



Research project on competence development and capacity building in Erasmus+: Youth in Action

Module (C) on systemic effects and organisational development:

**Interviews with key staff members of
organisations/platforms/networks**

National Report *Belgium (Flemish Community)*

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1. Context

This section will contain a description of the overarching research project on competence development and capacity building in Erasmus+: Youth in Action and will be provided by the transnational research coordination.

2. Executive summary

This report is the result of a close collaboration by the department of Social Work of the University College of West-Flanders and Jint VZW, the National Agency for Erasmus+: Youth in Action for Belgium (Flemish Community). It reports the results of a research on the systemic effects of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme on the development of organisations active in the youth sector. The field work for this research took place on the period April-June 2018. Key staff members of 11 organisations, that participated multiple times in TCA and/or training or support activities in KA1- and/or KA2-projects were interviewed. The question protocol included topics on choosing a training activity, support offered by the organisations before, during and after the training activity, the transfer of learning outcomes, past and future major developments of the organisations.

In the decision making process three phases can be discerned: initiation, consultation and application. In the initiation phase three movements are possible. In the bottom-up movement the decision process starts from an interest of a staff member or a volunteer. The start of the decision making process can be an initiative by a coordinator or a responsible for international projects in an organisation who discovers a training opportunity highly relevant to the organisation. In that case there is a top-down movement. The third movement is an external one. The decision making process is mostly instigated by a mail of the National Agency. The bottom-up process dominates in the interviewed organisations. In the consultation phase the relevance of a training or support activity for the organisation is assessed. This assessment is done at least with a team leader or the whole team. If the result of the decision process is the development of a new training activity in a KA1- or KA2-project even the board of the organisation can be involved, because that decision can have financial implications for the organisation. Participating in a training activity is therefore never a totally individual decision. The relevance of a training activity is determined by the correspondence between the main subject of the training activity and the focal concerns of the organisation, stipulated in its mission or vision, its policy plan, its year plan or in the personal development plan of the staff members. Also new themes, motivated by needs grounded in the daily practices of staff members or volunteers or subjects closely linked to current events, are considered as relevant to organisations. Once an activity is deemed relevant, the interested candidate applies for the activity or an organisation writes an application to organise a training activity.

In the support organisations offer to participants, a distinction has been made between support before, during and after the activity. Support before the training activity ranges from none at all, over practical support and support in preparing an assignment to a preparatory meeting discussing not only practicalities, but also more substantial aspects, such as the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme, expectations of the participant and those of the organisation and the mission of the organisation. The most extensive pre-activity support takes on the form of a trajectory of multiple days or evenings during which the participants are thoroughly prepared on the subject of the training activity. Support during the activity is rare and some interviewees signal they never have felt the need for this kind of support. If support is needed, people contact colleagues for

input in the usual way (phone, e-mail skype, ...) and some staff members responsible for international projects are standby during the training activities to provide support, even after office hours. Support after the activity involves support in transferring what has been seen during the training activity. Organisations are aware that transfer is not always easy and is an area of attention. Some organisations are developing a transfer policy, but are still searching. All organisations expect at least oral feedback, informally between colleagues or formally during a meeting. Some organisations try to promote transfer more actively by encouraging writing an article or testimony for their own media, by developing a system of knowledge management within the organisation and installing a working group 'internationalisation' or by creating training opportunities so attendees can practice their learning outcomes. Sharing experiences is not limited to the colleagues or volunteers in the organisation itself. Sharing outside of the organisation also occurs.

To examine the systemic effects of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme on the organisation, the organisations were first asked what changes they were confronted in the last five years. Subsequently, the role of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action in these transformations, if any, was gauged. Some organisations were confronted with a reorganisation or restructuring during the last five years. Others state to have become a more open and broader organisation in that same period, resulting in a change in mission and vision, a new approach, new activities or new attitudes towards specific target groups. It is in this last change that the training and support activities within the Erasmus+: Youth in Action are considered to be very instrumental. It triggers innovation and it fosters networks of organisations challenging each other to innovate and to question each other's approaches or views. It is furthermore an important way to develop intercultural skills. Participation in a training activity motivates personnel and volunteers and can be used as an element in the human resource policy or the volunteer management of an organisation. Finally, training/support activities can help in making youth organisations more aware of their own expertise.

Four forms of training activities are explicitly mentioned as valuable:

- short information sessions about the programme Erasmus+: Youth in Action itself for experienced staff members;
- training activities helping new participants to get acquainted with the programme;
- job shadowing is mentioned as a training activity especially helpful in transferring practices;
- Fundamental changes demand multiple training activities with a substantial preparatory and a post-activity phase in which learning outcomes can be put into action and be reflected upon.

Several organisations can still use some help with consolidating results and with impact assessment. There is a certain interest in exchanging results of projects and in ways other organisations consolidate results in their daily operations. A certain financial need to consolidate results and make them more sustainable in and outside of the organisation is expressed. Closely linked, is the wish to be able to repeat successful projects, training activities, newly developed methods ... to make them more sustainable.

Organisations warn though that it is an unfair expectation that every participation leads to innovations or new networks. Networking cannot be forced and the participants of some training activities are just not compatible. Not all aspects of training activities can be transferred or are very personal. Mostly all do not only demand transferring, but also need transformation to fit national, institutional or organisational contexts and practices. These can take time to realise. Organisations describe these training activities as *sowing seeds* needing time to germinate. Because these aspects are not always straightforward, most organisations appreciate the expertise and support of the National Agency and want to be able to continue to use it.

According to some organisations, the training and support activities within the programme have formed their current organisation. These training activities are considered to be the most important learning opportunities for these organisations. They are particularly instrumental in stimulating innovations leading to a more open and broader organisation.

3. Framework

3.1. Research Questions

The main research question of module (C) is:

“How do training and support activities within Erasmus+: Youth in Action contribute to the development of organisations, platforms and networks involved in Erasmus+: Youth in Action, also in combination with other Erasmus+: Youth in Action activities these organisations are involved in?”

Supporting research questions for module (C) are:

- How do beneficiaries of Erasmus+: Youth in Action support transfer (strategies) of participants of training/support activities strategically?
 - What kind of support do participants receive from their organisations for the transfer of the learning/training outcomes after coming back from the attended training/activity?
 - Are there explicit strategies within the organisation that contribute to the transfer of the learning/training outcomes in the organisations of the participants?
 - Are there any implicit strategies within the organisation, as part of its organisational culture, to deal with the outcomes of the attended training/activity?
- How do transfer (strategies) of participants of training/support activities in Erasmus+: Youth in Action effect programme beneficiaries at organisational level?
 - Are there any effects identified at organisational level, resulting from the transfer of learning/training outcomes of the participants?
- To which extent do training/support activities in Erasmus+: Youth in Action contribute to (which aspects of) organisational development?
- To which extent can training/support activities in Erasmus+: Youth in Action contribute to the visibility and recognition of the youth sector?
- How can training/support strategies at national and European level support organisational development through training/support activities in Erasmus+: Youth in Action?

3.2. Interview Sample

The sample for the interviews consists of key staff members of programme beneficiaries who have repeatedly/regularly been involved in international training and support activities for youth workers and youth leaders and/or who have implemented several relevant youth work projects in Erasmus+: Youth in Action, in particular training and support activities funded under Key Action 1 (e.g. Youth Worker Mobility), Key Action 2, Transnational Cooperation Activities (TCA) and other support mechanisms for the development and implementation of Erasmus+: Youth in Action projects. Where possible, it is encouraged to partly select organisations for Module (C)

whose members have been interviewed in modules (A) and (B) of the RAY-CAP research project.

Further sampling criteria for organisations/platforms/networks are:

- different types of beneficiaries, covering the diversity of programme users
- different sizes of organisations at national, regional and local levels
- different level of Erasmus+: Youth in Action involvement (training, support, mixed)
- different approaches to international youth work (activities, methods, structures)
- different activity types (KA1, KA2, KA3, TCA)

Within organisations, sampling criteria for key staff members are:

- key staff members who are responsible for implementing training/support activities abroad ('sending') and key staff members who are responsible for implementing training/support activities in their country of residence ('hosting');
- key staff members who are responsible for implementing international youth work projects with a focus on competence development and/or capacity building in Erasmus+: Youth in Action;
- key staff members from organisations that sent their staff or volunteers to Transnational Cooperation Activities (TCA) organised by the National Agencies
- several key staff members, as it's unlikely that only one person can cover the entire breadth and width of the organisation's approaches to staff development and related activities.

Based on the first set of sample criteria, thirteen organisations were identified in Belgium. It was decided to include all these organisations in the sample and not use the further sample criteria. All thirteen organisations were contacted and all initially expressed their will to participate in the research. The key staff member of one organisation was absent during the field work period of the research – half April 2018 till half of June 2018 - because of health issues. Nobody else in the organisation felt strong enough to answer the questions. This organisation eventually declined to participate. A key staff member of a second organisation was not reachable neither by phone, text messages or e-mail, even after several attempts. Therefore the realised sample for Belgium consists of eleven organisations in total.

Only one of these eleven organisations was also involved in module (A) and (B) of the Ray-Cap research project. Of these eleven organisations, four participated in several KA1-projects, two organisations combined a participation in two KA1-projects with a participation in a KA2-project and 5 participated in several KA1 projects and TCA's. In total, they participated in 87 KA1-projects¹, 2 KA2 projects and 16 TCA's since the start of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme. Only one of these organisations has been involved in a KA3-project².

¹ Although not all of these were subsidized through the Flemish NA.

² One organisation participated in a Structured Dialogue in the previous programme.

Two of these eleven organisations are nationally recognized, umbrella organisations³, four organisations are nationally recognized organisations⁴, two are local organisations. One organisation is a small, non-profit organisation, another one is a de facto organisation and finally, one organisation is the youth division of a national recognized social movement. Seven interviews were conducted with one key staff member, four were conducted with two key staff members. In total 15 respondents were involved in this research.

3.3. Interview Setting

All interviews were face-to-face interviews at the locality of the organisations themselves. The small non-profit organisation and the de facto association had no offices. The interview with the de facto association took place at the offices of the National Agency. The interview with the small, non-profit organisation took place in a pub.

The duration of the interviews varied between 40 and 90 minutes.

3.4. Interview Documentation

All interviews were digitally recorded, after obtaining a written informed consent of the respondents. These recordings were literally transcribed and analysed by using MAXQDA. The coding of the interviews is a combination of deductive and inductive coding strategies. For the deductive coding the different stages of the flow of the interviews were used. The other codes derived inductively from the interviews and were arranged as much as possible in a tree structure, using the deductive codes as higher level structural codes. The code system can be found in the appendix.

In line with the informed consent, the digital recordings are kept until the end report of this research is published. Then they will be destroyed.

3.5. Interview Questions

The transnational interview guidelines were translated into Dutch. In general the main questions of the interview guidelines were literally translated and asked during the interviews. There were three exceptions. Main question 12 is slightly different formulated. Instead of ‘what do you hope to realise for your organisation in the next five years’ the question ‘what do you dream to realise in the next five years’ was asked, sometimes leading to unexpected answers. Main question 13 was subsequently translated as how can the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme support you to realise these dreams. From the first interview on, it became clear that these organisations do not only follow training activities, but some of them are also involved in organising training ac-

³ These are organisations supporting the activities of member organisations, all which have a similar purpose.

⁴ These are organisations organised on a national level, but with regional departments or organisations whose field of operation is the whole of the Flemish and Brussels regions.

tivities. The main questions were about following training activities, but some of the subquestions were during the interviews adjusted to training activities organised by the organisation itself.

The interview flow of the transnational interview guidelines consisted of six main topics:

- Introduction
- Selection of training and support activities
- Preparation for/of training and support activities
- Follow-up of training and support activities
- Previous organisational change and development
- Future organisational change and development

This interview flow was respected as much as possible, but after a few interviews were conducted, the last main question ('are there particular types of training/support activities that typically work well for you?') seemed more natural under the topic concerning the selection of training and support activities.

4. Results

4.1. Selection of training and support activities

The decision to participate in a training or support activity is heavily depending on the theme of the activity. Some interviewed organisations also stress that the method central in a training activity is the main reason why they participate in a certain training activity.

Three different, although often intertwined, movements can be discerned in the initiation of the decision making process to participate in a training or support project. In the most common movement, the bottom-up one, the initiative typically rests by an individual professional or volunteer in the organisation. One of the interviewees used the Flemish word “*goesting*” (BE_05) to describe this mechanism. *Goesting* translates as having an appetite, having a drive. Mostly, the central theme or a method of the training or support activity draws the attention of a person in an organisation who takes the necessary steps to actively engage in the training or support activity. This mechanism is prominent among all types of organisations.

“Goh, for me, it is very often out of a personal interest and I think that that is because we from [name organisation] are a colourful bunch. Everybody has a different background and I think that the things we learn in those training activities, well for me, it starts personally; but I can always use it within our organisation, so it also has added value for the organisation. But it always starts from personal interests.” (BE_08)

In bigger organisations, mostly national ones, but not exclusively, a more top-down mechanism can be found. In this approach, the organisation tries to incite volunteers and/or staff members to participate in training activities. Larger, national organisations sometimes have a key staff member responsible for international projects. These staff members take an active stance to motivate volunteers and/or professionals by sending e-mails to possible candidates, teams or to the meeting of team leaders. In organisations without such a key staff member, this role is assumed by the coordinator.

“We send it out. We find it important that someone of [name organisation] attends this project. Who is candidate? Send your application to me after you have discussed it within your team and with your team leader. That is the way that we operate.” (BE_02)

Two tools that support this top-down approach are mentioned: the policy plan of the organisation or the personal development plan of professional youth workers (one organisation also has a personal development plan for its volunteers). In some policy plans it is explicitly stipulated that the organisation will participate in a number of transnational training activities per year. A personal development plan⁵ is a plan between an employee and employer with mutual agreements

⁵ Een persoonlijk ontwikkelingsplan or POP in Dutch.

on the personal development goals of the employee, which learning activities have to be undertaken to meet these personal development goals and which learning outcomes an employee has to realise in a certain time frame. Its aim is to improve the employability of (potential) employees (De Rick et al., 2013).

“We have put in the policy plan that we shall participate in 8 training activities. So two a year, but we know that we realise more (...) just to have a target. (...) and that is in the policy plan and that is also formal: we want to promote this. We have six actions and we want to send out this number of people. That gives people a mandate. Sort of, you are interested in following an international training activity? Somehow, we will provide the means for it ...”
(BE_02)

“There is the personal development plan. Every year, you are allowed to follow a training activity and if I am not mistaken, from the second year on, you are allowed to follow an international training activity. (...) A typical moment where this is addressed, is in the beginning of the year, during the performance review. In principle, the personal development plan is consulted. Individually, an assessment is made of the number of training activities you are entitled to. We discuss the possible directions of the training activities someone wants to follow or which training activities someone needs.” (BE_07)

The top-down mechanism is not stringent. The suggestions of the staff members responsible for international projects are mere suggestions. Whether persons or teams take up this offer, still depends on the appetite of that person or team. The policy plan and the personal development plan are flexible tools. If for instance the policy plan specifies quantitative targets, these are minimum targets. In organisations where there is a top-down mechanism, it is combined with the bottom-up mechanism in which the latter prevails.

“It would be wrong if our policy plan would function as a straightjacket. Social developments go so fast that every year, there are new, hot topics, so to say and you must be able to address them.” (BE_02)

“There are two ways. You have the personal development plan (...). That is one way. The other way is when you yourself actively look for possibilities and you can link it to your functioning. You submit it to your manager (...).” (BE_07)

A third mechanism can be described as an external one. One organisation has been suggested by the National Agency to participate in a training or support activity. The National Agency knew that this organisation was very interested in expanding their target group.

“But Jint also encouraged us. During a preparatory meeting, they said that the partner in Romania was a very good partner and that the support activity would be very well organised.”
(BE_06)

Because the personal aspect is so important in the initiation to participate, it is interesting to know how people stay in touch with the offer of training activities. The most prominent ways are e-mails by the National Agency, checking the training activities at the website of the National Agency, checking the SALTO training calendar on the website and subscribing to the e-mail notifications of the SALTO website. Also notifications of training opportunities on Facebook, the

EVS database or e-mails by partners in previous projects are mentioned. The most important way people try to determine whether a training or support project meets their interests is by consulting the call of the project. These calls are often sufficient to have a first impression, but some of them are vague, unclear or incomplete in their objectives. One interviewee remarked calls should focus on a better description of the central subject, goals and/or the methods used in the training activity so that interested candidates can make a more informed decision.

The call is thus very important to determine the fit between the training activity and personal interest, but it is also very instrumental in the next step of the decision making process: assessing the relevance of the training or support activity for the organisation. A key staff member responsible for international projects contacts the National Agency if calls are ambiguous:

“And often, if I have questions, I contact Jint. I hear what they say. Because sometimes I have doubts myself if a project is something for us or not. They [Jint] know us very well and know what we do. There is always someone who can tell this is more for a starting organisation, so not for you. Or yes, go ahead and apply.” (BE_03)

Although it almost always begins with personal eagerness, the training activity must also contribute to the needs of the organisation (or its broader network). Even in the small non-profit and the de facto association, the decision to participate in a training activity is not a strictly individual one. It always happens in concertation with the rest of the organisation because it can have financial repercussions, it demands time from the organisation or team tasks have to be reshuffled to assure a smooth operation of the organisation. If a top-down mechanism is used, the concertation round is used to convince staff members of the relevance of the training project.

“Then you consult your direct team leader and then you make, as team you look if it fits in the team schedule. In fact, that is even a basic requirement that the team leader, first in consultation with the team member looks how opportune it is, if a replacement can be realised, because often it has implications for the team because you must be substituted as educational worker or previous engagements must be postponed.” (BE_02)

“If it is an organisational choice, than it is rather the job of the organisation to persuade the staff to engage because it demands extra time and energy of the staff.” (BE_07)

There are several sources to determine the relevance of a theme (or a method) for an organisation. The mission and vision of the organisation and the policy plan are frequently mentioned. National organisations have a policy plan for four years. One network has a masterplan of three years. This policy plan or masterplan stipulates the main working themes of the organisation during the period of the plan. In local organisations main working themes are often decided during annual team days. During these team days the main lines of the working year are planned. The themes in these policy documents are derived from previous policy documents, previous experiences, a consultative process in which different stakeholders are heard or themes that are mentioned in policy documents of (higher) governmental authorities. Training activities with main

topics that are in line or are akin to these themes are seen as more relevant to the organisation and are therefore more likely to be selected.

“Every year, we have our team days during which we determine the general orientation of the coming year. That always happens in October.” (BE_06)

“The tendencies within the Flemish government are taken into account. What does the government stress? Diversity, social entrepreneurship were important themes for the government. Than we look how we can place it in our functioning and masterplan. These themes are certainly taken into account. (...)” (BE_09)

Relevance can also be found, irrespective of policy documents. Social developments happen fast and only taking into account those subjects that are engraved in policy documents would make organisations inflexible. Therefore themes, not included in these documents, can become relevant if it has a common ground with focal concerns of the organisation or a theme connects with new, social developments and needs of young people. A new, social development or a new need of young people is determined by media coverage, an own analysis of needs of young people or own experiences in the field, shared by colleagues.

“[We] also always have sought organisations that have a certain overlap [with our focal concern], but could offer us an added value. For instance, in Italy our partner is [name organisation]. They work around sustainability and beach clean ups, but they are not worried about [our focal concern]. They can contribute things on these subject matters. Our partner in Denmark is focussed on recycling. There is always a link (...).” (BE_04)

Interviewer: *And if you say, there is also room for new themes, is that something that lives among staff members or teams? Are is it determined by what gets the news?*

BE_02: *It is especially within our functioning. Yes, because people are faced with it. (...) And then you realise that a few other organisations in France and the Netherlands are also heavily confronted with it.*

A training activity can also be relevant to an organisation irrespective of the content of the training activity, because international training activities are considered a means to motivate or validate key staff members in the organisation. These activities are considered as “*inspiring*”, “*motivating*”, “*triggering a new onlook on your work*” or “*a recognition for your work*” (BE_02), “*giving you a boost*” or “*a means to stay informed*” (BE_03) by the interviewed staff members. In that respect, international training activities can be an instrument in the human resource management or a retention policy of organisations. This is particularly the case for national organisations, working with professional youth workers, but also smaller and local organisations recognize the motivational aspects of a participation in a transnational training activity.

“That can give a boost to your inspiration and your motivation. So you must apply it thoughtfully and well-directed. (...) I also think that it is because of the increased attention for career development [in the organisation]. The increased attention in that respect. That is a real trigger for people for staying longer in the organisation.” (BE_02)

A similar reaction can be found with organisations that work mainly with volunteers. Training activities in general and transnational training activities more specific can be an element in volunteer management. Training activities support volunteers, it empowers and emboldens them, it gives them the impression that the organisation beliefs in them and is willing to invest in them. It bolsters team spirit, a sense of belonging to a network. This is an important strategy in the retention policy of volunteers.

“Important in the moment you recruit [volunteers] - because we do that all the time – is that you can offer them quite rapidly an answer, a training. We learn them (...), he or she is not alone. There is a team of young people that looks for a way to handle it with you. You are a part of a network and we look at it from a structural point. (...) Our volunteers stay longer because of self-confidence, because of more network. The drop-out rate here is very low.”
(BE_01)

The decision to participate in a training activity is never an individual one. There is always a consultation moment in which the relevance of the training activity for the organisation or network is discerned. In this process, at least a team leader or manager is involved and if practical working arrangements have to be met, the immediate team is also directly involved in the decision making process. In national organisations the decision of participation in a transnational training activity belongs to the competences of day-to-day management, except if that participation would have severe consequences for the finances of the organisation. Then the members of the board are also consulted. Normally, the members of the board are informed about the decision, but they are not involved in the decision itself. This is similar in smaller organisations, but because the communication lines with the board are shorter in these organisations, it happens that the board is involved in the decision making process.

“And then it goes to the board. Our board is a very active board. They meet monthly, they are very involved. There is decided what we shall do because that is a big engagement even if there are subsidies. It stays a big engagement.” (BE_05)

The board of directors is involved in the decision making process if an organisation wants to organise a training activity itself in the programme. That decision can have financial repercussions for the organisation and then the board is actively involved in the decision making process.

Indirectly, even more people are involved in the decision making process because the relevance of a training activity is gauged against the mission and vision, a policy plan and/or a year plan of an organisation. Those are mostly the result of a participative process in which board, network partners, personnel, volunteers and as we have seen, even higher authorities are consulted. This consultation process can take on different forms. International network partners are mostly consulted at the end of a (training) project in the form of an evaluation of the project or in the form of feedback on a previous project. National network members are invited on ‘inspiration days’ on which they get a say on the future orientation of the organisation or are asked to participate in an online study. In a national organisation with regional teams the different teams can make suggestions for future directions and important working themes. These suggestions are often based on daily experiences. This organisation has a working group ‘internationalisation’ gathering members of several teams all over Flanders who have “*the virus of internationalisation*” (BE_02) to inspire each other and share each other’s experiences and to promote transnational projects to teams that are still less involved in them. This working group supports the staff member responsible for international projects at the national level and also has a say in the kind of projects that are relevant to the organisation. In local organisations the board is sometimes actively involved in developing the

policy plans or the year plans, together with personnel and/or volunteers. In the small non-profit organisation, also the board is sometimes mentioned. The decision making process in this organisation is very informal though and the board members are described as “*a bunch of friends*” (BE_08).

“We begin very broad and ask input of all partners in the youth service and in our network. Then we try to integrate that under a larger denominator, a theme. Then we try to realise a consensus. That consensus is given back to all our partners. Then they have the opportunity to give feedback on the themes. It is a very democratic process from start to finish.” (BE_09)

“Yes, actually the president of our board supports these [team] days and that is also with a SWOT analysis that we do. We take everything into account, performance reviews have already be done so we can take elements from them to the team days. As well as to team as to functioning as to content, as to approach of things...” (BE_06)

The final stage of the decision making process is submitting the application or developing a training activity. In the case of applying for an existing training activity, this is the responsibility of the participant in the training or support activity. In organisations with a staff member responsible for international projects, this staff member is sometimes also involved in the application, offering support to the volunteer or professional. In the case of developing a new training activity, some team members together with the coordinator and/or a responsible for internationalisation within the organisation are responsible.

4.2. Preparation for/of training and support activities

4.2.1 Support before the training

Sometimes participants in training or support activities have to do a preparatory assignment for the organisers of an activity. An often cited assignment, closely linked to the application for a training activity, is writing a motivation why the participant applies for the training activity and to clarify their expectations. Organisers of training activities who have more candidates than open positions in the training activity mostly select candidates on basis of their demonstrable motivation and their intent to transfer the content of the training activities to others in or out of their organisation. Other forms of preparatory assignments are: doing some reading or research into the main theme(s), preparing a presentation of their own organisation or country. One organisation mentioned that organisers asked to post digital tools or a description of them on a website so they can be shared with other participants.

Support given to participants before the training activity varies from none to a whole pre-activity trajectory of multiple days. Some organisations state that there is no preparation needed for the type of training activity they participate in or organise (e.g. study visits). Too much preparation can be off putting, especially for busy professionals or volunteers professionally involved in other sectors. There are also doubts about the added value of some of the preparatory activities. Other organisations leave it to the individual participant to decide in which degree he or she wants to prepare for the activity.

“No, sometimes they get an assignment by the guest organisation, especially for exchanges, they have to some research work into the subject, but no, nothing special”. (BE_03)

“In the first year, I have experimented with that, but that was a very difficult affair: trying to get people to preparatory workshops. I myself see no longer the added value of it. No, even looking back...” (BE_10)

Some organisations state to support participants informally. This last one is mentioned by the small ,o,-profit organisation and the de facto association. They have not a specific way of supporting participants before training activities, but the support is more a derivative of how they handle young people on a daily basis. Other organisations offer practical support, such as help to apply for a training activity, booking plane tickets or other means of transportation, information about the training venue, facilitating contact with the organisers, This practical support can take on the form of an e-mail or social media messages.

“Young people who participate through us, are supported in administration and practical. So the registration or contacts with the training organisation, the booking of tickets, ... that is how they can be supported.” (BE_09)

Some organisations have a preparatory meeting in Belgium, certainly if they do not know young volunteers very well or in case of first time participants. The focus of these preparatory meetings is providing information. The programme Erasmus+: Youth in Action is explained, for newcomers the intercultural context of the training is situated. The preparatory meeting entails thus more than only practicalities. There is also a more substantive preparation. Furthermore, extra information about the organisation is given, such as the mission and vision of the organisation, previous projects that are in line with the training activity are presented and contact information of persons within the organisation or network who were already involved in similar projects are foreseen. For managing the expectations, the expectations and the needs of the organisation and the participants are often discussed during those preparatory meetings. One staff member responsible of international projects of a national organisation provides at the end of such a meeting a documentation package, including a standardized powerpoint presentation of the organisation, info files of previous projects and contact information of relevant colleagues in other teams.

Sometimes the preparatory meetings can be so substantive that they evolve in preparatory workshops, even of multiple days and are considered to be part of the training activity in the form of a pre-activity trajectory. One organisation, active in a KA2 project, organises two preparatory workshops. The first is focussed on information. The Erasmus+: Youth in Action and the KA2-project are situated. At the end of the first preparatory meeting, the participants get an assignment. This preparatory assignment as in integral part of the training trajectory. It consists out of a case study in which participants have to analyse the social context of an individual. During the second meeting the participants get the change to do this analysis in small groups. The results of these case studies are actively used during the actual training. The third step – after the training – consists in applying the learning outcome to the specific case. The fourth step is giving feedback on the new experiences and reflecting upon them. The preparatory assignment is a necessary step in the whole training and the results of the preparatory activity are actively used during the train-

ing. This organisation has a total different appreciation of the role of preparatory activities in a training activity:

"So there were quite a lot of preparatory activities. This pays off, the commitment is bigger. They are very motivated to attend the training activity and when the trainer asked for real life examples, they had them. That really worked. " (BE_01)

A second organisation also has positive memories of a training activity with an elaborative pre-activity phase.

"We prepare them too. It varies from two, three evenings. We even once organised three weekends as preparation. (...) The goal was to provide them with a broad branch of tools (...). So we had a whole preparatory phase in which we provided them with tools based on our experiences. But then, we went also over the programme of the training activity itself." (BE_11)

4.2.2. Support during the training

This kind of support is less common. Some organisations state that they have not a specific support policy for people attending a training activity. For them attending a training activity abroad is like attending a meeting at home. If you need input from a colleague or someone back home, you contact them in the usual way and ask input. The small non-profit organisation and the de facto association stress once more that support during activities is a derivative of how young people treat each other during the training activity. It is not organised and very informal:

"Well, I said it before, we are all friends, aren't we. There is not such a strict hierarchy or so. We can always phone each other. But to be honest, I have never needed it [support during the training activity]." (BE_08)

A precautionary measure some organisations build in to prevent that their participants need support, is to cooperate only with organisations they know and who are able to provide qualitative support to the attendees. The larger national organisations also appoint a contact person. This person is always accessible by phone, e-mail, Facebook or whatsapp and really knows the providers of the training activities very well. This contact person is mostly the person responsible for the transnational projects in the organisation and can, if necessary, provide coaching or mediation. Another organisation tries to accompany their volunteers with a professional. This professional coaches the volunteers during the training activity.

"It already happened that there was a group in which the participants did not agree at all and that really escalated. They phoned me and I gave a one-to-one coaching. They know they can always count on me. I am always accessible, even outside of the office hours that is not really a problem. (...)" (BE_03)

One organisation has a closed Facebook group and promotes participants to daily blog about the training activity. The entries are used as a report of the training activity and can later be used in the organisation.

A last form of support are moments of reflection during the training activity. These moments are intended to make participants aware of their expectations and/or their learning goals and to monitor their progress in realizing these expectations and learning goals throughout the training. These moments can also be used to adjust the training activity according to the learning needs of the participants.

“And in the beginning we ask the participants what their expectations are. If we see after the first day, the expectations are different from what we have envisaged - for example if people say: “we want to realise something physically this week.”-, then we will look how we can do that. That is something we certainly do.” (BE_04)

“This year we have had extra attention for a workshop in the beginning, one in the middle and one workshop at the end: to think what do I want to get out of this, in between to think about what have we already seen. Because it is a whole lot and you do not always remember what that all was. And in the end, the same, but over what have we done, what do I remember and what do I take home.” (BE_11)

4.3. Follow-up of training and support activities

4.3.1 Elements of a transfer culture

Installing a transfer culture in organisation is one of the factors promoting transfer (Burke & Hutchins, 2008; Grossman & Salas, 2011). Although some organisations indicate that they do not have a clear or systematic culture on sharing ideas of a training or support activity, implicitly all expect that participants share ideas on return. This can be informal, over coffee or during lunch time. Mostly, it is more formal. This is during a team meeting, or in the case of the small, non-profit organisation during a board meeting.

“Afterwards it is expected that you give of course an explanation of what you have learned during a team meeting or another relevant meeting.” (BE_07)

“Yes, yes, certainly. It is the intention if you follow a training in name of [name organisation], that you give feedback on the next general meeting. (...) Then I only have to add an extra point to the agenda of the next board meeting and then “hey, I have a great idea”. Then it is discussed, so in that way... (BE_08)

Organisations often expect participants to report back in a written form. This can take several forms: reports, a contribution to a newsletter or other own media. Some organisations spend a lot of attention to reporting and expect that participants take notes during the activity to write a re-

port afterwards. These reports are often saved in a shared map, so that staff members or volunteers can consult them if they need them. Reports are especially important to one organisation involved in a KA2-project about innovative practices. The reports are an important means to capture what happens during the project and form the material to document and illustrate the experiences of the project during a symposium at the end of the project. A contribution to own media can take on several forms. Organisations can ask attendees to write an article for one of their newsletters or magazines, write a testimonial for the website, make a short picture show or video for the website, maintain a blog,

“We document everything systematically. We have to write an end report for a symposium. The measurement scales go to the steering group, we make reports from that, from our conclusions and recommendations that we can draw from these. We need material for our end report to present at the symposium. You can hardly state that this was good without saying why.”
(BE_01)

“We ask now, already more than a year, more and more to participants to write an article or to make a picture show (...) More and more participants answer [our call] and are willing to spread the word of what they have learned and transfer it to others. And that is something we want to do more and more in the future.” (BE_03)

National organisations/networks that have a staff member responsible for international projects actively collect the experiences of participants in training activities. This is often done by emailing the participants afterwards and inquiring into their learning experiences. At the same moment, they enquire about future training needs. One organisation tries to streamline their policy to capture the learning experiences of participants and to develop a system of knowledge management within the organisation. This staff member has personal contact with the participants after the training activity and tries to map the learning outcomes of the participants so they can be actively used in the design of new projects. This organisations brings participants to transnational training activities together in a working group ‘internationalisation’ on a regular basis, operating as a forum to transfer experiences over several teams.

“I notice already, on a national level, we already better know which training activities are followed. In the past, we had something: ‘ah, someone has done an international training, ok, good to know’. And now, it is interesting for me to know that one goes to there, goes to there... and we can already, I think, for instance if we do such an application or if we write a project, we already know better like... we can find inspiration there and I have to contact that person perhaps. So, internally it is shaping up ...” (BE_02)

Coaching and opportunities to practice is a next element of a transfer culture that is mentioned in the interviews. One organisation offers their volunteers the possibility to design their own project on return. If these ideas are fruitful and in line with the mission and vision of the organisation, they even exempt personnel to support these volunteers, use the experience of the organisation to promote the project or support the volunteers in some other suitable way.

“We do not always have the space, but we offer within the organisation the possibility to do something with it. We have had young people who attended a training on refugees and the development of a project on that subject. They came back and had developed a specific idea during the training. (...) We teamed up with these young people and then we looked step by step how we can proceed, with the support of a personnel member and the young people who carried the project.” (BE_09)

One organisation decided once to retake the transnational training activity on a national level because the number of candidates exceeded the number of places in the training. The methods learned in the training activity were so crucial to the functioning of that organisation that they decided to extent the training activity to all interested volunteers in the organisation.

“At the Belgian level, we organise only a few training activities for our own volunteers. It has happened that after a [transnational] training activity, for instance weekends, we have organised training activities to pass the training to interested volunteers who for instance could not participate in the activity” (BE_11)

Some organisations try to share their experiences not only with their own team or organisation, but also with their broader network. As mentioned earlier, one of the organisations involved in a KA2-project plans to organise a symposium to disseminate their experiences to other, similar organisations because the subject of the project is a strong need in the sector. Another organisation developed a new method to attract a new target group after a job shadowing activity in Erasmus+: Youth in Action. They shared this new method with the members of their umbrella organisation, leading to the proliferation of that approach within their sector.

“No, in fact, it was like this... they have said from [name initiative] we are going to do something for babies. And then I have sent them a mail to say, look, super, but we do that already. And then they asked from [name umbrella organisation], euh, are you up for talking about your approach? So in fact, we brought it up ourselves. (...) Then we went to [name umbrella organisation] to explain our approach and a lot of organisations have replicated it (...)” (BE_06)

4.3.2 Strategies

Three recurring strategies can be discerned in preserving the learning outcomes: documenting the training activity while the activity is taking place, sharing them (digitally) and offering various forms of post-training opportunities.

Documenting the training activity can take on several forms. Most commonly, participants make notes of the themes or the methods used in the training activity so they can share it later with colleagues or have something to fall back. Interesting material like powerpoints or other documents used during the training activity are collected. Sometimes, powerpoints, reports, good practices and other material are provided by the organisation behind the training activity. One organisation has once developed a manual describing extensively how to use different methods.

Although it is often the intention to develop such a manual, lack of time cripples it. That same organisation also documented methods by making videos of it, which are still used in training activities with young people.

“This year we made a video that clearly illustrates the differences between the methods/facets with an interviewer as well. Now we have a double video and a more theoretical interview with the trainer about the method. (...) In Russia with those art-methods, we have a very extensive method map, then it was successful.” (BE_11)

The material that is collected during the training activity is often shared with colleagues by putting it on a shared, digital map. Although the shared material is intended to inspire colleagues, some interviewees express doubts of its usefulness. The map is not that well known and is not very often consulted.

“Yes, we are very much digital. We have a Dropbox where as good as everything is collected and gets archived. My colleague is an architect and is an expert in keeping track of everything, so he has all these kinds of excel files. I am more the confused professor, I have creative ideas. If you leave it to me, it would vanish quickly and he collects that systematically and thoroughly. You click on the Dropbox, you get the methods, you get everything.” (BE_04)

Among the post-training activities two different sorts of activities are mentioned: offering participants a training ground to practise skills, methods and newly acquired knowledge and devising a kind of training trajectory. The most simple and most cited training ground takes the form of a workshop or presentation in which participants can present their new acquired skills or knowledge. A few organisations offer volunteers the opportunity to develop their ideas in a new project, inside or outside the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme. This organisation, experienced in organising training activities themselves, build in their activity programme moments during which participants can brainstorm and work together on a project in small groups. One organisation, often working with lower educated young people or with young people who meet obstacles to the labour market, offers their volunteers the possibility to map potential training or educational needs risen after the training activity and actively develops with them a training or education trajectory that meets those needs.

“So you gauche, where are the needs? Then I can help them: there is these course that addresses your needs and that can inspire you. Or come along, then we can see what opportunities there are. Or if they say, I want to do this or that, then I look for opportunities or I refer them to the right organisation or instance. That is what we try to do.” (BE_03)

Most organisations admit that there is little or no post-training reflection or that there is not one way or a systematic way to reflect in the organisation. Reflections often take place at the end of a training activity and often takes on traditional forms of reflection like (written) evaluations or a group conversation at the end of the training in which the training is revisited and the high and

low points are discussed. If there is a post-training reflection in the organisation, it happens when a participant gives a presentation during a meeting. Afterwards a short discussion can take place over what the training can mean for the organisation, how colleagues can use it, These discussions do not follow a certain pattern or use a particular reflection method.

“We just discuss that. When someone presents a Powerpoint or just gives a presentation of their experiences, then we just discuss them. We look at what is possible interesting for us, what elements people can use, ... That is a little bit ad hoc, I think. (BE_07)

Some organisations try other forms of reflection. These organisations use “*team days*” (BE_06), “*a brain storm evening*” (BE_09) or “*inspiration days*” (BE_08) to reflect on the future direction of the organisation. They use several input to feed that reflection, such as evaluations of previous activities, the notes team members have taken during training activities, input of their international network of organisations, SWOT-analyses, ... One organisation has tried to organise reflection with their network of organisations after a training activity by using videoconferencing. One, less traditional method of reflection, mentioned more than once, is visual mapping. Finally, one organisation, stating to have discovered new ways of reflection by participating in transnational training activities, stresses the importance of using various reflection methods.

“So the trainer was very good in drawing, so he did that live. (...) He had made a road map and that was complemented with input of the participants.” (BE_10)

“Those bigger group evaluations are always a visual question as we call it and that is more with images.” (BE_11)

“There is not one way, no. We are very used to reflecting. We do that a lot. (...) Reflecting on what happened, or on the group, or on the future or the past. No, it is certainly not fixed, the more diverse the better, to be honest.” (BE_05)

4.3.3 Obstacles in transfer

The transfer of what is seen during training activities is not easily realised. Some organisations are aware of this and try to develop a transfer policy, but most of them are still looking for one or are developing the first steps towards a policy. For them it is an area of attention within the organisation.

Interviewees signal several problems concerning the follow-up of training or support activities. The small, non-profit organisation and the de facto association state that knowledge management within their organisation is not well developed. Furthermore, the members of these types of associations are professionally involved in other organisations/sectors. Lack of time, work pressure or the balance between work and social engagement during leisure time impair their possibilities to attend training activities and to develop new initiatives after the training activity. As we have seen, even organisations working with professionals are searching for ways to optimise knowledge management in their organisation and even these organisations stress that the increas-

ing workload in the organisation sometimes prevents developing new and more initiatives after a training activity.

“Plus young people have such a busy life. It must fit in their life pattern and that is not always so evident.” (BE_03)

A second problem is the nature of what is learned in transnational training activities. Not everything can be easily transferred. The different notions of what youth work entails, the differences in national contexts, histories or cultures within organisations or even sizes of organisations hamper the possibilities to transfer content, methods, approaches, ... from one organisation to another, from one country to another. Furthermore, learning experiences can be very personal and cannot be transmitted as such to others in the organisation. Sometimes you really have to witness practices to really understand them.

“(...) that are very specific forms of training in which especially trainees are emboldened individually. You can try to bring that back, but then it is more a specific kind of new group dynamic exercise or a method to reflect.” (BE_05)

“The nature of what you see or learn there, is difficult to transfer to people who weren’t there. Because you have to be there to understand it, to understand a certain practice. Yes, that is just the way it is. So we can discuss it on a team meeting or give a presentation of it ... it is of course something different if you see a practice over there and that you realise, ok, we really have to do something with that.” (BE_10)

Therefore, some practices or ideas have not only to be transferred to people who did not attend the training activity, they often have to be translated or transformed as well. This can be understood literally and figuratively. Literally; most documents in transnational activities are in English and have to be translated into Dutch to be useful in a Flemish organisation. Figuratively means that existing practices have to be adapted, tweaked or elements have to be realigned to be implemented in an organisation. This demands the right circumstances, the enthusiasm of colleagues or fellow volunteers, financial means or other conditions that can be helpful to implement innovations. One organisation gives an example how practices in two organisations have been combined to design a new approach:

In Liverpool was that actually completely different because there they had a whole room where the children could go to and could develop themselves and learn.⁶ And Stockholm was also not the same. That were more baby tours with a buggy. And there was a lot of information for the parents, so that was more a guided tour for the parents, linked with all kinds of stuff for the babies. So what we took over is the aspect of the parents. Also the tactile aspect, that they can do a lot, that is something that could be found in both [organisations]. But we have focussed on

⁶ Later in the interview it became clear that this organisation is short of space.

the experience of the child, together with the parent. We do not do traditional guided tours. That is in anyway our approach. (...) They [the babies] are allowed to run around here. And afterwards they can frolic around with all kinds of material. Then they often become very dirty. They become themselves a work of art.” (BE_06)

Questioned about which ideas are more easily to implement, interviewees answered ideas that are already dormant in the organisation. The training activity functions then as a spark or as the last insight to develop and implement a new idea. More often, it can take several years before an idea, seen in a training activity, gets implemented. Some respondents described the function of a transnational training activity as “sowing seeds”.

“You plant, as it were seeds, that is how we see it. (...) We can give them knowledge and competencies, but for a main part, it is sowing seeds. (...) It is sometimes two-three years after the activity, that we see, that participant was there too. I’ll give you the example of [name participant]. He now works for a local television. Two years after the activity, he makes a feature over bike lanes and how they are used as parking lots. And then you hear, it is actually thanks to you, that inspiration. That is good to hear.” (BE_04)

“As youth service you do not always see the effect immediately, but afterwards you hear ‘I have done this abroad’ and that is very nice to see how it works.” (BE_09)

Because it can take some time before an idea materialises and/or because some ideas are already dormant in organisations, respondents find it often difficult to pinpoint an idea, a method or an approach to one specific training activity. A good and innovative idea mostly has more than one parent and may be the result of more than one training activity, day-to day experiences, etc. The precise origin of an idea is consequently not always very clear.

“It is always difficult to retrace the exact origin of the new things that we do... “ (BE_03)

“It can be, that if you see it for the first time, that you think, wow that is much too crazy and too experimental. But the next year, if you see it again... And if you see it the second, third, fourth time and you see the same thing, that you think, why not us? And often, if it is of course something very exotic, then you think, wow, what they do there, we must do it as well. I think that that happens once in a while, but, I cannot honestly say, that I have had that specific idea effectively from that project in that year, I really cannot say that.” (BE_10)

Finally, one organisation states that there is currently a proliferation of digital tools. Every training activity tries to collect tools on websites, launches Facebook pages, ... At the same time there are several initiatives that try to underpin European youth policies resulting in a mishmash of digital tools and making it difficult to keep track of all these initiatives.

“I am reasonable well informed, because it is a part of my job to keep up with European Youth policy and all that stuff. But I think, an organisation that participates in those pro-

jects, I think it is difficult to know the details in what and how. I notice that it hampers developing projects. Because for every idea something European arises. It is good that there is a follow-up... Because that is the reason why that Youth Wiki originated, because there was a need for an overview. But then this comes along, and then there is the next one..." (BE_07)

4.4. Previous organisational change and development

To address possible systemic effects of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme on the development of organisations a twostep procedure was followed. In first instance, some questions were asked about important changes and developments of the organisations in the last five years. Subsequently, the question was posed if the Erasmus+: Youth in Action had a role in these processes, if any.

4.4.1. Different forms of changes/development

The majority of organisations report that they have undergone a restructuring or a reorganisation during the last five years. These reorganisations are always accompanied by changes in staff, illustrating the high turnover of personnel in the youth sector. Most of them saw the numbers of staff decrease in the last five years, leading to a higher workload in the organisation, less opportunities to develop new projects and/or less opportunities to support young people. These reorganisations resulted in painful decisions to close down a part of the organisation, centralise certain functions in clusters at a national level and/or merges with other organisations with similar goals.

"People have been made redundant, leading to less staff. This has resulted in less actions, in less campaigns, in less things we can organise and budgetary, we have to be more careful. There are also more rules. So it has become more difficult than in the past when it was easier to try new things and take initiatives. That are the main changes in the last five years."
(BE_03)

Reorganisations are not always accompanied with staff reductions though. One organisation has seen its staff double in the last ten years. Social entrepreneurship has become a central issue in the functioning of this organisation in this period. This change in focus of the organisation has been instigated by the rules of financing personnel in the youth sector. At the same time this organisation introduced autonomous teams in its restructuring. This created a whole new dynamic and an increase in projects in the organisation, resulting in more staff. A second organisation has managed to bring in several new projects in the last months and has seen its staff double in the last year. A common denominator between these two organisations is the creation of a subsidiary in the form of a social enterprise offering employment and training opportunities to young people with lower educational attainment and refugees. This has contributed to a higher number of projects.

“It is not the past five years, but the last 10 years, we have expanded. The organisation now consists of almost 50 staff members. We evolved from a medium organisation with almost the half of these staff members to a much bigger organisation”. (BE_10)

Finally, the de facto organisation, only existing three years, has reached a crossroad. Until now, they have been able to organise some activities thanks to the Erasmus+: Youth in Action-programme, while still cherishing their independence of local authorities. Now, it faces a possible reorganisation from “a group of like-minded souls” to a more formal organisation in which the members are prepared to look for more funds and a more permanent functioning.

A second change mentioned by several organisations is a change or clarification in outlook of the organisation, often described as an opening or broadening of the organisation. This change in outlook can lead to a change in mission and vision of the organisation, but that is not necessarily so. It is more often translated in a more inclusive approach or a greater awareness of what an organisation can realise in a society. A change, mentioned by one of the informal groups, is an influx of new members, leading to new ideas and initiatives, that also translates in opening up the organisation and its outlook.

“The mission stays, but we have noticed that we do not accomplish it for a certain group. We could not offer them what they needed and now, with that new model, we are able to reach them.” (BE_01)

“The mission has broadened. It is just not only supporting groups (...), but more building bridges between different groups of people. (...) Intercultural work is still strongly present, but we are not only present in one country. (...) But I know that in the last two years we have reached new, highly motivated girls who have entered our organisation by that playground project (...). Afterwards they stayed and now they help to develop new projects in our organisation.” (BE_08)

4.4.2 Causes of changes and development

Three social evolutions are mentioned by several organisations as driving these changes: austerity, superdiversity and a changing social engagement among young people.

Just as in many other European countries, the current Flemish government has taken austerity measures to balance its budget. Especially some second-line youth institutions (Redig & Coussée, 2017) and national youth organisations have seen cuts in their grants in this legislation. For some of these organisations a restructuring or rethinking of their core business and approach was a financial necessity.

“The financial aspect is also important. The budgets have declined. We have to look for ways to finance all projects that we had in mind. It is sometimes searching for means to make ends meet. That is also a factor. Some dreams, projects we cannot realise because we do not have the financial capacity.” (BE_09)

A second social reality is the increasing diversity of the youth population of Belgium, especially in the major cities where the majority of children and teenagers have a migration background (Geldof, 2015). According to research of the Youth Research Platform, more than half of the 14 till 30 year olds living in the three major Flemish cities (Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent) have at least one parent that is not born in Belgium (Cops et al., 2015). Even in small, provincial cities and towns like Roeselare, Kortrijk and Oostende one in 8 to one in 4 of the school-aged children do not speak Dutch at home (Geldof, 2017). Furthermore, diversity becomes even more diverse in the sense that it not only involves more ethno-cultural diversity, but also gender diversity, family diversity, (dis)abilities, religion, educational attainment, sexual orientation, residency, poverty, ... (De Haene et. al., 2015). This diversification of diversity is known as superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007) and creates challenges for youth work, leading to changes in how organisations approach different groups of young people and in the structure of organisations, according to some of the interviewees⁷. It asks more intercultural awareness and the awareness that intercultural differences entails more than only cultural differences. Also the assumption (underpinning traditional, middle class youth work in Flanders) that young people have a membership of a local organisation for a whole year, needs revision. A more open and broader view is seen as essential to answering this challenge.

“That is actually completely orientated to people with a disability and art. We are now busy to develop things for blind people and art works. We currently have already some initiatives for deaf people. That has become our thing.” (BE_06)

“The young people who participate, their age becomes more diverse. We also have some people of +30 years, who no longer belong to young people, but they are still volunteer here, young and old ...in respect to other cultures and young people who begin with youth work. We have to be responsive. (...) We expect an openness from our trainers and that they do something with it [during a youth worker course]. (...) Because that is not obvious for them, having contact with other cultures. We also have noticed that in some of our games, some of our games are just not done in other cultures. We are very physical in our games, bodily contact is central.” (BE_09)

“The superdiversity in society also translates itself in organisational diversity. Without doubt, we have a group that organises itself or use the guidance of adults to organise themselves and they do not find the way to classical youth work. They stay underneath the radar. They get no support or they are not always well supported by local authorities. That is one of the reasons why we want to change our values, our vision. Membership, how will that look like? That is why we want to change, we want to adapt to reality.” (BE_10)

⁷ The importance of this social evolution for youth work is also reflected in the fact that the current Minister for Youth Affairs in the Flemish government has launched a Masterplan Diversity in/and youth work this year.

A third evolution is a change in the way young people socially engage these days. The interviewees refute a popular view that young people are less inclined to volunteer. Youth research corroborates that there is not a decline in volunteering among young people in Flanders (JOP, 2016). Some interviewees state though that young people these days engage in a different way than they used to. According to them, they are engaged in more than one organisation at the same time, resulting in more specific and time limited commitments. They are more outspoken, demand more support and prefer a more personalized approach. This observation reflects what is known in the literature as ‘episodic volunteering’ (Macduff, 2004; Beullens & Storms, 2007; Hustinx, 2009). That same literature stresses that this episodic volunteering does not substitute regular volunteering, but complements it and can be a first step to more long term involvements. Nonetheless, the respondents stress that it demands changes in the way organisations manage their volunteers.

“(...) Young people prefer to spread their engagements over more organisations. So we notice that we have to search more for volunteers. That has changed our way of functioning too. (...) It demands another approach. We want to offer a broad variety of possibilities so that young people are able to engage, but we also have to address the manner they want to engage. We cannot expect that they join four meetings a month. (...) And it demands a broader network of volunteers.” (BE_09)

“We have the impression that young people need more coaching. (...) I realise that more and more, of course you cannot generalize. But if you really have a personal bond with young people, then everything goes more smoothly. Young people really do not want to be a number. They want you to have attention for them as a person, as an individual. (...) When you send a personal mail, they answer very quickly. They are prepared to talk more about themselves and they are not afraid to ask help. (...) It is like they want to create a bond, feel special. That is one of our observations.” (BE_03)

4.4.3. The role of Erasmus+: Youth in Action

So where does Erasmus+: Youth in Action come into play? Interviewees find it very difficult to pinpoint a realization in the organisation to a specific training and/or support activity. They have done some statements about the impact of transnational training and/or support activities in general and about the whole Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme though.

Participation in a transnational training activity primarily inspires and promotes innovation. It is not the only way to innovate, but it has become an important way in how the involved organisations develop new ideas. This innovation can take the form of changes in the vision of an organisation or the integration of new methods (such as new digital tools, new coaching methods, new methods to reflect and new methods that promote group dynamics). It can also entail the introduction of a new approach or new activities adjusted to new target groups. As such, it programme contributes to opening up and broadening organisations.

“For instance, we work a lot with non-accompanied, minor refugees (...) who are not strong verbally. (...) Our colleagues from southern Europe are more used to work with this group, because they are the countries where they arrive first and where we can learn: ‘How do you handle this?’. This is very important. (...) A young Afghan who arrives in Belgium, learns Dutch to take a bus or to go to the shop, but they do not learn to express their feelings. (...) Every refugee in Belgium has a cell phone. They know perfectly how smileys work. Smileys are international. A smiley can express what they cannot say in words. That is a typical thing that we pick up from that [a training activity].” (BE_05)

Participation in a training and/or support activity can lead to new partnerships and/or networks, not only internationally, but also nationally or locally. These partnerships are important to develop new projects in Erasmus+: Youth in Action. Organisations involved in KA2-projects stress the importance of cooperating with earlier and trusted partners to have a successful KA2-project. One of these organisations, has realised an autonomous European network of like-minded organisations. This network meets on a yearly basis, has become completely self-sufficient and is instrumental in constantly improving the method and approach of this organisation. This has led to a bigger awareness of the organisation’s own expertise. This beneficiary is since then better able to communicate its expertise. External partners, among others governmental bodies, also recognise this expertise. This has been instrumental in obtaining new projects for this organisation. Partnerships are also important because partners in a network keep challenging each other and as thus, trigger innovation and learning in organisations. They are carriers of new ideas and a successful network facilitates the implementation of innovative ideas. The interviewees stress that networking does not come naturally with attending a training activity. Not all participations lead to new partnerships and networking demands time. Some organisations are in a network, not with an organisation they met during a training activity, but with an organisation that is a partner of an organisation they have met during a training activity and that is more compatible with them. Compatibility between organisations participating in a training activity promotes networking.

“In the beginning we were focused on traditional activities of awareness-raising.(...) Our Israeli-Palestinian partner strongly insisted that we should stop looking outside of our borders and should have a deep, long look at our own society. And that has had an important impact. (...) Our solidarity and our work has shifted from abroad and now also includes Belgium.” (BE_11)

“I think that it [networking] is sometimes difficult because a lot of people are put together and sometimes that is a wild guess. You do not know if people will match because sometimes it is people with little experience or the other way around, people with plenty of experience. And there are very different youth work realities in Europe. (...) It is totally different if you can make a certain preselection or if you can invite people that you know it is interesting to share ideas with.” (BE_07)

Participating in a transnational training activity is also the best learning ground to develop intercultural knowledge, attitudes and skills. Speaking a foreign language forces you to speak in a less complex manner because you are less fluent, a skill that can be useful while speaking your own language and dealing with various people. It also makes participants more aware of their own culture and the contingency of that culture. What seems for granted for the participant, does not need to be for someone else. This awareness leads to questioning daily routines stimulating creativity and innovation.

“In the way how you deal with people. Also over here, there are cultural differences. People are different. In fact, you learn to communicate with people in a very comprehensible manner and you can use that here, in your day-to-day work, in your local functioning very well what you have learned over there.” (BE_06)

“You learn, how would I put it, not to take your own culture as starting point. (...) That is something those training activities have taught me very strongly. By cooperating in groups, in those international groups, ... It is not only personal development, it changes your world view.” (BE_08)

Other impacts of training activities were mentioned. An organisation states that participating in transnational training activities can influence policy making:

“But it also trickles down in policy consultation. For instance, when a new decree is made, that we say that for us that and that is important. That is how it can seep through. I am not going to say that it is because we have seen something in Copenhagen or in Newcastle or that kind of things. But I think it can have an impact as such as well.” (BE_10)

The impact of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action in general is more profound on the individual level than on the organisational level, according to some of the respondents. Participation in the programme has contributed to:

- a better view of youth work realities in different European countries;
- the construction of a larger, international personal network;
- more knowledge in general and knowledge of Europe specifically;
- strengthen a European identity;
- the development of language and intercultural skills;
- a higher appreciation of the value and use of non-formal education;
- project management.

One interviewee even states that he has become a better coordinator of his organisation thanks to the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme. The most cited impact that participating in the programme has on the interviewees themselves is that participation is very motivating and inspiring for their daily work. As we have seen, this is not only a strictly personal impact, but motivated staff and volunteers are also beneficial to organisations.

“I have made friends in the whole of Europe and even far outside of it. And I see that the generation of my parents or so, they are very sceptical about Europe and very critical and pff, they think that Europe imposes all these rules, but I feel myself really a part of that ideology of an united Europe and I feel European. So that European identity has been reinforced in me.” (BE_08)

“I get a lot of room in my own school to design my classes pedagogically as I see fit and I constantly use non-formal learning methods. (...) I have discovered through these non-formal methods of Youth in Action, that this is really my thing. My eyes have opened, look, I want to continue to work around that theme, but combined with non-formal learning.” (BE_04)

“If you do always the same your motivation is less and plus you have a part here at your desk that is necessary, such as administration, dossiers and follow-up, but you also need a bit of action, where you yourself are in the field and experience what our young people experience. To stay informed, but also to experience yourself and that gives you a boost to continue. Because if you constantly sit after your desk, you wonder: What happens?” (BE_03)

Quizzed about the relationship between participation in the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme and organisational changes, the reactions are mixed. Some organisations bluntly state that their participation in the programme has shaped and formed their organisation to what it is now. Especially organisations who state that their mission or their approach has opened up or broadened in the last years attribute this to their participation in the programme.

“It is actually our largest playground to learn until now, all those European projects. I think that also holds for the young people who have participated in EVS, in youth exchanges. (...) We always say that these youth exchanges are the cement of our organisation. (...) I think that the openness of our organisation is due to those European projects. If we did not have these European projects, we would exist as organisation, but it would be a completely different one. Those European projects have given us an open view on the world, but also on our own society and on what we can mean as organisation and what people can mean to you.” (BE_06)

“But what can I say about it? Maybe specific the context: our organisation is what it is because of that [Erasmus+: Youth in Action]. (...) Everything we do - of course there have been extra's over the years – but the essence has arisen, is nurtured and formed during international training activities. The persons who have been involved throughout the years, 80% of the stayers have been involved in international activities, ... Our DNA has arisen through international activities.” (BE_11)

The de facto association that is at a crossroads, states that their participation has handed them a possible, future direction and purpose:

“That first year, that was actually more dormant. We existed, but we had no activities. (...) Then our real first steps, actually Erasmus+ has pushed us in a certain direction. In the direction of creating new methods, non-formal methods (...) Now we realise as group that it is fun to think how we can raise the awareness of young people and how we can involve them (...). That is something that we have become aware of in that programme.” (BE_04)

Other organisations, often those organisations that have undergone a reorganisation of a restructuring in the last years, sketch the relationship between the reorganisation and participation in the Erasmus+: Youth in Action in the opposite way: it is the reorganisation that has led to (an increased) involvement in the programme. One organisation is more hesitant though and does not see a link between the changes the organisation has undergone and their participation in the programme. According to this organisation, changes are the result of a complex interplay of re-organisations, participation in (training) projects and activities, daily experiences, ... and cannot be attributed to one specific aspect.

“We have reinvented the organisation in a large degree. We have then said, we want to present ourselves as an organisation with a real expertise, because we have a lot of expertise with young people with fewer opportunities and how we can help them to reconnect with society and empower them. And internationally, that is also a way to present ourselves. There are also [financial] means over there, or cooperation across borders. (...) Actually, how I see it, international projects are rather an extension of our mission and vision than that our mission or vision has been influenced by international [activities].” (BE_02)

“What makes my organisation attractive to me are those autonomous teams. It really promotes entrepreneurship among staff. That leads to new projects. That creates possibilities to say, I am not going to do an international project once in four years, as is stipulated in the policy plan, but we will design a recurrent offer and we will do it every year. That is a consequence of that entrepreneurship.” (BE_10)

A final stance does not make a link between changes and the programme. The programme has helped these organisations to become better in what they already do or realise a central goal of the organisation. In that respect, the programme reinforces these organisations. Furthermore, some organisations stress that they have become better in different aspects of project management by the programme.

“No, I don’t think so, we apply our usual way. (...) Our goal is to reach as many young people as possible and offer them international possibilities.” (BE_03)

“I think that E+ encourages us to contemplate ourselves, to see how we approach things. Maybe if we are addressing that subject, that we perhaps link that method to reach our goal. That makes that we as organisation reflect even more over ourselves.” (BE_05)

4.5. Future organisational change and development

A similar approach was used for future organisational changes and developments as for changes in the past. First, future dreams for the organisation were asked and subsequently, the possible role that the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme can play in these changes.

4.5.1 Two hopes: continuity and innovation

In future organisational developments there is a certain tension between a desire for continuity and a will to innovate. These two seem contradictory, but are often expressed at the same time by the same organisation. An illustration can be found in next interview fragment. On the one hand, this organisation hopes to innovate, but also wants to consolidate these innovations:

“On the basis of this project we hope to recalibrate our basic course, enrich it. To organise one training day during the Easter holidays (...) I hope that we will be able to give a better answer after two years, if we have integrated it well in our structure and if we can continue to update our knowledge for new volunteers and that they can apply it in the structure of consultation that they must have to work with these people. (...) That we can keep support our volunteers – and even more – (...)” (BE_01)

A similar phenomenon can be witnessed concerning networking. Some organisations want to realise new partnerships and networks, but at the same time want to make these networks more durable, because working with regular partners has some advantages: it makes it easier to realise projects of a higher quality, to realise more complicated projects, such as KA2-projects, or to build expertise. In this respect, one organisation remarks that – if you have to start from nothing - three years is not such a long period to realise a strategic partnership.

“At the European level, I still dream to realise a big network of like-minded organisations (...) I think of a long-term partnership in that case, because if you look at those strategic partnerships KA2, that is only 3 years. I really think that it takes longer, I think it is more interesting if it could last longer than three years because then you can realise more. (...) Because sometimes it takes three years to take a first step and that is only the beginning. You have not worked into the deep yet.” (BE-06)

The need for continuity is expressed by the hope that the organisation still exist in five years. This hope is not only expressed by the small, non-profit organisation and the de facto association, but is also mentioned by some of the national organisations. It can also be found in the wish of some organisations, that have known a period of transition, that the new structures or approaches get the opportunity to proof their usefulness. They hope that after a time of contraction or fast growth, the organisation knows a less turbulent five years and even a continuity in staff members. Some organisations have developed new approaches in the past period, have developed new networks and partnerships. ... thanks to the programme. These organisations hope to embed these realisations structurally in their organisation and if possible, to consolidate these results in their organisations. These wishes are closely related to the hope that the next five years are characterized by more financial stability. Most organisations aspire to stay in the Erasmus+:

Youth in Action programme, even grow in it and make it an integral part of how they operate. Yet participating in Erasmus+: Youth in Action is an investment for organisations: it's a time investment and a financial one. Some of the organisations are doubtful and even fearful that they will be able to continue this investment in the future. One organisation involved in a KA2-project complains that the financial means for attracting external, highly specialised experts really does not suffice and are completely inadequate. The hope that there is a certain continuity in the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme itself has also been suggested in several interviews. Even seasoned and experienced organisations express difficulties in staying informed of the many changes in the programme. They point to the non-existing or confusing communication of the European Commission (e.g. the solidarity corps, brexit). But also changes in the amount of money that is allocated at each deadline and the way it is allocated, adds to this confusion.

"I think that that integration [of international projects in the day-to-day operations of the organisation] is very important. And with EVS we are beginning to do that, but too often it is still too much considered to be the cherry on the cake and in fact, it has to become more – maybe I am now exaggerating my metaphors, to stay with the image of a cake – an ingredient of your cake and not just the topping." (BE_02)

"I hope we still exist in the future and that as a channel we still can send people to those kinds of training activities. People who otherwise would never have that opportunity." (BE_08)

"Well, I hope that in five years' time, that transition trajectory in which we are now and that constitutes a whole rebuild, has finished. That it has consolidated and functions well. That the growing pains of the last years have vanished. That it can lead to rest among the people involved." (BE_10)

The will to innovate takes on two forms: becoming better in what organisations already do and realising new accomplishments. What organisations want to improve or what they hope to realise strongly differs from one organisation to the other. Some wishes are recurrent though. The most often is the wish to realise new and/or sustainable partnerships and networks. The will to become better is expressed as follows:

- Becoming a centre of expertise and be recognized as such
- Better be able to proof the impact of the organisation or projects
- Improving the support of volunteers
- Broaden and open the mission and vision of the organisation and realising a new (more inclusive) approach
- To further immerse the organisation in non-formal learning

"Now we are thinking how we can have a real impact. To get that on the rails we will have to find a new way to go further: a sort of an Urban Pedagogy Academy (...)" (BE_04)

“It is my ambition to reform our federation into a federation of open youth work. (...) My ambition is that we become a federation with a broader scope, relevant to a broader group of youth organisations. And that this is also very clear”. (BE_10)

“A few small things: more trajectories in our programme instead of one-off activities. More trajectories to improve the impact and so. And also getting our impact assessment more clearly.” (BE_05)

New accomplishments organisations want to realise in the coming five years, include among others:

- A new approach
- A KA2-project
- New networks
- Finding new financial means and resources
- A partnership with local authorities to develop new policies
- Initiatives to thank and bind volunteers

“In ideal circumstances, I see us cooperating with policy makers like our partner in Copenhagen does. They really work together with the city of Copenhagen and they do things together and they can suggest new policy ideas and so.” (BE_04)

4.5.2 The role of Erasmus+: Youth in Action

The training and support activities of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action are mentioned mostly indirectly as a tool to realise these future goals. Mostly it was referred to as ‘*using the expertise of the National Agency*’ (BE_07) or ‘*the support of the National Agency*’ (BE_04). The National Agency also has accumulated expertise over the years and should continue to provide support. It is here that training and support activities are mentioned. Several organisations stress that the National Agency currently actively supports organisations, not only through training activities, but also by consultation. They stress that the National Agency should be continuing this and even expand it. A National Agency should be more than “*an agency that manages EU subsidies*” (BE_07).

“I am going to discuss it with Jint. I cannot wait actually. I have to consider it with Jint, because Jint is very original in finding solutions. (...) I must say that Jint and the people of Youth in Action support me as much as they can and help me if I have questions.” (BE_01)

Five domains/subjects are mentioned in which organisations could use help and suggest that the expertise of the National Agency could and should be more exploited. To be clear, these are suggestions of organisations. It doesn’t mean that it does not already happen. These domains are:

- The Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme itself
 - o Due to the continuous changes in the programme and the complexity of the programme, focussed and time-limited information sessions about these changes should be organised on a regular basis.

- The creation of partnerships
 - o Several organisations express doubt about the practice to put different people from different organisations from all over Europe haphazardly in the same training activity in the hope networks will arise from it. According to them, this practice is not effective and efficient. Here the expertise of the national agencies should and could be used more proactively. The National Agency knows the organisations and what they do, they have contacts with other National Agencies, so there is a certain expertise about which possible, future partnerships have a greater chance to succeed.
- Consolidation
 - o Organisations struggle with consolidating the results of their projects and could use some help here.
- Impact assessment
 - o Organisation involved in the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme, certainly those involved in a KA2-project, have been convinced of the importance of proofing the impact of what they do. They are still looking for ways to measure their impact.
- Translations
 - o One organisations suggest that writing projects in English and translating material from training activities is time-consuming and that perhaps the National Agency should have a reserve of students translators that organisations can use to make translations

“Informative moments or keep us regularly informed of changes or which priorities are important. Maybe also suggesting some ideas, because they say we should be creative, but what does that entail? What is possible? Sometimes you have ideas that cost money and if the budget is lower than expected, you cannot do it. In that sense, more meetings and more consultation must be possible.” (BE_03)

“Because now, if you meet a good practice, that is very random. So more well-directed partnerships and more directed knowledge and expertise with the right people. Now it is a hotchpotch and you must know very well in which programme you have to apply and then you must be lucky to find a suitable partner. Certainly, when it involves a certain subject, it [networking] is difficult. I think it could be stronger.” (BE_07)

“It would be interesting if there would be training activities about impact assessment – unfortunately we cannot do it ourselves – on vulnerable people or programmes that are in line with ours. On the field research as it were, data collection and so on. How we can deal with that.” (BE_05)

Financial support is also mentioned on several occasions during the interviews. Several organisations state that some projects are systematically underfunded, creating financial problems for organisations. Especially projects involving young people with fewer opportunities or with special

needs and who demand extra support and highly specialized projects, demanding external expertise, are mentioned here.

“(...) Now we receive a grant of 500 euro to support a young person. Officially, that is good for 10 hours of support. But in reality you spend more than 40 hours on that person, with the whole project. (...) And according to me, that is something that a whole lot of organisations do, because they cannot do it otherwise. The young people that we send really need support. And Jint knows that. That is the reason why they have approved that reinforced mentorship. But they could stimulate it more...” (BE_02)

One person, involved in a KA2-project for innovation and the exchange of good practices, addresses that there are not sufficient financial means to distribute the results of projects external to the own organisation after a project is finished. At the start of a project it is not always clear what the results will be of such a project. If these results prove to be very relevant to other organisations in the field, there are no financial means to train staff of other organisation after the running period of the project. Exempting staff to train staff of other organisations is not an option for most organisations in the youth sector. As a consequence, useful innovations and other results of the projects in the programme are limited to the own organisation and are threatened not to be consolidated on a larger scale. This organisation pleads for more financial means in the programme for strengthening results and making them more sustainable.

“That you have to contribute financially as organisation, is normal. But you cannot pay everything. Your course or training becomes so expensive, that nobody will turn up. As an organisation in the youth sector, you do not have the financial means to pay expensive courses. The threshold becomes too high. I think, if Europe invest more in it [consolidating of results], they will see it pays off. They will see that it will spread further and that their means are used more effectively. They have forgotten to build in the final piece. They probably thought most organisation will do it automatically. Most organisations do it, but internally, because it stays in house, but not further. It demands an investment from Europe.” (BE_01)

There is a certain demand for an external exchange of results. Several interviewees are curious what other organisations realise in their projects within the programme Erasmus+: Youth in Action. They are also very interested in how other organisations consolidate these results in their daily operations. Closely linked to this demand, is the ask to be able to repeat a successful project, a successful exchange or newly developed method and as such, propagate it.

“In hind side, maybe, how will I put it? Offer some more inspiration or something like that? How can you multiply as much as possible the results of your project? Or how can you use your training once more? That part I have missed personally. Maybe I have not found it yet, maybe it does exist. (...) Maybe even offer more support in project follow-up? I have the feeling that there is something... – but maybe it is also a task for organisations – but I have the feeling that it is a matter of concern. I struggle with it myself. After all, there is a lot of money involved in these projects.” (BE_08)

One interviewed staff member finds the offer of training and support activities in the Erasmus+ Youth in Action-programme unattractive. There are enough training possibilities at the local and national level according to him and the training activities at the European level have little added value. Some other interviewees also do not often participate in training activities at the European level, but not because the offer is not appealing, but because the circumstances are often not right to participate: the timing is not convenient, there are other time constraints, they do not know the possibilities ... These interviewees do not comment on the type of training activity that fits them best. Other organisations have not a preference for a certain type of training activity: the more varied, the better and variation in approach of training activities is even instructive.

Some preferences are expressed during the interviews though. These can be about the formula, the design or the activity and/or the subject. Concerning subject, some respondents make general remarks. Subjects should be innovative and tangible. Subjects are innovative if they touch on current affairs in Europe or social trends that affect the whole of Europe. As examples social engagement of young people, populism and refugees and migration are cited. Tangible subjects are subjects that can be used to develop projects. Examples are young people with fewer opportunities or young people with special needs. More specific subjects mentioned, are soft skills (such as leadership) and impact assessment, especially qualitative impact assessment.

A successful training activity must have clear and achievable goals and must use a mix of experiential learning and informal learning methods, such as sharing experiences, participative approaches and reflection, according to the respondents and reflecting the literature on training transfer that stresses the importance of the use of interactive methods to encourage participation (Burke & Hutchins, 2008). One interviewee has the opinion that reflection should be applied in moderation though. As examples TCA in the form of a study visits or a job shadowing are mentioned as especially enriching and inspiring.

“TCA are often study visits. Then you travel from one place to another. That is part of the experience. You are really taken out of your comfort zone. That is a real challenge through which you even get more out of it.” (BE_03)

“Very experiential, based on elements of Freire, Kolb, also in deciding the goals. Experiential, goal-orientated, starting from the group. That is also always the case, you always must integrate your own story during a training. You just cannot assume an onlookers position. People get to know each other through storytelling, narratives. (...) Try to start as much as possible from the persons themselves, from their stories. And participative, as much as possible.” (BE_11)

“I have noticed that you can prolong these things [reflection] and too much introspection and too much reflection. That doesn’t always work, it doesn’t always work for me...Two hours is more than sufficient.” (BE_10)

“The fact is during a job shadowing you are directly out in the field. During a training activity, you are inside whole of the time, you will do workshops and you will also see local elements. For me personally, I like it if I am completely submerged in that given and that you really can cooperate. A job shadowing is for our kind of work super interesting because you are really submerged in it. That week I was a member of that team, so I could participate in meetings and so. It is much easier to translate it to your own organisation.” (BE_06)

Three forms of training activities are named as useful forms. The first one are short workshops of maximum a half day, organised in Belgium concerning subjects directly linked to the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme and its changes. This training activity formula is preferred by experienced staff members who wish to stay updated on the programme. This formula has the advantage that it does not demand a lot of time. Less experienced staff members and a representative of the smaller, non-profit organisation cite the appetisers training activities and the BiTriMulti training activities as very helpful in developing a project. One respondent remarked it would be convenient if these training activities could take place in Belgium, once more because it would be time saving. Exempting a staff member for a whole week is an important investment for small organisations.

That is what I find interesting. An informative moment, in one afternoon and we catch up.” (BE_03)

“For instance, I once did a training – where was that? That was in Ireland, I guess – that was a training, a BiTriMulti I suppose and it dealt with the development of youth exchanges. The next year (...) I organised a youth exchange. That training really helped me to fill in the application form, how to write a project, how do you start one, how do you involve young people in it. I really have learned a lot from it.” (BE_08)

Finally, some respondents state that training activities that take on the form of a trajectory, with multiple preparatory meetings, the actual training activity and a substantial post-training activity phase is the best option to help realise fundamental changes in organisations. One of the respondents, who states that his organisation is formed by the programme, specifically points to such a training trajectory in the establishment and transformation of his organisation.

“If I consider the training activities with the greatest impact, I would say that that is the one with the extended preparation and post training activity. That training activity has caused the most involvement. I think that 60% to 70% of the trainees have stayed three or four years in the organisation. The impact was bigger, more involvement.... But that year we had more financial means to realise it.” (BE_11)

4.6. Any aspects covered in addition to the ones above

The Flemish National Agency deliberately opts to open the Erasmus+: Youth in Action to all organisations offering non-formal, non-obligatory activities in the leisure time of young people.

This means that the range of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme is broader than what traditionally is understood as youth work in Flanders. The bulk of ‘classical’ youth work in Flanders are youth associations, locally embedded and supported by local authorities providing leisure activities “*by, through and for young people*” (Redig & Coussée, 2017, p. 30). This youth work is carried out by young volunteers during a limited period of their lives. Professional youth work is rather the exception than the rule. The same holds true for adult involvement in youth work⁸. The majority of youth workers in Flanders are therefore volunteers, often between 16 and 30 years old. Even higher-level organisations (such as regional and national ones) are highly depending on social engagement of young people. With the exception of the small, non-profit organisation and the de facto association that share some characteristics with this youth work, this part of Flemish youth work is not represented directly in the current sample because these organisations participate less in training and support activities in the programme. Indirectly they are represented because some of their umbrella organisations are included in the sample. Professional youth work on the other hand is overrepresented in the current research.

This has consequences for what is addressed in the interviews. Professional youth work already work with young people with fewer opportunities or young people with special needs. This can be an explanation why a more open and broader organisation is so important to the respondents. As one of the interviewees put it, it would be “*bestowing too much honour*” (BE_07) though to ascribe (an increase in) the interest of their organisation in young people with fewer opportunities to the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme. Several organisations have become more aware of their expertise in working with these young people through their participation in the Erasmus+: Youth in Action and some of them see the programme as an opportunity to highlight their expertise.

The high reliance on volunteers and the continuous search for new volunteers in youth work in Flanders explains why volunteers, volunteer management, volunteer retention and the future of social engagement among young people feature so heavily in the interviews. Young volunteers are essential to the existence of the Flemish youth sector.

Some of the respondents – and not only those of the umbrella organisations – stress that the programme does not fit the reality of Flemish youth work. For instance, the distinction between youth exchanges and mobility for youth workers is in a high degree an artificial one if an important part of your youth workers are 16- to 30 year old volunteers. The programme is also not considered to be volunteer friendly. Some respondents still find it regrettable that the programme is not that well-known by young people and young volunteers in youth work, especially because it offers such interesting and varied possibilities. The administration of a project, the development and management of it is still difficult for young volunteers. The jargon, the fact that the documents are in English, the required time investment, the frequent changes in the programme,

⁸ Although we have seen that some interviewees signal that some young people stay longer and longer involved in youth work, even after finishing their studies, finding a job and after marriage.

... add to its complexity⁹. This explains the often expressed need for a continuous support by the National Agency and the safeguarding of a separate National Agency for the Youth chapter of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action.

“Maybe an even more intense support? We once considered a KA2-project, but we eventually did not apply because we considered it to be too difficult.” (BE_04)

“I think, if it is the ambition of Jint that more of our members get into the programme, they have to do more intensive efforts to realise that, because we alone cannot close the gap. Somewhere, implicitly, it is expected that we channel our members to the programme. But that has no avail. If we have to support such an application for a project, we need ourselves a lot of time. That is a weak spot of the whole programme if you ask me.” (BE_10)

⁹ At the same time, some respondents downplay its difficulty. The first attempt to apply for a project and the dissemination of results are considered to be difficult.

5. Main findings and conclusions

Training and support activities within Erasmus+: Youth in Action are one of the ways to innovate for beneficiaries of the programme. Innovations can take the form of a new direction, a new vision or mission, new approaches, attitudes and/or activities for new target groups, leading to a more open and broader organisation, one of the two most cited organisational developments that happened in the last five years.

Three strategies for transferring can be discerned: actively documenting the training during the activity itself, creating occasions and possibilities to share learning outcomes and creating a training ground to practice learning outcomes. Although almost all organisations state not to have an explicit policy to support transfer of participants after return, all of them at least expect an oral feedback. This can happen very informally or more formally, e.g. a presentation during a meeting. Some organisations try to develop a policy. Organisations encourages participants to share experiences by writing an article for their magazine, a testimonial or making a picture show for the website. A national, but highly decentralized organisation tries to develop a system of knowledge management within the organisation so that the acquired expertise built up during training activities is better retained and can be used for designing new projects. One organisation offers young volunteers opportunities to design their own project on return, so they can turn their learning outcomes into practice. This organisation exempts even staff members to help these young volunteers and uses its own expertise to promote the projects. One organisation retook the transnational training activity at the national level, because there were more candidates than available places at that training activity and because the organisation deemed the subject of the training activity crucial for the future operations of that organisation.

Sharing experiences can also happen with other, similar organisations. One beneficiary of a KA2-project, plans a symposium to share its experiences with a new developed method with others in the sector. An organisation, that developed a new approach after partaking in a job shadowing activity, shared its approach on a meeting of their umbrella organisation, leading to the proliferation of that approach to other organisations.

Organisations were confronted with two recurrent changes in the last five years: reorganisation or restructuration and the development of a more open and broader approach by the organisation. It is in this last development that the Erasmus+: Youth in Action is considered to be very instrumental. It triggers innovation and it fosters networks of organisations challenging each other to innovate and to question each other's approaches or views. It is furthermore an important way to develop intercultural skills. These skills are very useful to use in their daily operations. One of these skills is questioning the taken-for-grantedness of habits. This is once more an important prerequisite to innovate. Participation in a training activity can also be an element in the human resource policy or the management of volunteers in an organisation. Participation in a training activity motivates and gives a boost to personnel and volunteers, leading to a higher retention of staff and volunteers. Finally, training/support activities can help in making youth or-

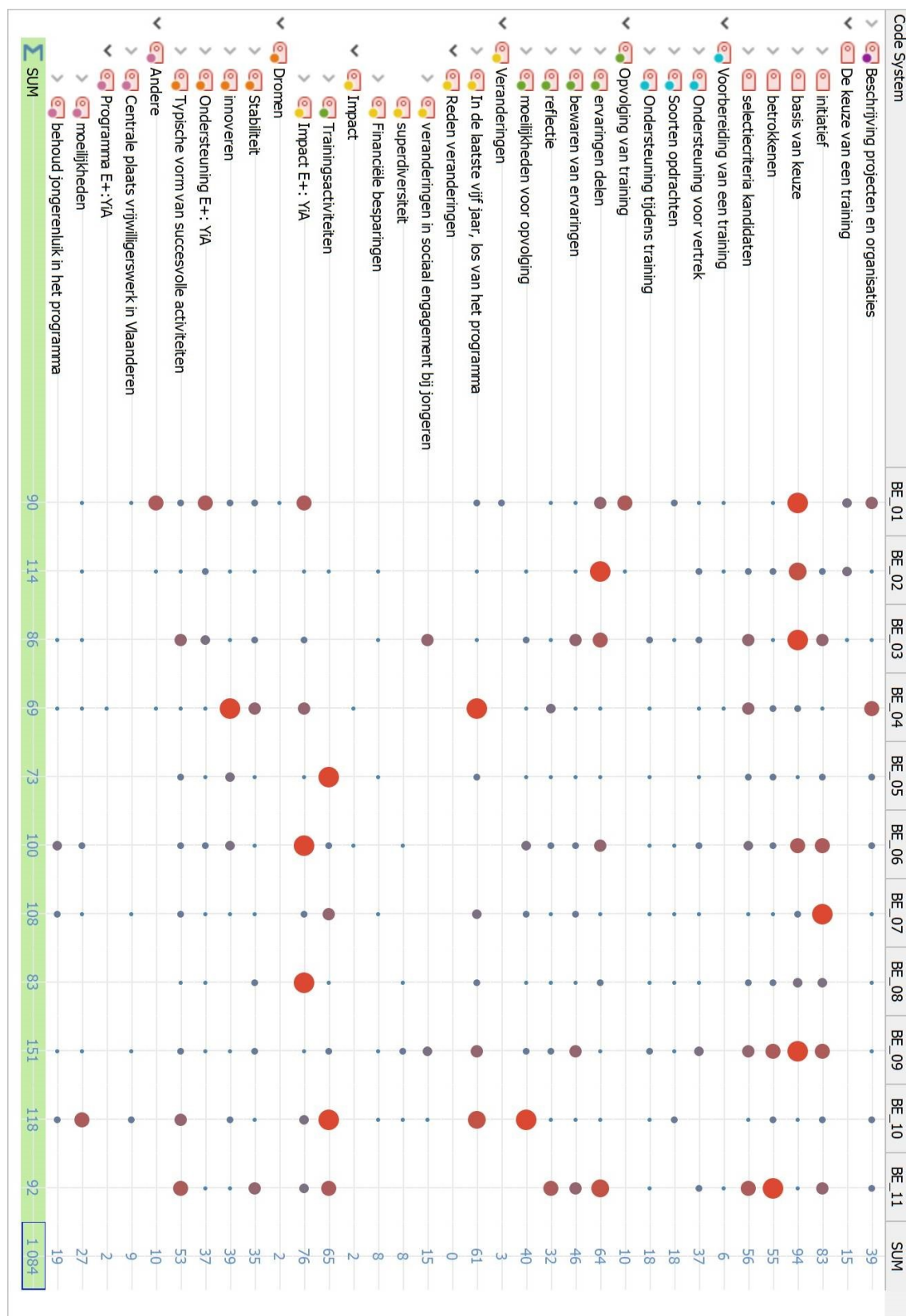
ganisations more aware of their own expertise. Having an international network of organisations helps to foster expertise and makes it more recognisable to external partners, possibly leading to more projects.

Four forms of training activities are explicitly mentioned as instrumental. Short information sessions about the programme Erasmus+/ Youth in Action to stay updated on the programme are preferred by experienced participants. Appetiser training activities and BiTRiMulti training activities are mentioned for new participants to get acquainted with the programme and its possibilities. Study visits, but especially job shadowing, stimulate transfer of practices. Fundamental changes demand multiple training activities forming a training trajectory, comprising pre-and post-training phases. The pre-training phase is necessary to prepare the training activity, the post-training activities should involve practising the learning outcomes and reflecting on them.

According to some organisations, their organisation is formed by the training and support activities in the programme Erasmus+: Youth in Action and has turned it into the organisation it is now. These training activities are considered to be the most important learning opportunities for these organisations.

6. Appendices

Figure 1: Code System Ray-Cap Module C (Belgium)



7. Literature

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