# Research project on competence development and capacity building in Erasmus+: Youth in Action – overall design

The proposed study is conducted in the framework of 'Research-based Analysis of Erasmus+: Youth in Action' (RAY).[1] It aims to explore processes, outcomes and impact of training activities for youth workers and youth leaders in Erasmus+: Youth in Action (E+/YiA), in particular training activities funded within Key Action 1 (Youth Worker Mobility), Key Action 2, Transnational Cooperation Activities (TCA) and other support mechanisms for the development and implementation of E+/YiA projects. In particular, the study aims to explore how these activities contribute to the competence development of youth workers and youth leaders, how they contribute to youth work practice, and how they affect the organisations involved in E+/YiA. This should lead to a better understanding of the systemic impact of training and support activities within E+/YiA. Furthermore, the study should also contribute to the quality development and strategic planning of Transnational Cooperation Activities (TCA) within E+/YiA.

**Aims and objectives**

The aim of this project is to explore evidence for the benefits of international cooperation in the youth field in E+/YiA, especially with respect to its contribution to quality development of youth work training and the work of youth workers, organisations in the youth field and National Agencies of E+/YiA. This evidence should contribute to the visibility and recognition of international cooperation in the youth field.

Objectives are:
- to explore competence development of youth workers and youth leaders through their participation in training and support activities in the youth field, in particular in the framework of E+/YiA (including TCA);
- to explore how learning outcomes from such activities are transferred into practice;
- to explore long-term systemic effects of training and support activities on the organisations involved in E+/YiA.

The exploration of competence development should refer to
- key competences according to the European reference framework for key competences for lifelong learning (see European Parliament and Council, 2006); in this respect, this study should build on the RAY studies between 2009 and 2014;[2]
- youth work competences, in particular related to international youth work and youth work with a European Dimension, but also to youth work in general; in this respect the study should take into account existing literature and frameworks for (international) youth work such as the European Training Strategy (see Bergstein, García López, & Teichmann, 2014),

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[1] See http://www.researchyouth.net/
[2] See http://www.researchyouth.net/2013/publications/

the portfolio on youth work of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2007) and related studies (see European Commission, 2014; Pantea, 2012).

The study could also be used to explore potential synergies between training/support activities in different sectors of E+, with a view to a potential added value of cross-sectorial training activities, in the framework of strategic partnerships within E+.

**Research questions**

General research questions:
- How do training and support activities within E+/YiA (in particular in KA1 and KA2) contribute to competence development and professionalism of youth workers and youth leaders?
- What is the European dimension in regard to the impact of training/support activities?
- How are learning outcomes transferred into practice?
- How do training and support activities within E+/YiA contribute to the development of organisations involved in E+/YiA, also in combination with other E+/YiA activities these organisations are involved in?
- How could the findings contribute to quality development of training/support strategies and youth work/training/support practice in the context of E+/YiA, including the work of National Agencies in this respect, in particular through dissemination and exploitation?
- How could the findings contribute to youth policy development?

Specific research questions:
- Which key competences and (international) youth work competences are developed trough training/support activities within E+/YiA? To which extent are they developed?
- How does the development of key competences and (international) youth work competences focussed on quality standards and professionalism take place in training/support activities within E+/YiA?
- Which training approaches, methodologies and other factors are successful in developing these competences? What stimulates the development of these competences?
- What are the differences of training processes and outcomes depending on different types of training providers, training formats and types of training and support activities?
- How does participation in E+/YIA contribute to inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities?
- What triggers the participation of youth workers and youth leaders in training and support activities?

**Research design**

The study should make use of existing data and knowledge resulting from RAY research activities between 2007 and 2014, in particular the RAY studies on the effects of YiA and on learning in YiA (Fennes, Gadinger, Hagleitner, & Lunardon, 2013); furthermore, data from RAY surveys between 2009 and 2014 could be further evaluated and analysed.

Basically, there are three research modules:
- a module on the competence development of participants in training/support activities within E+/YiA;

- a module on the transfer into practice of what has been learned in training/support activities (use of competences developed);
- a module on the systemic effects (including long-term effects) of training/support activities, in particular on the organisations involved (youth organisations, training providers, National Agencies).

*Module on competence development*

As a first step, existing knowledge should be collected, reviewed and analysed, in particular
- outcomes of the RAY 'Standard Surveys' and 'Special Surveys' between 2009 and 2014, including a deeper analysis of the data collected;
- literature and studies on this topic, including literature on youth work competences;
- reports on monitoring of TCP activities (2007-2013), to be requested from National Agencies.

During this phase, a specification (framework) of 'youth work competences' (including for international youth work) should be worked out based on a literature review as well as on a survey (standardised interviews) with beneficiaries who are responsible for implementing TCA in E+/YiA.

As a second step, a pre-study is planned, exploring basic dimensions of the development of youth work competences and their use in practice by interviewing participants involved in training and networking activities within YiA (2007-2013). This pre-study is aimed at contributing to the development of research instruments of the main study.

The research design of the main study is based on a self-assessment of competence development by participants in training/support activities through interviews before and after the training/support activity. The sample of participants should include participants with different levels of experience with training/support activities ('newcomers' as well as 'repeaters').

Additionally, the questionnaires for participants within the RAY research project on monitoring E+/YiA ('Standard Surveys') will include a special section for participants in training/support activities (Youth Worker Mobility and Transnational Cooperation Activities) in view of their development of (international) youth work competences. The outcomes of these surveys will be taken into consideration in the analysis of the interviews of this study.

*Module on the transfer of competence development into practice*

As a first step, existing knowledge should be collected, reviewed and analysed, in particular from RAY surveys between 2009 and 2014, TCP monitoring by National Agencies and related literature.

The research design would include interviews with participants in training/support activities around 6 to 12 months after the activity (same sample as for the module on competence development). These interviews would also refer to effects on the organisations of the interviewed participants (see also next module on systemic effects). In this respect, the sample of participants should reflect a broad scope of organisations, including from organisations with no prior involvement in YiA or E+/YiA.

Complementary to the interviews, participants will be encouraged to write a diary concerning their youth work practice (optional), focussing on what they have done differently because of their participation in the training/support activity – and how their practice has changed.

*Module on long-term systemic effects (organisational development)*

This module would explore (long-term) systemic effects of training/support activities (including TCA) as well as of the overall involvement in E+/YiA on the organisations involved.[3]

As a first step, existing knowledge should be collected, reviewed and analysed, in particular from RAY surveys between 2009 and 2014 (including items related to effects on organisations and local project environments), from related literature, from national studies, from the interim evaluation of YiA in 2010 etc.

The research design of the main study would include interviews with staff members of organisations involved in training/support activities and in other activities funded through E+/YiA.[4] Staff members interviewed would be directors of organisations and staff members working on E+/YiA activities (focus on organisations involved in the modules on competence development and on the transfer into practice through youth workers and youth leaders interviewed for this study).

Optionally, the research design could include case studies of selected training/support activities as well as of organisations with a multiple involvement in E+/YiA.

A main indicator for organisational development would be the quality of (international) youth work, indicated by non-formal learning, intercultural learning, inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities and participation of young people in the activities of the organisations. Further indicators could be the "multiplication" of experiences gained in training/support activities, the sustainability of effects resulting from the involvement in training/support activities etc.

*Further research activities*

As in RAY surveys between 2009 and 2014, it is planned to include a special section/module for participants in training/support activities (including TCA) in the future 'Standard Surveys' within research-based analysis and monitoring of E+/YiA. This section/module would include questions on the development of (international) youth work competences as well as on the profile, motivation, prior training/learning experiences in the youth field, prior involvement in E+/YiA etc. of participating youth workers and youth leaders.

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[3] In general, organisations involved in training/support activities are likely to be also involved in other activity types of E+/YiA.

[4] To be clarified if the sample should also include organisations which were involved less frequently and/or for a shorter period.

**Partners**

Research partners of this project are the RAY Networks partners in Austria, Belgium (Flemish-speaking community), the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Turkey.

The pre-study is carried out by the RAY Network partners in Austria, the Czech Republic and France.

The working group developing and monitoring this research project is composed of representatives of the RAY Network partners in Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, France, Slovenia and Turkey. The Partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Union in the field of Youth will be invited to meetings of this working group.

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