Learning in Youth in Action

Results from the surveys
with project participants and project leaders
in May 2012

Interim Transnational Analysis

Executive Summary

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'Youth in Action' is a programme of the European Union supporting European youth projects. The 'Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of the Youth in Action Programme' (RAY) is conducted by the RAY Network, which currently includes the Youth in Action National Agencies and their research partners in 15 countries.

This study was implemented by the Institute of Educational Science at the University of Innsbruck and the Generation and Educational Science Institute in Austria in cooperation with the National Agencies and their research partners in Austria, Belgium (Flemish speaking community), Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Finland, France, Hungary, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Sweden and Turkey. The RAY Network members in France and German participated only in the survey in November 2012. National research reports can be requested from the respective National Agencies and their research partners.

The study is being funded with contributions from the National Agencies in the respective countries.

This report reflects the views only of its authors, and the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

The full version of this study can be retrieved from
http://www.uibk.ac.at/bgl/projects_networks/projekte.html.en#p14

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Abbreviations and glossary

YiA   Youth in Action Programme
PL   Project leaders/members of project teams
PP   Project participants
RAY   Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of Youth in Action. The RAY Network consists of the Youth in Action National Agencies and their research partners involved in the RAY project.
NA   National Agency

Project leaders   Youth workers, youth leaders, trainers or other actors who prepared and implemented YiA projects for/with young people or youth workers/leaders, at least in an education/socio-pedagogic function, but frequently also with an organisational function; normally, in particular in the case of projects with participants from two or more different countries, these projects are prepared and implemented by project teams with two or more project leaders.

Type of project (also 'project type')
    The analyses partly differentiate by 'type of project' combining Youth Exchanges from Action 1.1 and Action 3.1 and combining training and networking activities from Action 4.3 and Action 3.1; combining these similar types of sub-Actions (the main difference being the eligible countries) results in higher numbers of respondents in the respective categories and, thus, in more meaningful results.
YE   Youth Exchanges (Action 1.1 and 3.1)
YI   Youth Initiatives (Action 1.2)
YD   Youth Democracy Projects (Action 1.3)
EVS   European Voluntary Service
T&N   Training and Networking (Action 4.3 and 3.1)
TCP   Training and Cooperation Plan
SD   Structured Dialogue – meetings of young people and those responsible for youth policy (Action 5.1)

Residence country   Country of residence at the beginning of the project (the country of the partner organisation who the participant was part of)
Funding country   Country in which a project was funded through the respective National Agency of YiA
Venue country   Country in which one or more core activities within a project – in particular meetings of young people or of youth workers/leaders (in most cases from different countries of origin) – took place; also referred to as 'hosting country'

Sending   This refers to PP or PL who came from a 'sending' partner, i.e., they went to another country for their project
Hosting   This refers to PP or PL who came from a 'hosting' partner, i.e., they were involved in a project taking place in their residence country

YiA Programme countries:
These are EU member states, EEA countries and EU candidate/accession countries

YiA Partner countries:
These are countries from Southeast Europe, countries from Eastern Europe and the Caucasus region as well as Mediterranean countries.

RAY countries   RAY Network members participating in these surveys (= funding countries)

Country codes:
AT   Austria
BE   Belgium
BG   Bulgaria
CZ   the Czech Republic
DE   Germany
EE   Estonia
FI   Finland
FR   France
HU   Hungary
LI   Liechtenstein
LU   Luxembourg
PL   Poland
SE   Sweden
SK   Slovakia
TR   Turkey

Key competences for lifelong learning
KC   Key competence
KC1   Communication in the mother tongue
KC2   Communication in the mother tongue
KC3   Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
KC3a   Mathematical competence
KC3b   Basic competences in science and technology
KC4   Digital competence
KC5   Learning competence (learning to learn)
KC6   Social and civic competences
KC6a   Interpersonal and social competence
KC6b   Intercultural competence
KC6c   Civic competence
KC7   Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
KC7a   Sense of initiative
KC7b   Sense of entrepreneurship
KC8   Cultural awareness and expression
ML   Media literacy

Executive summary

This study was implemented as part of the project 'Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of the Youth in Action Programme' (RAY) which aims to explore the effects of the Youth in Action Programme (YiA) of the European Union, in particular on young people, youth workers and youth leaders involved in the projects funded by it, but also on the organisations, groups and other bodies promoting it as well as on the local environments and communities where these projects take place. The RAY project aims to study these effects in general, not only with respect to the explicit intentions of the YiA Programme, therefore seeking to contribute to the generation of new knowledge about the processes and outcomes of non-formal education activities, in particular in the youth field, but at the same time aiming to contribute to quality assurance and development in the implementation of the YiA Programme and to evidence-based and research-informed youth policy development.

The RAY project, founded in 2008, involves National Agencies of the YiA Programme and their research partners in presently 15 countries. The research on the YiA Programme is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative social research methods. As a first activity, online surveys using multilingual questionnaires for young people participating in YiA projects and for youth workers/youth leaders were developed in order to study the effects of YiA projects on the actors involved, including the effects on their organisations and local communities, and also to study the implementation of the projects as well as the profile of the actors and organisations involved. These 'standard surveys' have been implemented since 2009 and will continue to be used until the end of the YiA Programme. The transnational analyses of the surveys conducted between October 2009 and May 2011 are available (see Fennes, Gadinger, & Hagleitner, 2012; Fennes, Hagleitner, & Helling, 2011).

In 2012, a special study was developed aiming to explore the learning processes of actors involved in YiA projects: how do participants and project leaders learn in YiA projects and which settings, educational approaches, methodologies and methods contribute to learning in YiA projects? For this study, a 'Special Survey' using multilingual online questionnaires was developed and implemented in 2012. Furthermore, qualitative research methods – interviews with project leaders and focus groups with project participants –are being and will be implemented during the first half of 2013 in order to produce additional findings and provide a deeper analysis of the survey findings. A full report is scheduled to be ready during the second half of 2013.

The present report represents an interim transnational analysis of the special surveys conducted within the framework of the RAY project in May 2012 by National Agencies and their research partners in 13 countries: Austria, Belgium (Flemish-speaking community), Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Sweden and Turkey[1], coordinated by the Institute of Educational Science at the University of Innsbruck in Austria. More than 9,500 project participants and 1,500 project leaders and members of project teams (referred to further on as 'project leaders') were invited to complete a questionnaire aimed at exploring how learning takes place in projects funded by the YiA Programme. Around 30% of the participants and around 45% of the project leaders invited to take part in the surveys completed the respective questionnaires (one for the participants and one for the project leaders). For this transnational analysis, only a proportion of these responses could be used in order to arrive at a coherent set of respondents (2,038 participants and 503 project leaders).

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[1] Germany and France participated only in the special survey in November 2012.

The samples of the survey in May 2012 are, in principle, comparable with the samples of the surveys in 2010/11 with respect to gender, educational attainment, distribution by project types and distribution by sending/hosting. This implies that, whenever applicable, the results of the surveys in 2010/11 and in May 2012 are largely comparable.

Competence development

Participants as well as project leaders report to have developed skills related to key competences for lifelong learning through their involvement in a YiA project. With respect to the competence development of participants, the responses to the special survey correlate highly and very significantly with those to the standard surveys in 2010/11 (see Fennes et al., 2012): the most distinct development is reported for skills related to interpersonal, social and intercultural competence as well as to communication in a foreign language; a significant development is also reported for skills related to sense of entrepreneurship, civic competence, cultural awareness and expression, and learning competence (learning to learn), as well as for skills related to communication in the first language (mother tongue), mathematical competence and sense of initiative.[2] This suggests that YiA projects contribute to a broad scope of key competences, on the one hand competences related to active citizenship as well as to participation in public life and civil society, on the other hand competences which are not directly linked to the objectives of the YiA programme.

Similar to the participants, also the project leaders report the development of skills related to the key competences for lifelong learning. Also here, the responses from 2010/11 are comparable to those from May 2012: project leaders report the most distinct development for skills related to communication in a foreign language, interpersonal, social, intercultural and civic competence as well as to sense of entrepreneurship and communication in the first language (mother tongue) – which shows a similar pattern as the competence development reported by participants. Furthermore, project leaders also report that through their involvement in YiA projects they developed youth work competences, in particular with respect to non-formal education and international youth projects. Overall, this reflects that Youth in Action contributes to the professional development of youth workers and youth leaders and thus to 'learning organisations'.

Youth in Action – a space for new learning experiences

A majority of participants report that their project used exercises, games and methods that were new to them. Similarly, a majority of project leaders report that during their project they had applied exercises, games and methods for the first time. This indicates that YiA projects are a space for trying out and experiencing new educational/learning methods – a laboratory for training/teaching and learning for both participants and project leaders. And these projects also provide for successful learning spaces: a considerable majority of participants indicate that these methods addressed important topics and triggered their interest for them, that they helped them to learn something more easily, and that they consider them to be suited also for school or university. Only a very small proportion of participants thought that the methods used were useless for learning something valuable or that they were somewhat childish.

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[2] Some of the eight key competences defined in the European reference framework for key competences for lifelong learning were divided into sub-competences. In particular, 'interpersonal, social, intercultural and civic competence' was divided into three sub-competences: 'interpersonal and social', 'intercultural' and 'civic'.

The learning continuum[3] in Youth in Action projects

Participants and project leaders report that between 40% and 50% of the project time was dedicated to activities which are mostly in line with non-formal education/learning methods: between 20% and 25% of the project time was dedicated to activities which rather would correspond to formal education/learning methods (i.e., 'listening to and engaging with presentations/inputs given by experts or group/project leaders'); around 20% of the project time was not part of the project programme, providing opportunities primarily for informal learning. This indicates that YiA projects offer a broad spectrum of learning opportunities between more formal education activities on one end and more informal learning situations on the other, thus covering the full learning continuum, with around half of the activities in the non-formal education/learning bracket.

Specific learning situations, methods and activities in Youth in Action projects

YiA projects are characterised by a broad variety of learning situations, methods and activities applied in each project: participants as well as project leaders selected on average more than 7 out of 11 methods they could choose from, and each of the methods mentioned was selected by more than half of the participants/project leaders.

The biggest proportions of specific methods applied in YiA projects are shown for discussions, followed by presentations/input by participants and presentations/input by experts, thus indicating, on the one hand, a frequent use of rather traditional methods, on the other hand a participatory approach with a large majority of projects involving participants in presentations. Remarkable is the high percentage of projects providing for individual reflection or reflection in a group, which suggests that a large majority of project leaders considers reflection to support learning processes. Ranking high are also outdoor or sports activities, indicating that these are applied as non-formal learning methods. Furthermore, experiential learning methods are applied in a considerable majority of projects (role plays, simulations, field exercises, trying out what has been learned), as well as mentoring by members of the project team, artistic methods and using digital or online media – the latter suggesting that blended learning[4] has found its way also into non-formal education.

Learning of participants in YiA projects

The responses indicate that in YiA projects the participants develop skills related to key competences through a combination of non-formal, informal and rather formal education/learning methods and settings; the participants indicate that they developed a specific skill in a combination of, on average, three different situations or activities. Non-formal education methods and activities which were part of the programme play the most dominant role, followed by informal experiences with people in and around the project, confirming the relevance of informal situations and settings for learning and competence development in general. In particular, the responses indicate that the development of citizenship/civic skills is strongly supported through informal learning. Furthermore, reflecting/talking about the experiences during or after the project, taking part in the organisation of the project and applying what one has learned in the project are reported to contribute considerably to the development of selected skills for lifelong learning, thus confirming the relevance of reflection, a participatory approach, and of practical experience for learning.

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[3] The full spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning
[4] A combination of face-to-face learning methods and e-learning/computer-supported learning

Learning of project leaders in YiA projects

Project leaders report that they were involved in a broad scope of tasks and activities related to the development and implementation of their project: on average, each project leader reports to have been involved in at least six out of the eight types of project leader activities, implying that a large majority of project leaders were involved in a broad scope of activities in which work-related learning could take place at least potentially.

Similar to the participants, project leaders report to have developed skills related to key competences for lifelong learning through a combination of different types of activities they implemented in their role as project leaders: they indicate that they developed a specific skill in a combination of, on average, three to four different project leader activities. Overall, project leaders report to have developed the skills in question best through activities which are directly linked to designing, developing and implementing the project, in particular when implementing project activities with/for participants, and also during organisational and administrative tasks. Designing the project, cooperating with youth workers from other countries and implementing project activities for/with participants are reported to be very effective for work-related learning in YiA projects.

Learning of YiA participants in everyday life

Participants also reported that they learned something during the twelve months before the survey in a range of contexts and situations in everyday life (thus also outside the YiA project they were involved in) – covering the full scope between formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts as well as work-related learning. Informal learning contexts play an important role for all participants and a dominant role for those who are unemployed, not in paid work or volunteers. Obviously, school, college or university are more relevant learning contexts for those in education or training, and work/the workplace are more relevant learning contexts for those who are working. For the latter also non-formal learning contexts (i.e. training courses) play a relevant role.

Also in everyday life, participants report having developed skills related to key competences for lifelong learning in a combination of different everyday life situations – on average in three to four situations for each of the skills in question. The situation mentioned most frequently for developing these skills is a non-formal/informal learning situation: in an association, civil society organisations, doing voluntary work or projects, etc.; formal education situations (at school, university or college) rank only in second place. Further relevant situations for developing these skills are informal and non-formal learning situations such as studying, travelling, working or living abroad, when being with friends or family or when attending training courses, seminars, workshops, etc.

Differentiated analyses by project types

A differentiated analysis by project types shows considerable differences between project types with respect to types of methods, project activities, situations occurring in the projects, and the distribution of informal, non-formal and rather formal situations/activities/methods. This suggests that different educational approaches are applied for different project types, some of them showing a broader or smaller scope of situations/activities/methods, some project types showing more rather formal situations/activities/methods and others less, some applying more

participatory approaches and others less. The different educational approaches applied by project leaders might well be challenged by the analyses provided in this study.

Coherence of responses

The responses to this survey show a considerable coherence with respect to many aspects:
- a coherence of responses within the participant survey and within the project leaders survey, where responses to one question are coherent with responses to another question;
- a coherence of responses of participants (self-perception) with the responses of project leaders (external perception with respect to the participants);
- a coherence of responses to the standard survey in 2010/11 and to the special survey in May 2012, where applicable.

Whenever possible, the correlation was analysed and proved to be very high and very significant in most cases.

Further research activities

At the time of writing this report, a qualitative study involving interviews with project leaders and focus groups with participants is being conducted complementary to the online surveys in order to allow for a more in-depth analysis of the processes and outcomes of projects funded by the YiA Programme.