied they are.

An expansion of public transport and increasing mobility are the most often wished for improvements in the facilities for young people. Particularly young people who are living in the countryside want to become more mobile. They want to have an easy access to the opportunities that are available in the city. It is notably that the wish for a better public transport systems gets weaker in the older groups; maybe because these young adults do have more possibilities already to be mobile on an individual way.

For leisure time the need of more cinemas, pubs, discos and clubs and of more youth culture events like concerts are on top of the list. Also more facilities for sports are needed. One is looking for possibilities to meet with friends and have fun.

It becomes obvious that the possibilities in the cities are expected to be far wider than in small towns and in the countryside. Only in very few groups in the cities the people ask for more nature, for more parks, they commonly also mention their need for more commercial opportunities.



Participation of young people

In this topic a high variety of approaches of the young people to participation can be seen in the different countries. The question is not about participating in organisations, going to elections or being a member of a political party, but what can young people do to manifest their wishes and to make their needs apparent for society.

Common for all countries is the belief that it is easier to get heard if a group works together than by doing something alone. When the young people are in a group, they are more likely to be noticed and - more important - are more likely to change things.

It is furthermore evident that older people do see a bigger impact of their actions than younger.

There is also a clear tendency to express the belief that participation methods like being member of organisations or the establishment of youth forums, signing petitions or the direct talk with politicians are far more influential than new forms of expressing the own needs like cultural events. Moreover it is stated that demonstrations or writing on the wall do more bad for the cause than good. Expressive forms of making their needs and wishes public - like concerts, theatre, demonstrations or graffiti - are having a short term effect of getting heard but are lacking sustainability.

To participate in society effectively needs two steps: to get heard and then to achieve something. Expressive forms are better to get heard but have to be chosen with respect to the acceptance of the adults. To achieve something, one has to act according to the democratic rules.

Concerning their parent's generation the results are quite surprising: It is stated in the majority of the countries, that the adults do have more possibilities to participate effectively but are not interested to do so anymore. It is also stated that in comparison to the time when their parents were young today exist more options to get heard for young people.



Membership in organisations

With exceptions to some countries - Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey - membership in organisations is very popular (in Bulgaria where no members in the groups at all). It is also common that memberships are more popular to older participants of the focus groups than to the younger ones and they are more popular in the city than in the countryside. The least memberships can be found in the groups young female from the countryside.

The popular organisations can be clustered to cultural organisations, sport clubs and to political (environmentalists, social) organisations.

One becomes a member of an organisation because of the increasing leisure time activities: it is fun to be there and it provides possibilities to meet other people with similar interests. The reason to go to a social organisation is to change something, to help other people and for self development.

In most groups a positive attitude towards being member of an organisation; only in Hungary the participants are more sceptic then positive about memberships.

Not being member of an organisation does not automatically imply that people are not interesting in organisations. In most cases the participants claim that no organisations exist in their surrounding - or more correct: they are not informed about the opportunities they have to join an organisation. So it is clear that a lack of information does exist about youth organisations and the possibilities they would supply.



Active or passive membership

In general more young people in the focus groups want to be active than passive if they are (or would be) members of organisations. Females tend to try to be more active than males of the same age. In Slovenia, Croatia and Cyprus it is seen evident that being a member of any organisation is only interesting if one is active in the organisation. The other extreme is Poland, where in 5 out of 6 groups people prefer to be passive members than active ones.

On the other side it is we see mistrust in institutional organisations in Wales, Luxembourg, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Bulgaria and Turkey - always due to different reasons.

The reason for the wish to be an active member is to participate and join the activities of organisations while they believe the main reason for other participants is to profit from benefits.

Participants who want to be passive in organisations argue for that because they think they can not provide much to organisations as active members; money is more important for organisations than their help.

The reason for the overall positive answer about being active seems to be firstly the social acceptance and secondly the personal inexperience toward this hypothetical question.

It is noticeable that active membership is not connected to become member of the board or to elect the board. Being active does not mean to take responsibility inside the organisations but it means to participate from the activities organisations offer. So activity is not being active for or inside the organisation but with the organisation.



Influencing the youth card / a youth organisation

Only in 4 countries - Netherlands, Wales, Poland and Luxembourg - the majority of the participants are not interested to influence youth organisations or the youth card. They reason that they do not have enough information about the organisations to know if it interesting to influence them or not.

Women are more interested to influence the youth organisation / - card than men and older participants more than younger.

It is startling that a lot of participants argue that they could imagine to work for the organisations and to help organising events.

For the youth card organisations they see a possibility for influence in helping them find more discounts.

So the reason for a higher influence in organisations is the prospect for direct personal benefits!



Conclusion

All over Europe the most disadvantaged group, the group that sees for themselves the fewest opportunities are girls from the country side. They lack possibilities to spend their leisure time in their local surrounding together with friends and/or facilities to become mobile to go to the next bigger city.

Young people are very moderate in their wishes. They just want to have the opportunity to meet with friends and to live a life according to late modern everyday life/youth culture: Space to meet with friends, public transport and more cultural events are wished for by most of the participants.

The young generation does not see many effects of participation in society. Expressive forms of articulate their needs and wishes, their hopes, problems and fears seem to have only short term effects and no sustainability - and in some cases even does more harm than good. Socially accepted forms of participation seem more effective but are not very popular with the young people. Adults have more opportunities to express their needs and to change something but do not use it.

(Youth) organisations provide possibilities for leisure time activities and are interesting for young people to meet others with similar interests. But joining such organisations has as condition that these organisations are known to young people. A lack of information about youth organisations and the opportunities those offer can be observed.

Active membership in organisations seems interesting but only in the way to participate at the activities of organisations not to do voluntary work inside the organisations. Only if someone is interested to influence the structure and the direction of an organisation he or she would work for the organisation.



Participation of young people

For further and more detailed information please see the single country reports for Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Hungary, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey and Wales.

For further questions connected to the research project of the EYCAdeMy please contact:

Manfred Zentner
jugendkultur.at
Institute for youth culture research and culture transfer
Bauernmarkt 6/5
1010 Vienna
Austria