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POLICY REPORT

NOVEL FRAMEWORK FOR DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION
AND ENGAGEMENT OF UNDERREPRESENTED EUROPEAN
YOUNGSTERS — NEUEYT

Welcome to the NEUEYT policy report, based on initiatives for youngsters, stakeholders, policy makers, local communities, and youth organizations.



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POLICY REPORT

NEUEYT Project - Novel Framework for democratic participation and Engagement of Underrepresented European Youngsters

KA3 – SUPPORT FOR POLICY REFORM
EUROPEAN YOUTH TOGETHER

Project No.:604631-EPP-1-2020-1-IT-EPPKA3-EU-YTH-TOG.



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1.INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the NEUEYT policy report, based on initiatives for youngsters, stakeholders, policy makers, local communities, and youth organizations. This document is an outcome of the NEUEYT project which proposes to work on innovative initiatives for the enforcement of active citizenship and democratic participation among youngsters 16-20, particularly underrepresented in policy making decisions, with regard to those living in remote/rural areas.



1.1 About the project

NEUEYT is an ambitious project aiming at designing and testing according to a participative approach an innovative set of initiatives able to boost civic engagement of youngsters. The project pays special attention to the under-represented, namely the “invisible” for the literature, assuming that digitalization can play a crucial role in the emerging of new forms of dialogue. The project consortium believes that the digital approach of the newly developed participation initiatives will reduce the gap among the invisible youngsters. This has been a crucial aspect in this project.

In order to achieve the result of this project, the consortium has worked thoroughly in the collection of the excellences of e- democracy in Europe by identifying their features. The outcome of this research is 8 core initiatives, which have been tested at partner country level, thus already activating youngsters and putting them in relation with policy makers.

The methodology used to carry out these initiatives focused on the active involvement of youngsters and policy makers to the activities in local communities, thus engaging them from the research to the piloting, from the development of the policy recommendation to the feedback given to the initiatives of the framework. Action research, co-creation, and community development principles guided this approach.

The main target group for this project was youngsters between the age of 16 to 20.



1.2 Project objectives

- Increasing the active participation in democratic life of under-represented youngsters, through blended approaches, new discussion/debate formats and innovative targeted languages;
- Increasing the opportunities of youngsters, to be listened by stakeholders and policy makers at local, regional, national and to international level;
- Testing new ways of blended participation of youngsters for innovating the panel of services provided by stakeholders and providers in the field of Youth according a sustainability perspective;
- Promote the concept that youngsters should determine the future of Europe: increasing the general idea that investing on youngsters and on their trust in the institutions and the community, is crucial.

T1.3 Project partners

The partnership involves 6 countries (IT, GR, CY, NMK, FR, NO) and gathers public (local and regional) as well as private bodies (international nets, youth Associations and NGOs), all involved in youth empowerment and policy making.

The consortium consists of:

- Glocal Factory – Verona, Italy (consortium leader)
- Poraka Nova – Struga, North Macedonia
- Associazione Foris – Brindisi, Italy
- Hub Nicosia – Nicosia, Cyprus
- E-Trikala, Trikala, Greece
- Pistes Solidaires – Pau, France
- Agder County Council – Agder, Norway

PARTNERS



2. THE 8 NEW INITIATIVES FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION

The 8 initiatives are the core outcome of the project. All the initiatives have been tested in all the partner countries, and all initiatives have been tested in more than one country. All the initiatives have involved meeting between youngsters, policy makers and stakeholders. The testing of the initiatives has resulted in a “Global framework of initiatives”, produced by the project partners.



2.1 The making of the initiatives

The creation of the 8 new initiatives has been a process developed in different steps.

During the first step, the partners of the project did an extensive desk research on existing good practices which involved a digital, democratic and active participation between youngsters, youth workers and policy makers.

So, what is a good practice? It is not only a practice that is good, but a practice which has been proven to work well and produce good results and is therefore recommended as a model. It is a successful experience, which has been tested and validated, in the broad sense, which has been repeated and deserves to be shared so that a greater number of people can adopt it.



All the good practices found met the following criteria:

- Effective and successful
- Sustainable
- Gender sensitive
- Technically feasible
- Inherently participatory
- Replicable and adaptable

Aware of all the factors of the different good practices gathered, the project consortium met for a three-day joint staff training, where they reflected and debated on the lessons learned by the selected best practices. This step was extremely important, as it focused on relevant inputs for the design and development of the Novel framework for democratic participation and engagement of underrepresented European youngsters. During this training, the partners worked together and co-shaped the 8 initiatives, based on the criteria of the good practices.

2.2. The 8 initiatives

Pinpointed: Pinpointed is an activity aimed at guiding youth to reflect on current issues which affect their lives and at analyzing the problem they will address to different policymakers through critical notes.

Voice up: This activity aims to design and conduct a number of activities that will enable young people to point out the best and worst places in the city and compare their daily commuting and living in relation to where they live.

Self-advocate influencer: Self-advocate influencer is an activity that aims at making youngsters from under-represented communities work in pairs with youngsters on modules focused on gaining knowledge on working with social media and expressing themselves through different tools. The main goal will be to be heard and provoke reaction from the relevant policy makers.

INITIATIVES



pARTme: The pARTme initiative will ask youngsters to create by their own artworks, adopting any possible form of digital artistic language they prefer, (poetry, music, videos, images, songs, medleys), and which best describe/express selected topics.

Silent Debate

The aim of this initiative is to give youngsters an opportunity to express themselves on several current topics. This method encourages dialogue with the text and with the other members of the group; it encourages personal involvement and group building; it gives everyone time to think, to express themselves without being interrupted and to listen to others.

Six steps to participation in civic and democratic processes: The “6 Steps to participation in civic and democratic processes” is an active learning process which aims to foster changes in our society, it is a problem-based learning process which encourages young people to ask questions, reflect on issues that affect their lives and explore the complexity of real world’s situations.

Road map to digital youth council

The roadmap to (digital) youth council aims at providing a step by step guide on how to create a youth council that can be used by any other European country as a roadmap to democratic participation.

We & Us panel: In the We & Us panel, youth will be able to conduct a research on 10 topics of their interest. To do so, they will have to design a tool which will be useful for this, as well as disseminate the survey and gather representative information.

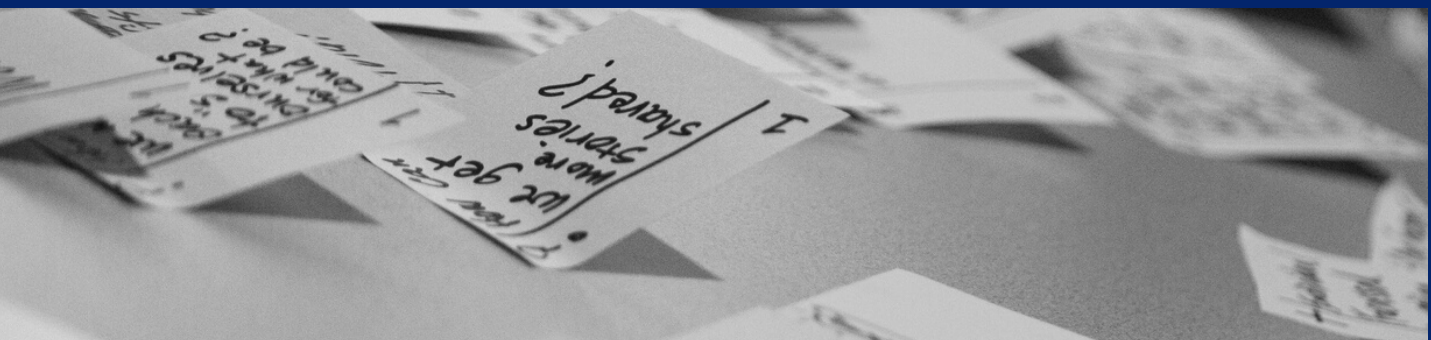
INITIATIVES



3.THE MAKING OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Policy recommendations are built on the collective experiences of the initiatives and the input from the stakeholder-tables.

The Policy recommendations aims at capitalizing all the results gained during the implementation of initiatives, concerning the development and testing of the framework and all the deliverables and outcomes generated by the testing phase. An international laboratory and the mobility of youngsters and policy makers have supported, through engagement, the quality impact of the deliverables. The tested framework has been finetuned for future sustainability and transferability.



STAKEHOLDER TABLES

3.1 Multi-stakeholder lists

A multistakeholder-list was produced by each partner. The people on the stakeholder list are politicians, top administrators, youth workers, school leaders or other relevant target groups somehow involved in work with young people, in formal or informal ways. The list will be used to distribute information about the project; to recruit participants for the initiatives and to recruit to the stakeholder tables.

3.2 Multi-stakeholder tables

In every country a multi-stakeholders table has been created at local level in every partner country in order to share decisions and validate the outputs/deliverables. The tables consist of a minimum of 8-10 members from the stakeholder list, in addition to at least two youngsters of the target groups. The stakeholder tables have had 3 meetings discussing the framework and scope of the project; the experiences from the initiatives and policy recommendations.

Some members of the stakeholder tables have participated in transnational mobilities, exchanging experiences and learning with stakeholders in other countries that has implemented the same initiatives. The members of the stakeholder group are committed to ensuring that the collected experiences and knowledge created in the NEUEYT-project will continue beyond the life span of the project.

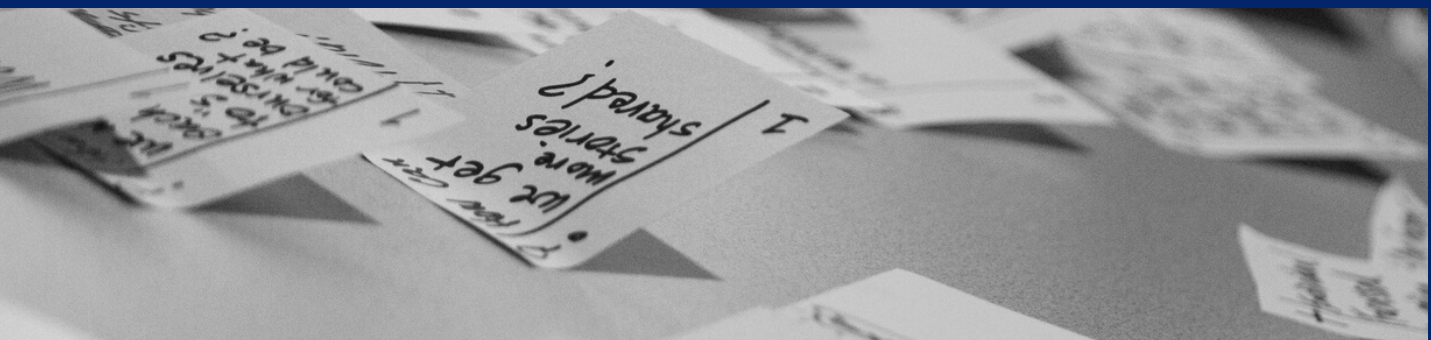
The Policy recommendation have collected contributions from each Multistakeholder table, key recommendations to overcome specific challenges emerged during the implementation of the panel of the engagement activities of the framework.



4. NEUEYT – POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL REFLECTIONS

Policy makers and stakeholders should comprehend that young people are willing to participate in democratic life without being too much engaged nor solicited. It means we should be able to envisage that the way young people engage might not be in accordance with our expectations. Hence, their engagement will not be uniform and it will (also) depend on how they are considered by policy makers and stakeholders.



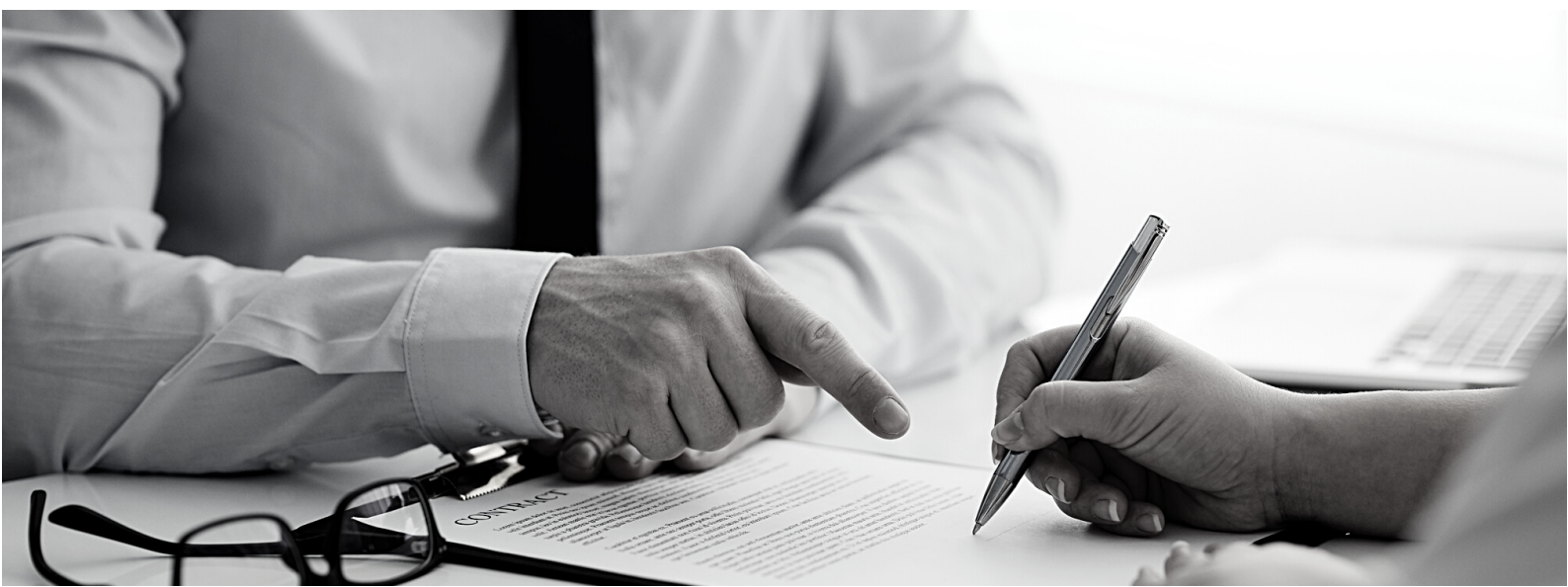
Policy makers and stakeholders should view digital tools as potentially valuable for enhancing participation of youngsters in democratic processes if used in respect of their peculiarity. Digital tools are however only complementary and secondary to live engagement. As not all youngsters have access to or want to use social media (SoMe), politicians should also visit schools and other relevant arenas where young people are present/active. Thinking in terms of completely replacing traditional tools and formats of interaction could be both counterproductive and risky for the democratic process itself.

Communication through digital tools is tailored for quick and often short exchange of information. Digital tools and social media are furthermore often used to express discontent or for showing opposition and protest. Political processes are on the other hand of a long-term and complex nature.

Accomplishing the first meeting between youngsters and policy makers is one thing. Creating the right circumstances that allows them to work together in mutual respect and understanding in the long run is much more challenging and requires advanced social skills from both sides.

There is an intergenerational gap in the use of the digital sphere which should be taken into account. Adults and youngsters tend to live on different digital arenas. It is also difficult to find a common ground because the tools are changing rapidly.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



POLICY RECOMMENDATION

I. Ensure sufficient and equal digital connectivity and access

1. Public authorities at all levels should ensure sufficient digital connectivity on their territories and address inequalities in access to internet and digital technologies between youngsters in different areas (central vs. remote) and groups.

II. Promote awareness-raising, education and training on use of digital tools & social media and media literacy among youngsters.

1. Design educational programmes with an ability to foster social/societal responsibility, tolerance, solidarity and civic engagement among young people.

2. In order to participate in political processes in a constructive manner, young people must be allowed to form their opinion based on facts and arguments and have access to quality information validated by trusted sources. The youngsters also need to raise their awareness on the negative impacts of social media (e.g. non-recognition of the fake profiles, susceptible of the fake news, fake values, influence and image of perfect life), and develop media literacy and ability for critical thinking.

3. Organise training courses/open grandstands for raising awareness for the proper use of digital tools/social media, for students, teachers, professors, upper staff of the educational system- as well as the ministry of education.

4. Underlines the importance of digital advocacy and policy making, and calls for the establishment of national educational programs merging technology, activism & policy.

5. Develop systems/procedures to better validate non-formal education as an important tool to enhance active participation of youngsters in democratic life.



POLICY RECOMMENDATION

III. Enable stakeholders and policy makers to better understand and manage the particular way youngsters communicate via social media and digital tools.

1. Stakeholders, policy makers (and adults in general) need to understand that youngsters have a very different way of communicating - in particular via social media or digital tools in general. Their peculiar way of sharing messages, info and emotions through a variety of approaches differ from the adult way. When interacting with youngsters, it should be mandatory for all adult counterparts to properly grasp this aspect and act accordingly. Otherwise, the message to youngsters might not reach them or risk being misinterpreted.
2. Youngsters want to be protagonists also of civic participation, and therefore they expect to be made accountable and responsible when they engage in society. Stakeholders and policy makers need to entrust the youngsters with responsibility for activities and initiatives, and at the same time be able to accept mistakes and quest for support and amendments.
3. The creativity of youngsters may also cause unpredictability which could frustrate adults or policy makers. They should therefore develop preparedness and ability to deal with youth creativity (out of protocol behaviour) in order to benefit from their contribution to democratic life and as actors of the community.
4. Frustration and disillusion experienced by policy makers and stakeholders when engaging with youngsters is part of the game, but this should not lead them to cutting relationships with the youngsters. There is a need for patience, and alternative ways of interaction should be (creatively) developed and implemented by stakeholders.
5. Active listening is perhaps the most appreciated skill youngsters look for in a relationship with adults in the context of democratic participation. Policy makers and stakeholders should be active listeners on an ongoing basis when engaging with youngsters.



POLICY RECOMMENDATION

IV. Different approaches to and formats of Interaction between decision-makers and youngsters should be tested.

1. Policy makers and stakeholders should listen to and (better) understand the needs and messages the youngsters are communicating through digital channels. It is important to use simple tools for feedback from young people, for example similar to surveys of satisfaction at airports ("smiley buttons").

2. Policy makers and stakeholders also need to adapt to changing needs and habits of young people and technological change and upgrade their skills to understand the issues youngsters face online.

3. The youngsters do not always have a broad political interest in the age of 16–20. But they are still engaged in the development of their communities, and often in individual cases. There is thus a need to develop platforms where youngsters are heard on individual topics, without the demand to engage in the broader political topics.

4. Policy makers and stakeholders should give the young people a clear signal that they are interested in hearing their opinions and take them seriously. They should also be honest in the communication with young people, and state and explain disagreements if needed.

5. Explore and apply alternative formats/channels of interaction between decision-makers and youngsters, such as:

a) Films – as opposed to long documents which are often not appealing to youngsters – have a potential for initiating a constructive conversation between youngsters and politicians.

b) Podcasts which could be useful tools for raising youth awareness in political issues.

c) "Silent debate", because it encourages personal involvement and group building; it gives everyone time to think, to express themselves without being interrupted and to listen to others.



POLICY RECOMMENDATION

6. Encourage young people to act as “ambassadors” for engaging other youngsters in political processes. Peers are convincing examples and testimonies for other youngsters. They might therefore be the best “influencers” and the most credible ones in the eyes of other young people.

7. Use suitable urban spaces, for example buses, to collect input from young people about the development of the local environment.

8. Pay particular attention to removing barriers for the democratic participation of young people with disabilities, at risk for social exclusion and poverty.





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