

**Research-based  
analysis of European  
youth programmes**

**EUROPEAN YOUTH PROJECTS ARE POWERFUL IN PROMOTING  
PARTICIPATION AND CITIZENSHIP OF YOUNG PEOPLE –  
AND THEY CAN BECOME EVEN MORE EFFECTIVE**

**Results and recommendations of the RAY  
research project “Long-term effects of Eras-  
mus+ Youth in Action on participation and citi-  
zenship”**

**RAY LTE**

**AUTHORS**

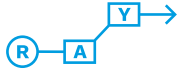
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## TEN RAY PARTNERS WANTED TO DIG DEEPER

Since its inception, the RAY network has provided evidence that European youth projects foster participation and citizenship<sup>1</sup>, one of the main objectives of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action (E+/YiA) Programme and its predecessors<sup>2</sup>. The latest reports show, among other results, that 62% of participants believe they developed three skills strengthening citizenship and participation and 36% of them report that they actually became more active as citizens as a result of their participation in the programme<sup>3</sup>. In order to explore these effects of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action projects on the participants in more detail and to find out whether the effects are persistent, ten RAY partners conducted a longitudinal study from 2015 until 2018 (RAY-LTE: Long-term effects of Erasmus+ Youth in Action on participation and citizenship).

## SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS PROVIDE FOR RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The mixed-method approach of the study used standardised multilingual online surveys with project participants, project leaders and young people, who did not attend in a E+/YiA or similar projects (control group) before the project core activity and at three stages after it (two to three months; one year and two to three years); 60% of the 2,030 participants, who were invited to the first survey, answered it and more than 18% of the respondents also completed the following surveys. In parallel, 82 participants took part in three qualitative interviews before the project core activity as well as one year and two to three years after it. The participants, who were invited to the surveys and asked to attend in the interviews, took part in E+/YiA projects with and without a focus on participation and citizenship. The preliminary results were discussed with the interview partners at a research conference in Strasbourg, feeding in the final transnational analysis.

The analysis illustrates how E+/YiA contribute to the development of participation and citizenship and how these effects could be furthermore improved in E+/YiA projects and beyond:

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<sup>1</sup> Among others:

Fennes, H., Hagleitner, W., Helling, K., Rosenthal, A. (2011). *Researched-based Analysis of Youth in Action. Results from the first series of surveys with project participants and project leaders between October 2009 and June 2010. Transnational Analysis.*

Fennes, H., Gadinger, S., Hagleitner, W. (2012). *Exploring Youth in Action. Effects and outcomes of the Youth in Action Programme from the perspective of project participants and project leaders. Transnational Analysis 2011.*

Fennes, H., Gadinger, S., Hagleitner, W., Lunardon, K. (2013). *Learning in Youth in Action. Results from the surveys with project participants and project leaders in May 2012.*

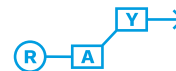
Geudens, T., Hagleitner, W., Labadie, F., & Stevens, F. (2015a). *International inclusion projects effectively generate more inclusiveness.* Retrieved from <https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3269/EffectsOfInclusionProjects.pdf>

Geudens, T., Hagleitner, W., Labadie, F., & Stevens, F. (2015b). *International youth projects benefit most those with fewer opportunities.* Retrieved from <https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3230/ImpactOfMobilityOnYPFO.pdf>

Bammer, D., Fennes, H., Karsten, A. (2017). *Exploring Erasmus+: Youth in Action. Effects and outcomes of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action Programme from the perspective of project participants and project leaders. Transnational Analysis 2015/16.* Retrieved from <https://www.researchyouth.eu/results-erasmus-youth-in-action>

<sup>2</sup> Erasmus+ Youth in Action (2014–2020); Youth in Action (2007–2013); Youth (2000–2006)

<sup>3</sup> Böhler, J., Fennes, H., Gadinger, S., Karsten, A., Mayerl, M., Pitschmann, A., Roth, C. (2019). *Effects and outcomes of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action Programme. Transnational Analysis.* Retrieved from <https://www.researchyouth.eu/results-erasmus-youth-in-action>



## E+/YiA PROJECTS ARE A POWERFUL TOOL TO PROMOTE PARTICIPATION AND CITIZENSHIP

- The responses to the surveys and interviews before the project show relatively high levels for most areas of participation and citizenship **competence** and **practice**, partly higher than the control group. This suggests, that participants in E+/YiA projects are already quite competent and engaged in civil society and democratic life before the project.
- An increased **knowledge** relevant for participation and active citizenship can be observed in both research strands, in particular on how to engage in civil society as well as environmental protection and sustainable development. Furthermore, **skills** are developed, in particular communication, negotiation and cooperation skills, which are relevant for participation and citizenship. There are indications that these skills are developed mutually with the increased knowledge. The increase in knowledge and skills does not appear for the control group and is persistent throughout the survey and interview waves.
- The interviews indicate that E+/YiA projects strengthen various **values** inherent to democracy and **attitudes** relevant for participation and citizenship in particular the protection of the human rights and the principle to always see people in the centre of a democratic state, an increased willingness to contribute to society, an increased interest for social and political issues, as well as the importance of the protection of the environment and sustainable development.
- The interviews also show that the projects result in an increased participation in civil society and democratic life especially for two groups of participants (this also applies for some areas of participation and citizenship competence): for those who have a higher educational achievement or are more experienced with participation and citizenship. This could be interpreted as a ‘Matthew effect’ – those who are already active are able to increase their engagement more than others. The other group consists of participants who are less experienced, did not attend any special courses on this subject or participated in E+/YiA for the first time. This indicates that young people with fewer opportunities benefit from E+/YiA projects.
- For some areas of participation and citizenship competence and practice, the qualitative interviews show a sustainable increase, which is not confirmed by the analysis of the surveys, at least not through a statistically significant increase. This is the case, for example, for participation and citizenship values and attitudes as well as for participation and citizenship practice. A possible explanation is that the changes observed in the interviews are too small or did not apply to enough participants to be measured through the surveys. Another possible explanation is that the self-assessment of the participants was already very high before the project for a number of areas (see above) and could hardly be increased.

## HOW CAN E+/YiA PROJECTS HELP BENEFIT YOUNG PEOPLE MORE?

Further findings of the LTE study indicate factors that are likely to be decisive for this competence and practice development. Recommendations were derived from this, some of them are listed below:

For most areas of participation and citizenship competence and practice, which show an increase as outlined above, the respective developments are observed mostly for participants in projects focussing on or explicitly addressing participation and citizenship.

→ The objectives of E+/YiA projects not focusing on participation and citizenship should be linked to participation and citizenship and addressed explicitly wherever possible in E+/YiA projects. Generally, project themes of most projects funded through European youth programmes can be linked in some way to participation and citizenship. Youth programme objectives related to participation and citizenship should be emphasised in youth projects.

Some of the younger and less educated participants had difficulties understanding the rather abstract concepts of ‘participation in civil society and democratic life’ and ‘active citizenship’.

→ These concepts need to be explicitly communicated in a language, phrasing and terminology that is comprehensible and close to the reality of participants and project team members.

Topics like the refugee movement, the Brexit as well as the growth of extremist parties and movements are mentioned repeatedly by the interview partners, influencing their attitude with respect to participation and citizenship, sometimes towards increased motivation and engagement, and sometimes towards resignation.

→ It is recommended to link social and political events and developments at local, regional, national, European and global levels to the project theme and to learning spaces in the environment of the project. This enables participants to experience and understand participation in society and democratic life in a practical way that is close to real life and therefore in a more sustainable way.

→ The mentioned social and political events and developments can also result in concerns, doubts, uncertainties and anxieties of participants with respect to their social and political life and their future. Adequate guidance by project teams is essential for participants to be able to cope with these concerns, especially in projects tackling issues related to participation and citizenship.

## THE RESEARCHERS GO ON DIGGING

In the current follow-up research project case studies are being carried out on projects with a focus on participation and citizenship (RAY-PART). The aim is to find out which approaches to participation and citizenship education and learning are effective in developing participation and citizenship competences and practices of participants and, in particular, fostering the engagement of young people in civil society and democratic life and empowering them to do so. It is again planned to discuss the preliminary findings with the research participants at a conference in Strasbourg in spring 2021.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

The full research report for RAY-LTE, along with supporting material, is available at [researchyouth.net/lte](https://researchyouth.net/lte).