

**STUDY
SESSION**

CLIMBING THE LADDER

**CAPACITATING YOUTH LEADERS TO
FACILITATE YOUTH PARTICIPATION
IN THE DECISION-MAKING
PROCESSES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL**

**—
24th – 30th
APRIL
2022**

**EUROPEAN YOUTH CENTRE
STRASBOURG | FRANCE**

This report gives an account of various aspects of the study session. It has been produced by and is the responsibility of the educational team of the study session. It does not represent the official point of view of the Council of Europe.

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REPORT



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study session “Climbing the Ladder - Capacitating youth leaders to facilitate youth participation in decision-making processes at the local level” aimed to provide a learning space to engage and equip young people with skills and practical tools to reinforce their potential impact as youth leaders across the continent. It was led and enriched by the expertise of the DYPALL Network and Assembly of European Regions (AER), which aimed to share their experience as European networks with capable and active youth leaders from all over the Council of Europe’s Member countries. During this study session, participants were able to share about the opportunities and threats of the COVID-19 pandemic situation in the youth-participation field and examine existing good practices and tools for fostering their participation at the local level.

Moreover, through practical sessions, participants had the opportunity to reflect on the importance of the advocacy’s quality process and outreach strategies in the youth field and how to foster their role as multipliers and promoters for revitalizing democracy back to their local context.

Some of the main outcomes were the creation of a concrete advocacy plan for addressing their local realities and challenges and the network released across the different organizations and entities represented.



THE ORGANISERS



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DYPALL Network organised this study session in cooperation with the Youth Department of the Council of Europe. DYPALL Network (Developing Youth Participation at Local Level) is a European platform of over 78 civil society organisations and local authorities from more than 30 countries, that aims to involve young people in decision-making processes at the local level, and thus enable municipal and regional authorities to address the needs and interests of youth, engage young people as active actors of problem-solving and increase the level of ownership, commitment and involvement of an essential part of our communities.

YP Lab is a resource and mobility centre within DYPALL Network with the focus on research development and capacity building in the field of local youth participation.



www.coe.int

The Youth Department of the Council of Europe elaborates guidelines, programmes and legal instruments for the development of coherent and effective youth policies at local, national and European levels. It provides funding and educational support for international youth activities aiming to promote youth citizenship, youth mobility and the values of human rights, democracy and cultural pluralism. It seeks to bring together and disseminate expertise and knowledge about the life situations, aspirations and ways of expression of young Europeans. The Youth Portal of the Council of Europe also contains an overview of information about the work of the youth sector, the Council of Europe's youth policy, the current projects and activities.



<https://aer.eu/>

The Assembly of European Regions (AER) is the largest independent interregional organisation in broader Europe, with around 140 regional authorities as members from 30 countries. Established in 1985, AER is a forum for regional politicians to engage in interregional cooperation and to voice regional interests on the European stage. AER was a key player in the creation of the advisory bodies to the Council of Europe (Congress of Local and Regional Authorities) and the European Union's Committee of the Regions. Since its inception, one of the AER's key priorities has been raising awareness and understanding of the relevance of European policies for regions and their citizens, basing its activities on the principle that sharing information, offering platforms to exchange views and experiences, and creating opportunities to debate issues of general European concern all and contribute to boosting a sense of ownership of the European project among the citizens. The AER also works extensively in the field of youth policies. Dedicated working groups are established to exchange regional expertise and experiences on how to empower youth, increase their employment opportunities, and strengthen their role in society through education and traineeship, employment, and civic engagement.

THE MOTIVATION BEHIND THE SESSION

Within the annual program of the Council of Europe, there are different learning opportunities promoted to engage and equip young people with skills and practical tools to reinforce their potential impact as youth leaders across the Continent. Since the outbreak of the Covid19 pandemic though, the opportunities to meet in person and create stronger connections between the potential changemakers have been drastically limited, and only through digital activities, the working program of the Youth Department has continued (with the exception of a few study sessions - two of them implemented by DYPALL Network).

In those two study sessions, DYPALL Network focused on digital youth participation and e-participation tools and mechanisms, while for this third activity we were going to implement we decided to move the focus from the tools/working frameworks to the target group. This study session aimed in fact at equipping youth delegates, youth workers, representatives of local youth councils and similar participation structures with practical knowledge and skills to foster processes of meaningful youth participation at the local level all around Europe.

In the context of an ambitious recovery from the social and economic impact of the pandemic, we recognize the need of working closely with those enthusiastic leaders that are committed to having an impact, and that can become facilitators and multipliers for the participation of young people in decision making processes at the local level all around the now 46 Members States, and possibly beyond.

Among many other areas, this emergency situation has negatively impacted the learning experience of the 2020 Youth Delegates to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, who are usually invited twice to main sessions in Strasbourg and are tasked with the development of a personal project in the field of youth participation around the halfway mark of their mandate. In our 2020 Study session, we hosted 3 YDs and we have understood how youth delegates and youth leaders, in general, can be and become key actors for the introduction of good practices and recommendations produced at the European level in terms of youth participation in decision-making processes, in their local and regional communities.

We collected very positive feedback from several YDs and decided to proceed with this application, which would allow both current/former YDs and other local youth leaders to share a very exciting learning experience.

In our view, revitalizing pluralistic democracy (priority n. 1 of the Youth for Democracy and Human Rights program) and promoting quality development and recognition of youth work (priority n.4) are long-term objectives that can be achieved if addressed through sustainable action plans, valorising the role that young people can play in these processes. Whether as peer educators, youth workers, or future policymakers, it is vital for them to firstly acquire relevant knowledge, improve their practical skills and develop future-oriented attitudes that can support their path as changemakers.

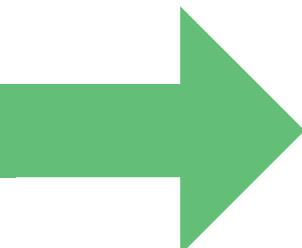
We, as a European-wide network, are committed to providing further learning opportunities and supporting them, but we also recognized the need to kick off this process through shared experiential learning, and there are no better occasions than a study session implemented in cooperation with the Youth Department of the Council of Europe at one of their Youth Centres to do so.

These reflections were adequately taken into account while developing the application for the study session and subsequently shared with the team members throughout the preparatory phase, considering their different terms of engagement. In our views, this Study session reached the aim of creating valuable conditions for revitalizing pluralistic democracy and promoting quality development and recognition of youth work, valorising the role that young people can play in these processes.

OBJECTIVES

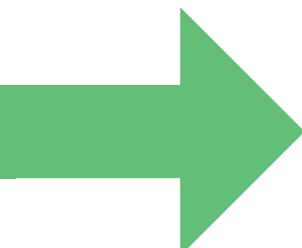
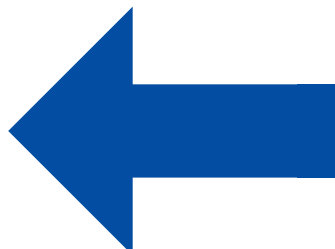
The study session aimed at empowering a group of young people to advocate for meaningful youth participation at the local and regional levels.

The participants were set to expand their knowledge about youth work and youth participation in the democratic life of their local communities, including the most recent trends while improving their practical skills in facilitating short activities and designing a youth dialogue process. Moreover, the participants were going to complete the study session with a clearer vision and a step-by-step working plan on how to implement the outcomes of the session and be more engaged as young facilitators for democratic processes in their local and regional realities.



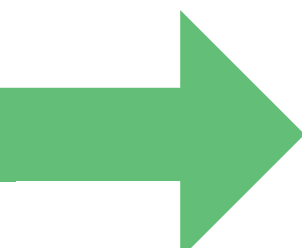
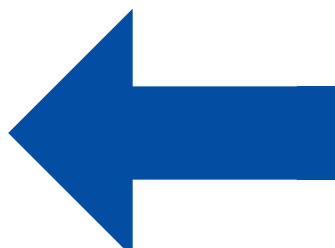
Bring together and train 25 youth leaders from all around Europe about youth participation in the democratic life of their local communities, in line with the most recent mechanisms, recommendations, structures, models;

Explore the impact of Covid19 in the traditional and formal processes and available spaces for youth participation (youth councils, youth organisations, youth delegate programme, etc) and map new forms of participation that emerged during the pandemic (from the experience of DYPALL Network and that of the participants – e-participation, blended mobilities);



Reflect on and provide with a wide range of tools, both traditional and digital, that can boost the active participation of young people in their local communities;

Create and test a learning module based on non-formal education that includes vital elements (such as advocacy principles, outreach strategies, facilitation skills) to build participants' competencies and strengthen their leadership to activate youth participation at the local level and multiply their learnings and attitudes with their peers;



Empower 25 youth leaders to continue playing a key role in revitalising democratic processes throughout Europe.

PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

The study session gathered 25 participants and 4 team members from a total of 22 different European countries, including a few from non-CoE-member states (Kosovo,¹ Russian Federation). This group ensured a strong diversity in terms of having young leaders from all around Europe, from Ireland to Azerbaijan, from Ukraine to Malta, with a span of ages from 18 to 1 participant over 30.



25

Participants



22

Countries

AV. AGE

18-30

Years

To summarise their profiles:

- The participants are young people (leaders, youth workers, etc) that are engaged and thriving to improve the opportunities and conditions of participation youngsters at the local level and beyond (including representatives of local youth councils);
- The participants are motivated and eager to expand their knowledge and actions towards revitalizing pluralistic democracy and promoting quality development and recognition of youth work through sustainable action plans.

We also care to mention that 11 out of 25 participants were either current or former Youth Delegates to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, which represented a very interesting and inspiring target group to work with.

Finally, we would like to underline that to complete the selection process, having collected over 550 applicants, we took into account the following criteria:

- Previous experience in the youth sector, specifically related to youth participation in decision-making processes and youth work, is not necessary but is welcomed.
- Participants who have already planned projects and initiatives to boost youth participation at the local level in cooperation with local authorities are especially welcome.
- The same criteria applied to young people residents in rural areas, from minorities, or vulnerable groups

¹ All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

THE PROGRAMME

DAY 0

Sunday, the 24th of April was the arrival day. Most of the participants reached the European Youth Centre throughout the day and joined the team for dinner. In the early evening, as usual practice in study sessions, we organized a quick informal welcoming, introducing the team and proposing a couple of getting to know each activity, so to start breaking the ice.

Participants were then free to remain in the common areas and continue chatting, while those who still had not arrived in Strasbourg joined during the evening.



The first official working day during study sessions is usually Monday, having all the group completed and ready to start.

After breakfast, we met downstairs in the main working room, a well-equipped to space to develop basically any kind of non-formal activity.

In the morning, we opened the session with some welcome words from all team members and the external educational advisor, Elizabeth Kasa-Mälksoo, followed by a quick presentation on DYPALL Network and the Assembly of the European Regions. After that, we invited participants to divide themselves into 3 groups and we explained the next team-building activity, a mission impossible challenge using a mobile application (Action Bound). Just before the coffee break, we managed to have a quick overview of the tasks that participants had to complete in the time provided, including short song performances, some quiz questions on the Council of Europe and poetry on the role of youth.

DAY 1

After the break, we had an official intro on the Council of Europe by the in-the-house educational advisor, Agata Stajer, who presented the mission of the organization and specifically the activities and current developments of the Youth Department of the CoE. After some questions were collected by participants and explored with Agata Stajer, we closed the morning firstly by delivering a presentation of the program of the week, highlighting day by day the core sessions planned and the optional activities.

Finally, we collected participants' expectations, contributions and the potential obstacles that could appear throughout the week, which were attached to a beautiful hot air balloon designed by Elizabeth Kasa-Mälksoo. She quickly summarised them in plenary, before breaking for lunch.



In the afternoon, we focused on the impact of the Covid19 pandemic on the youth sector, specifically on youth work and youth participation in decision-making processes. The first session of the afternoon was dedicated to exploring "the what, the how, the when and the where", in an effort to understand as a group what has been happening since the outbreak of the pandemic. After the break, having in mind the conclusions of the previous session, participants dived into a SWOT analysis to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that emerged as a result of these unpredictable last two years.

The day was closed with reflection groups just before dinner, and a free evening leaving participants the freedom to organize their own time.

The second day, Tuesday, started with a quick energizer in the garden next to the working room. Once back indoors, we summarised the previous day and introduced the highlights of the day ahead of us. The team presented the model of the “3Cs” (challenge, competence, context) and through it, taking advantage of the space available in the Youth Centre, we had the opportunity to discover the role and commitments of each participant in the field of youth. Before the break, participants worked in groups to identify the key features of each role (youth workers, youth leaders, activists, policy makers, officers in youth organizations and more) and the relations of power existing among them.

After the morning coffee break, our lecturer, Hrvoje Kovač, introduced “the Ladder of Youth Participation” inviting participants to familiarise themselves with it based on their own context and its dimension at local/regional level. We then mapped participants' practices and experiences through Padlet, a very practical digital tool.

DAY 2

In the afternoon, we launched an organizational’s fair!

Participants had some time to prepare an A3 poster reflecting where is their organization active, at what level they operate (local/regional, national and/or international), the key topics they focus on, their target group, and a success story since their creation. We also invited them to share what kind of support or resources they might need to develop further to facilitate and foster networking and mutual exchanges of knowledge and feedback. The fair lasted for around 45 minutes, before a much-needed coffee break, with many participants still chatting!

To conclude the working sessions of the day, we took some vital time to debrief the outcomes of the fair. Then we recalled the third element of the 3C model (context) and thus reviewed the key competencies that youth leaders and youth organizations should develop and actually possess. The reflection group that followed posed the questions: “How will you develop the competencies that they are still missing?” - which the team decided to use as a good stimulus for the days to come.

The evening of Tuesday, the 26th, was dedicated to the optional activity: "the Youth Centre Olympics". Participants who decided to join were divided into four teams, matching the 4 priorities of the CoE Youth Sector (Revitalising Pluralistic Democracy, Access to Rights, Inclusive and Peaceful Society and Youth Work).

Each team faced another in four different games (table tennis, table football, a card game and a super match of rock, paper scissors).

Two semi-finals and one final, with some European soundtrack in the background, were organized between the four teams, which led the "Revitalising Pluralistic Democracy" to conquer the final success!

On Wednesday morning, we kicked off the advocacy module, expected to run until Thursday afternoon. For this activity, we welcomed Andres Muñoz Rojo, from the Assembly of European Regions (AER), who facilitated the theoretical part delivered in the first session of the morning, and overviewed the group work activity that was introduced to participants after the coffee break. To dive into advocacy, the team presented the "six steps advocacy cycle", which, together with a corresponding template, was the main tool that we provided to the group. Participants had the chance to discover and reflect together on the key ingredients for effective youth advocacy at local/regional levels while identifying the main advocacy issues related to youth participation. After the break, the group focused on the typology of stakeholders (partners, allies, opponents), their attitudes and the capacity of stakeholders to make a change, concluding the morning by drafting in groups a basic advocacy plan to turn problems into solutions.

DAY 3



As per common practice, the afternoon on Wednesday was left free to participants, who could take advantage of this time to explore the city, rest or advance with their own commitments.

After dinner, served in the European Youth Centre, participants were invited to the main working room for a surprise activity. The team prepared some prizes for the team that won the Youth Centre Olympics the previous night and right after a karaoke night kicked off! Participants and team members even showed their dance skills, the highlight of a very fun night!

Thursday started with a simulation activity: the "donors' forum".

This activity was structured to encourage participants to work in groups and develop concrete ideas to intervene in facing a social issue they identified. For this activity, they followed the 6 steps advocacy cycle and the draft template the team introduced the day before. The team impersonated the role of the donors, specifically a wealthy lady, the CEO of a global foundation and the head of the youth policy department at a National Ministry.

The simulation activity lasted around 90 minutes after a quick introduction of the "rules of procedure", making sure that all participants had clearly in mind how to best fit their role in this simulation. During the simulation, participants had time to prepare their pitch to convince the different donors to provide financial and in-kind support for their ideas to be implemented.

DAY 4

After the simulation, we had a comprehensive debriefing session which was crucial to review what had actually happened in the activity, how they managed the time available and what kind of improvements they made in their pitches throughout the activity, based on the feedback received by the donors.

After lunch, the participants were given a couple of hours to explore more in-depth the follow-up actions and concrete advocacy initiatives they would like to realize. During that time, they had a chance to work on their individual advocacy plan, which was the conclusive step of the two days dedicated to the advocacy module, which we consider a key competence nowadays for youth leaders, activists and youth workers.



The afternoon ended with a final round of reflection groups, which also allowed the team to collect valuable feedback and impressions on this specific thematic touched upon in the week.

For the dinner on Thursday participants received a cash allowance which they could use to self-organize for the meal. This was a great occasion to discover a bit more about the city of Strasbourg, spending an informal evening together.

Friday was the last day of the study session. The morning was dedicated to discovering the follow-up opportunities that are promoted by DYPALL Network, including the international projects currently running around Europe on the topic of youth participation and activism. The team also presented a soon-to-be-launched "Youth Advisory Board", a new initiative created by DYPALL Network to involve more directly young people in the inception and implementation of the activities of the network in the years to come.

DAY 5

In the first morning session, we also hosted again Agata Stajer, the in-house educational advisor, who presented the 2022 Youth Campaign for Revitalising Democracy, which launched in March 2022 and is planned to run until October of this year. The campaign, which includes national contact points in most CoE countries, was decided by the Joint Council on Youth in 2021. In the framework of the campaign, the European Youth Foundation presented the available funding opportunities which were launched this year: a special call for pilot activities and international activities. Moreover, at the end of June 2022, the Youth Department is set to host a youth action week involving over 400 participants, to which those present in the study sessions were invited to apply for!



After the last coffee break of the week, the team run a few evaluation activities, which were fundamental to collect the most pressing feedback that participants felt to share in the plenary, also recalling the expectations, contributions and potential obstacles that participants pointed out at the beginning of the week. A final individual evaluation form and the delivery of the certificates of participation were the cherries on the cake!

Overall, we feel to say the activity was very stimulating and engaging, offering valuable thematic inputs and creating good dynamics for the participants to network and learn from each other. While the week had been intense, the team also realized that an extra day could have been very useful to dive even more into other relevant competencies for youth leaders (such as facilitation skills and outreach).

By lunchtime, few participants were ready to leave Strasbourg to go back home, while most of the others, due to depart the day after, were still at the Youth Centre, enjoying the afternoon and the farewell evening on the rooftop, a very beautiful place to hang out and close an intense but very exciting week!



THE LINK WITH THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

At the beginning it is important to mention, that the activity was addressing, among others, the past and present Youth Delegates of the Council of Europe. Therefore, we believed it could only benefit from a close connection to the structures of the Council of Europe. Moreover, from our past experiences, we realized how the cooperation with the European Youth Centres contributes to the high educational value of the Study Session and quality perspectives on the topics of youth participation and youth work.

The Youth Department offers multiple opportunities to follow up and keep exploring these specific thematics. The Youth Centre has all the necessary facilities, such as working rooms dedicated to debates and workshops, computer rooms and outdoor space to realize unique learning experiences. Moreover, the transfer of knowledge and experience between the Youth Department of the Council of Europe and the DYPALL Network is of great importance for our network development and has offered us multiple learning outcomes to improve our work in the field of youth in the past, and we believe this positive trend will continue in the future.

Bringing back now the connections between this study session and the priorities of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe, as they were already mentioned in the first section of this report (motivation behind the session), we are now summarising below the main outcomes related to the priorities we tackled:

- Revitalising pluralistic democracy: the study session enabled young people to exercise their right to assemble and be active in youth organizations, and furthermore to contribute individually, in one's own reality, to empower other young people to participate in political processes;
- Implementation of the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, by developing the capacity of youth organizations and youth leaders to facilitate the participation of young people in decision-making processes at the local level;
- Youth work, particularly contributing to the quality development and recognition of youth work and non-formal education and learning and pursuing quality development and innovation (including digitalization) in capacity-building activities.

Moreover, the theoretical pillars of the activity (ladder of participation, RMSOS approach etc), as well as several practical methods, were inspired by the "Have Your Say" manual, which was also distributed among participants, to serve them in their future work.

The work of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities was also discussed, thanks to the several former and current Youth Delegates taking part in the Study Session.

Finally, the study session benefitted from an introduction to the "Democracy Here, Democracy Now" campaign and the European Youth Foundation funding mechanisms, as potential frameworks for participants' follow-up activities. Finally, The Council of Europe's functioning and activities were presented at various moments throughout the study session, as previously explained in the program section.

LEARNING POINTS

The background features a large, abstract geometric design. A dark blue shape, resembling a downward-pointing arrow or a chevron, is positioned on the left side. This shape overlaps with a larger green shape that forms a wide, upward-pointing arrow or a chevron on the right side. The overall composition is clean and modern, using a limited color palette of blue, green, and white.

AIM OF THE STUDY SESSION - TO LEARN MORE ABOUT LOCAL REALITY AND PLAN YOUTH LEADERS' ACTIONS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

As we already fostered in the first part of the report, the aim of this Study Session was to provide a learning space to engage and equip young people with skills and practical tools to reinforce their potential impact as youth leaders across the continent.

Since the Covid19 pandemic started, not only the opportunities to meet in person and create stronger connections between the potential changemakers have been drastically limited, but also the role of the youth leaders and of youth workers was meaningfully affected. Youth leaders had to translate their impact and communication with the stakeholders to an online dimension, which required new skills and tools to be managed.

We saw the need to create this Study Session in order to provide concrete tools to Youth leaders and therefore build their capacity to revitalize pluralistic democracy and promote quality development through sustainable actions plans and advocacy skills.

Whether as peer educators, youth workers, or future policymakers, it is vital for young people involved to firstly acquire relevant knowledge, improve their practical skills and develop future-oriented attitudes that can support their path as changemakers. We, as European-wide networks, had the opportunity to support them in this learning process and we created the basis to further support them in their local activities.

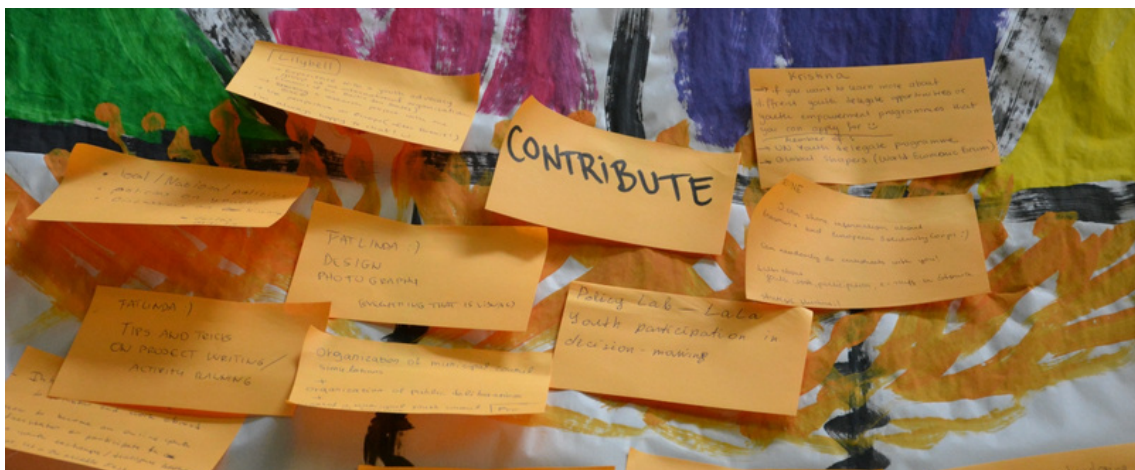


LEARNING PROCESS & EXPECTATIONS

The study session was a learning process shaped by connecting the aim of the team and the expectations of the participants. On the first day, after the presentation of the organisers, namely DYPALL Network and Assembly of European Regions (AER), we had the opportunity to map the expectations, fears and meaningful contributions of all the participants.

In this regard, it is possible to underline the following key findings:

- to get new knowledge in the advocacy field on how to foster their action in their local reality;
- to have the opportunity to boost their consciousness of the main theories and model on youth participation;
- to map the stakeholders that are part of the process;
- to enlarge their network in order to be sustained in the process;
- to get new perspectives on how to overcome the common challenges of youth leaders actions at the local level;
- to reach a tangible outcome, such as a practical plan of action that could be discussed with their organisations back home.



THEORIES & METHODOLOGIES APPLIED

The activities proposed were shaped starting from the Council of Europe's relevant publications in the field of youth participation, such as "Have Your Say! Manual on the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life", with the aim of exploring some meaningful theories on the field.

RMSOS MODEL, BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE PANDEMIC

One of the first steps to frame the learning process throughout the week was the analysis of the RMSOS model (Right, Means, Space, Opportunity, Support), divided into three key periods, namely before, during and after the COVID-19 health crisis. As we mentioned before, the pandemic significantly impacted the youth field. Moreover, it was the reason why several youth leaders had to face meaningful changes in their actions, namely the loss of jobs, the need to reshape their actions using new methods and tools, mainly digital tools, and the change of behaviour of the stakeholders, which were forced to give more attention to other issues.

Moreover, one of the key discussions to underline is that some of the participants considered the current moment as after the pandemic, meanwhile, some of them believe that we are still in the COVID-19 timeframe. Regarding this latter, they considered the after section as the future situation that we will have to face when the health situation will end.

Below will be resumed the main findings from the participants:

- **Rights**

Thanks to the analysis that the participants did on the topic of rights, they underlined how before the pandemic there was a meaningful underestimation of technological literacy and the mental health of youngsters; if the latter became then a focus after the pandemic, the youth leaders underlined how these two latter key points were added to the right of education, which was one of the rights more impacted by the pandemic. During and after the COVID-19, the freedom of movement and the right to have a social life were meaningfully notched. Moreover, in the after context, the participants believe that the right to protest and to health access are and will be shaped by several restrictions imposed by the different authorities. To have a clearer point on the right of participation, if before the pandemic it was a focus for a big part of youngsters and authorities, during the health crisis it was not a key topic anymore, overtaken by the lack of more primary rights. The vision for the future is that due to the application of technology, it will return as a focal point for the community.

- **Means**

The unequal access to fundamental means such as housing, food, education, and technology was already a critical topic, that brought people with fewer opportunities out of the participation dimension; this situation get more critical during the pandemic, which increased the differences between the access to the fundamental means, particularly for the people that were already in a disadvantage situation. From the point of view of the people involved, the inflation created by the health crisis and the current financial situation will still affect the people with a lower income, and keep hurting their participation of those.

- **Space**

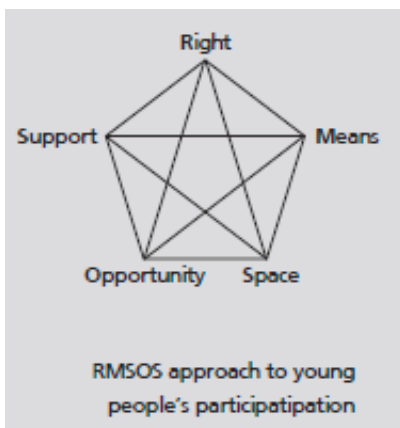
Space for youth participation is one of the aspects that changed the most cause of the pandemic. Before, there were several physical spaces, mainly in big cities, and the main problems were the lack of information about these spaces and that some of them were politicalized. During the COVID-19, all the physical spaces were closed, and only in a second moment, part of those were translated to the online dimension. This situation allowed rethinking youth participation in a more accessible way, that could connect not only people from the same city but from all over the world. As one of the main contributions of the health crisis, the current situation and the future ones are more eager to include a hybrid working and learning flexibility. Moreover, participants underlined also how people started to consider youth participation online as a plus in their active life. However, this doesn't have to substitute the physical spaces, which are still really important to provide spaces for meaningful youth participation.

- **Opportunity**

Opportunities for youth participation were mainly in person, and if the youth leaders saw the accessibility of those events as more challenging, it was also more engaging for the people involved. During the pandemic, more and more online opportunities appeared in the youth participation framework. Meanwhile, all the in-person events were deleted or postponed. This allowed youth to have access to more opportunities, also beyond their physical limits, fostered their skills in searching and finding new activities to do, and allowed the organizations to improve their digital skills and their communications on social media. For some sections, such as sport, arts, and music, it was more difficult to be translated into the online dimension. After the pandemic, several postponed events took place, empowered by the online and hybrid dimensions. Organizations are keeping their new communication skills, which greatly upgrade this aspect, compared to the COVID-19 situation.

- **Support**

The support given to the youth field was mainly about public and private grants, physical spaces provided by different entities, as well as materials and services. During the health crisis, this support was re-driven to other topics, such as health, education, and access to technology; in the post-pandemic, a lot of the support is still focused on the latter issues explained above. However, several physical spaces will be reintroduced and added to new learning methods and good practices.



Several participants pointed out the importance of this exercise in the final evaluation form, underlining the importance of focusing part of their time on considering the different challenges and changes in their daily work, also valorizing the prompt response that they had in order to face these new conditions and create a new normality. Thanks to this exercise, we were able to find out the key roles in the youth field, such as youth workers, youth representatives of NGOs and local organizations, youth leaders linked with political parties, facilitators, mentors and trainers.

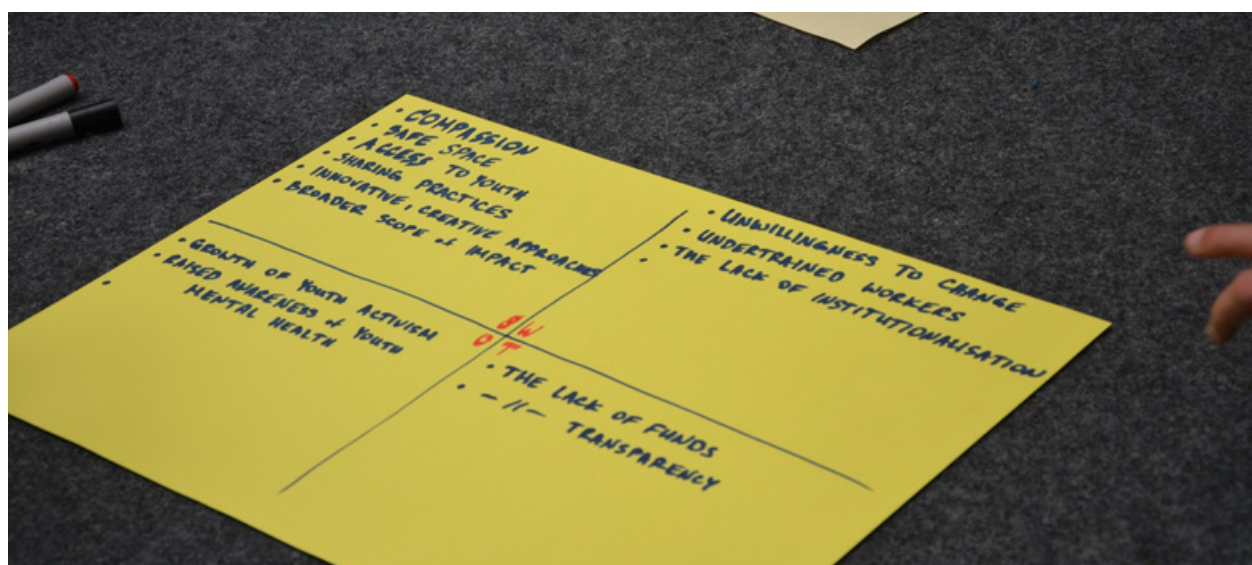
KEY ROLES IN THE YOUTH FIELD

Moreover, together with the participants, we analyzed the youth field and we selected some key roles in the field; each of those was then analyzed through the SWOT analysis method, which was aimed to understand all the aspects related, their connections with the different stakeholders and how the participants changed their roles before, during and after the pandemic situation. Since the participants are directly involved in the field, their perspectives and experiences were relevant to understanding the real impact of the COVID-19.

Below the key findings of the activity:

- **Facilitators, mentors and coaches**

The strength of the people in these roles is the personal connections with the youngsters, the flexibility and the freedom in organizing their activities shaping them also depending on the audience and the creativity in doing it. Those strengths are balanced by the weaknesses, such as the unclear role and knowledge of the people in those roles, the need for authorization from third parties, the objectiveness that they have to keep during their activities and the possibility of other people overstepping in their frame of actions. The opportunities fostered for facilitators, mentors and coaches are the diversity of methods that they can use, the increasing inclusion of the participants, the opportunity to bring academic knowledge to the table and the opportunity to create a meaningful cultural dialogue, to tackle possible differences between the public. Moreover, the threats are the judgment of the community, the security, which is not always provided by the local authorities, the insatiable situation of funds, which can not be provided if the project is denied and the possibility of being subjected to hate speech.



- **Youth workers**

The role of youth workers, similar to the previous role, has the great strength of having access to youngsters and the possibility to introduce their scope with creativity and different methods. Youth workers also have safe spaces to act and to share practices. However, the unwillingness to change from the society, the lack of institutionalization and structure coordination with other bodies involved and the possible ego and personal attitude are seen as the major weaknesses. The biggest opportunities that youth workers have are the increasing youth activism and the consequent recognition of their role related to the care of youth, such as in the mental health field, and the broader digitalization of the activities. However, the lack of funds, transparency and support from stakeholders are the biggest threats that youth workers have to face.

- **Youth representative**

Youth representatives have strong national and international networks, several tools, visibility and the strength to bridge the young voices and the authorities to change the situation meaningfully. The main weaknesses are that youth representatives are frequently victims of tokenism behaviours by adults and are not paid for their role. Their main opportunities include the new knowledge and competencies to which they have access, a better understanding of the community needs and access to more opportunities; the threats include the highly competitive environment, the under-resourced, the unfair representation and the broader target group's unstable and unclear.

- **Youth leaders**

Youth leaders differ from youth representatives since they can be from different environments. Their major strengths are the impact they can have on the community, their network and their recognition in the society; significant weaknesses are the lack of salary, which can be linked with instability and an unwillingness to commit to pursuing the role and position. Opportunities underlined are such as the model that they can be for the community and the opportunities that they can bring to that; however, bureaucracy, lack of skills and knowledge, and lack of funding are the major threats that they face.

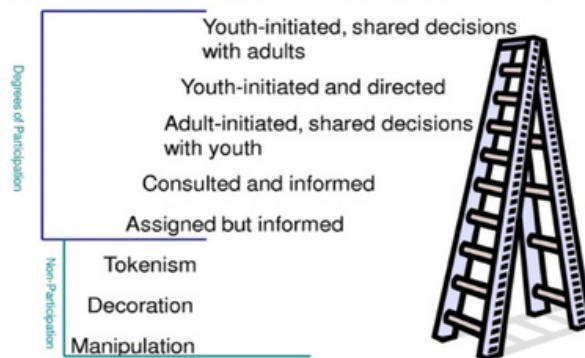
- **Member of political parties**

The members of political parties are elected by the community, have internal resources and funding support, and greatly influence society. However, if their vision conflicts with their role, a real weakness could be clientelism and corruption in the party. If, from one side, they have the opportunity to change the system and the bureaucracy and give access to more young people, on the other side, they have to face adults that are strictly attached to the current system and their unwillingness to change, their actions depend on their audience and their party colleagues and they have to make compromises with the different stakeholders.

THE “LADDER OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION”

Another key model that was broadly explored by our Youth policy external expert, Hrvoje Kovač, was the “Ladder of Youth Participation”. The model shaped by Roger Hart and explained in the previously-mentioned “Have Your Say!” Manual was firstly illustrated by the external expert who asked participants to position some realistic examples on the ladder and afterwards to think about their reality and to reflect on which step is more conformed to the current situation in their local context. This brought all the group into a relevant discussion on the challenges and the solutions that can be addressed in order to climb the ladder. Thanks to this exercise, the participants analyzed their local reality and positioned themselves on one of the steps of the ladder. This was a preparation understanding in order to set the basis to develop their advocacy plan in the following sessions.

Ladder of Youth Participation





THE ADVOCACY CYCLE

Thanks to the deep experience of the Assembly of European Regions (AER), we analyzed the Advocacy Cycle which permitted the youth leaders to deeply understand how to shape an effective advocacy plan. This latter is divided into six main steps that address all the aspects needed in order to meaningfully engage in challenges. The model was applied in two different settings: through realistic issues to tackle and through participants' real challenges. Firstly, the participants, after choosing the issue to tackle, were working on each step in order to create their first plan.

The five key issues were:

- Youth are excluded from international representation (UN Youth Delegates Program)
- Young people don't have a space to foster their participation in society
- Institutional disbalance in politics concerning youth
- Young people are not politically engaged
- Young girls are often forced into marriage

Furthermore, after pinpointing the core problems, each group was identifying the desired goal, the specific objectives to reach and the expected result; in addition, all the groups had to determine the different stakeholders involved in their plan and divided into target audiences to be addressed, beneficiaries of their actions, the allies and the possible opponents.

Moreover, they focused on the concrete actions that they should do in order to have a real impact on society. Below the example of the advocacy cycles applied to the main topics tackled:

- **Youth are excluded from international representation (United Nations Youth Delegates Program).**

The team that choose “Youth are excluded from international representation (United Nations Youth Delegates Program)” as a core problem, had the desired goal to increase youth participation and young voices on issues related to UN representation; the target audience selected was made by the Ministry of youth, foreign office, youth NGOs and youth sections for political parties, with the specific objective of convincing target group to redirect fundings to the youth programs. The expected result is to foster the opportunities for youth to engage in UN processes, to improve UN’s reputation in Youth participation and to give a strong signal to youth that they are important and represented. The beneficiaries of this plan would be youth, youth movements and youth NGOs, however, the main opposition underlined were the foreign office and the diplomatic body that represents the country to the UN.

- **Young people don’t have a space to foster their participation in society.**

The desired goal selected was that young people have space and they use it. This is related to the main objectives, such as more youth centres, more programs and qualified youth workers. This would be related to the main change: that young people are actively involved in their communities. This brings a more inclusive and peaceful society, focusing on the audience which is mainly local authorities, youth and NGOs. The allies selected are the whole society and the youth part of the population, and the action could be financed by local, national and international funds.

- **Institutional disbalance in politics concerning youth.**

The third group decided to focus on the core problem above, pointing out the institutional balance in which youth is included in politics as the desired goal and the raise the level of the political literacy among youth, the reduction of the age for nomination and the increase of tax of youth participation as the main objectives. Their target audience was the institutions, the beneficiaries were the youth NGOs, international alliances and the young people, and the primary opponents were the ministry of youth/education and the conservative parties.



- **Young people are not politically engaged.**

Another core problem tackled by the participants was that youngsters are not politically engaged; their specific objectives can be resumed as increasing political education, lowering the voting age, and having more youth represented at the local and political levels. The main change could be that young people would make political-level decisions. The target audience underlined is composed of the ministry of education, government, local authorities, and political parties. Beneficiaries would be: young people, society, and the system of democracy; meanwhile, the opposition was identified in the conservative parties. The donors could be the media, NGOs, international organizations, and young people.

- **Young girls are often forced into marriage.**

The desired goal for tackling the problem of early marriages is that more girls would access and pursue their education; the main objectives were: to achieve more economic and social support, increase awareness and education on the negative effects of the issue, and increase awareness and education on early pregnancy on girls' health. The changes expected were the creation of a more culturally integrated society, better mental and physical health among girls, and having more girls in education so they may participate and contribute more to society. The audience was identified as the local and national governance; the beneficiaries are the girls, the families, and the whole society. However, the opponents could be the religious institutions and the ultra-conservative groups. This action could be funded by several donors, such as local schools, health authorities, NGOs, humanitarian organizations, and civil society.

Therefore, after applying the model to these issues, each participant was able to concretely create an individual output, such as designing a specific advocacy plan to overcome the problems they face at the local or regional level.

In conclusion, the primary outcomes were how to build an advocacy plan practically, the importance of teamwork and problem-solving, how to shape practical activities related to the broader issue, and the ability to raise awareness and be funded for their purposes.





OUTREACH STRATEGY

The outreach strategy is part of the Advocacy Cycle theory that we had the opportunity to explore during the week. To provide a realistic context and foster the groups' ability to cope with possible obstacles, we decided to approach and test their strategies through a role-play activity. This method can be replicable in order to give simulation activities to participants to understand how to approach different entities and how to shape meaningful activities in order to reach the goals pre-selected.

Considering the topics that the participants pointed out during the session on the advocacy plan, we decided to create a Donors Forum, in which they would be able to address three different stakeholders to get their activities funded.

The participants were divided into different groups. Each group could select one of the topics and frame some practical activities that would be useful in order to reach the objective of their advocacy plan. The groups had the opportunity to address three different donors: a governmental identity, a private donor and a foundation; this exercise enabled participants to shape their proposal to suit their objectives and the donors' expectations. This activity was the completion of the advocacy cycle and was pointed out by the participants as one of the most exciting sessions. Indeed, it gave them the concrete opportunity to test their outreach strategy, foster their teamwork, build participants' competencies and strengthen their leadership to activate youth participation at the local level.

The primary outcomes of the activity are:

- A meaningful understanding of how to shape concrete actions in order to reach their objectives;
- Fostering teamwork skills;
- Choosing the donors in line with their objectives and expected results;
- Facing the stakeholders to reach a win-win strategy;
- Building competencies and strengthening leadership aimed to activate youth participation at the local level;
- Create and test an outreach strategy.

Some of the threats of these activities are the misunderstanding of the exercises by the participants, their unwillingness to participate and to play their role, and to lose the link with the core problem; however, these challenges can be overcome by a deep explanation of the topics and support, if needed, by the team.



NETWORKING ACTIVITY

DYPALL Network is a European network with almost 80 members from more than 30 different countries; we strongly believe that building strong relationships with partner organizations all over Europe and beyond is one of the best ways to overcome the common challenges. For this reason, we organized a session in order to give the opportunity to the participants to discover the realities of the others and to have an enriching confrontation on their context of action. The youth leaders fostered their knowledge of different possible solutions for tackling the common challenges and to build future projects and cooperation.



FOLLOW-UP OPPORTUNITIES

As a short-term follow-up and monitoring activity, DYPALL Network invited all the participants to have at least two monitoring calls with each other (participants were divided into pairs and trios) in order to keep in touch with the established network and check up together on the implementation of their advocacy plan at the local/regional level.

Looking at the actual follow-up activities, all the plans developed by the participants were tackling personal objectives and core problems in their local reality; for instance, one of the plans developed by one of the youth leaders was about building a youth center in a critical neighborhood in order to welcome the youngsters and to give them an alternative to street activities. The participant already has connections with donors and beneficiaries and started communication with its allies right after the study session. Another good example is the plan to involve young migrants and youngsters with migrant backgrounds in a locally funded project aimed at integrating the community; funds, allies and beneficiaries are already mapped. However, the biggest challenge is reaching out to this ladder in order to include them and propose some meaningful activities. Those explored above are two of the potential advocacy plans built by the participants and ready to be implemented; indeed, the organization is at the participant's disposal for further project ideas and mentoring support.

Another important news that we shared with the group is that DYPALL Network is in the process of launching the Youth Advisory Board, in which all the participants will be invited to join in the following months; the idea of this initiative is to create a pool of youth leaders all around Europe that can be consulted for our projects, who can propose new strategic developments and approaches and that can be trained to become multipliers in their local realities. Moreover, AER offered to mentor and support new project ideas and further cooperation in line with their youth initiatives; they were also invited to apply for the Democracy Action Week, planned at the end of June 2022 as the flagship event in the framework of the 2022 Youth Campaign.

Overall, as just introduced, the participants are part of the target group but also the main actors of the monitoring strategy. They are empowered not only for themselves and their projects but also to mentor and support the relevant initiatives of their peers.

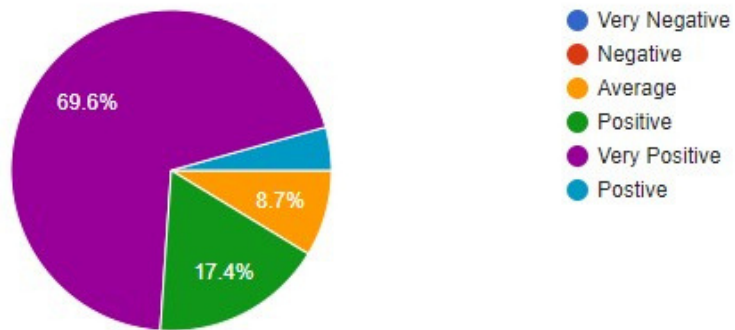
Finally, for the second half of 2022, we will welcome all participants' ideas and request support in developing their project applications targeting the topics of this study session. DYPALL Network, through its main office and member organizations spread around Europe, will evaluate how to support better those that approach us with such requests.

INSIGHTS FROM PARTICIPANTS

The participants evaluated mostly positively all the sessions included and provided in the program. Almost the 70% of the participants considered it as very positive, with only the 8.7% who evaluated it as "average".

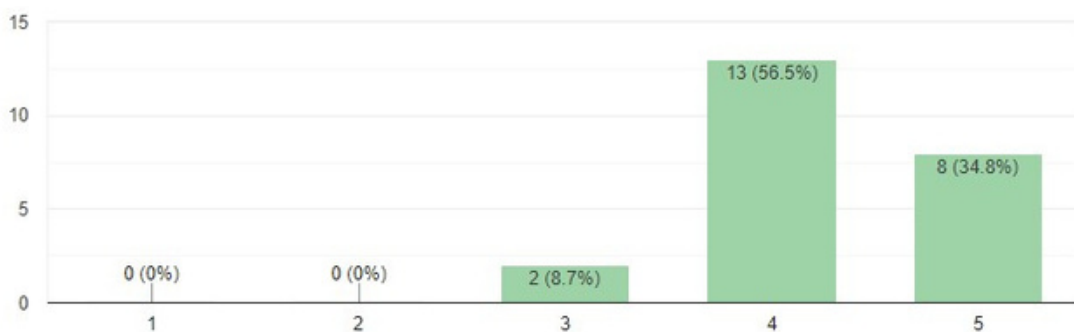
Overall, my experience of this study session was:

23 responses



To what extent were your expectations met during the study session

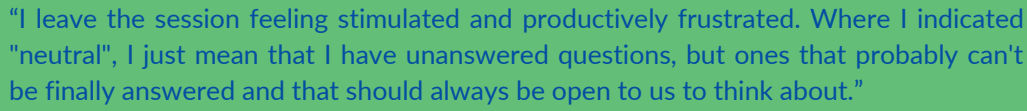
23 responses



It is possible to resume the main learning key findings underlined by the participants below:


- New knowledge in the field of advocacy and youth participation;
- New methods and skills to continue their work at local/regional and international levels;
- Good networking opportunities and a deep sense of motivation in continuing to play a proactive role in their local realities;
- Deepened their understanding of youth participation through the light of the Council of Europe's work, instruments and opportunities;
- Developed awareness with regards to the impact of COVID-19 on the traditional spaces for youth participation (youth organisations, youth councils, Youth Delegates programmes etc.) and about the new forms of participation which emerged during the pandemic;
- Understood the importance of participation and accessing their rights in society;
- Increased their knowledge about advocacy principles and developed their skills for advocacy planning;
- Got practical examples of youth participation (through networking and expert input);
- Increased their confidence in acting as leaders in their communities and contributing to empowering young people to participate in their local and regional life.





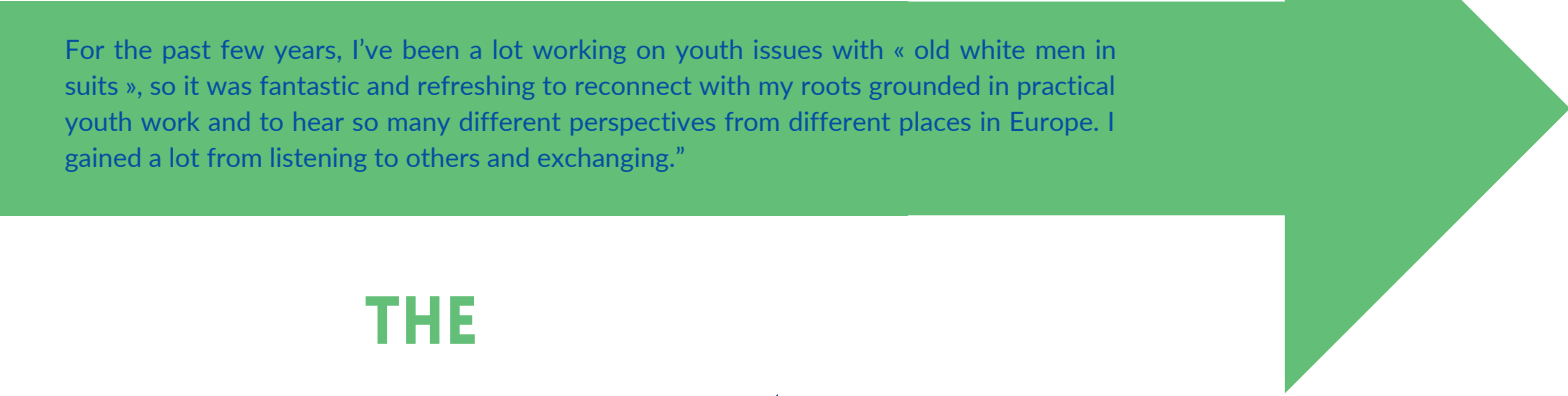
"I leave the session feeling stimulated and productively frustrated. Where I indicated "neutral", I just mean that I have unanswered questions, but ones that probably can't be finally answered and that should always be open to us to think about."

QUOTES



"I am extremely surprised and satisfied with the programme as I did not expect to gain so much from it. I definitely feel more empowered and more hopeful because of all of the strategic tools that you provided us with. Now, I have a better understanding of how I can proceed with establishing my own advocacy campaign in an effective way - before everything seemed like too big' of a goal which made it seem unreachable but now that I know how to divide my goals into smaller steps, I feel more motivated and determined to do an effective campaign with tangible outcomes within my community."

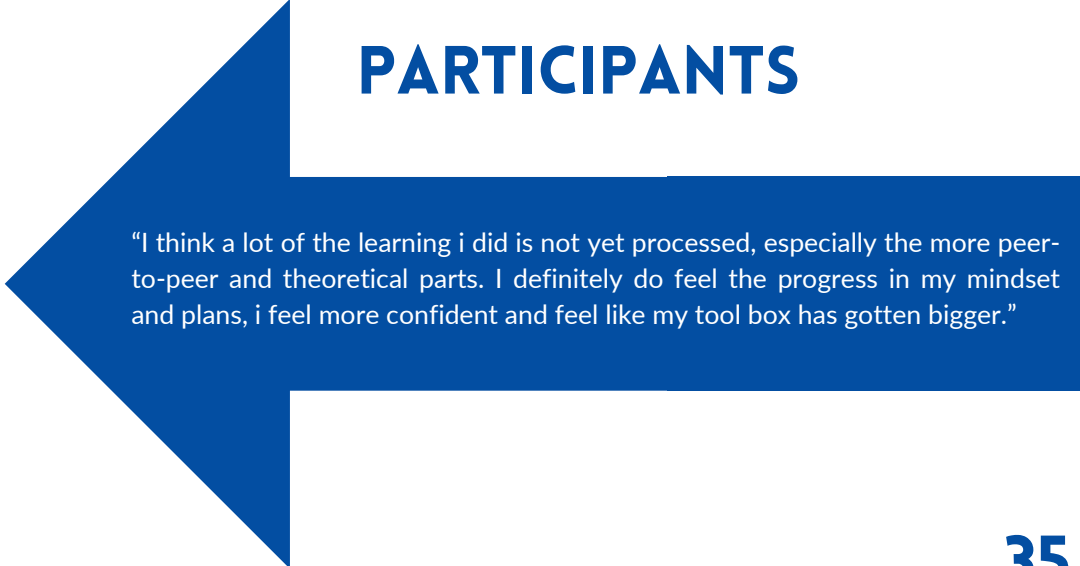
FROM



For the past few years, I've been a lot working on youth issues with « old white men in suits », so it was fantastic and refreshing to reconnect with my roots grounded in practical youth work and to hear so many different perspectives from different places in Europe. I gained a lot from listening to others and exchanging."

THE

PARTICIPANTS



"I think a lot of the learning i did is not yet processed, especially the more peer-to-peer and theoretical parts. I definitely do feel the progress in my mindset and plans, i feel more confident and feel like my tool box has gotten bigger."

OUTCOMES

- An interesting analysis of COVID-19 pandemic effects on the Youth Sector and the community of practice, understanding of the “new normal”, with its pros, cons, opportunities, and challenges for youth participation in times of pandemic;
- Understanding of the role and activities of the Council of Europe concerning youth participation, including key documents and mechanisms;
- Networking (for example, through organising the Fair of NGOs for and from the participants, we managed to introduce them to each other's work, offering space and opportunity for them to find ways of collaboration and future cooperation);
- Quality content was delivered (such as advocacy principles (mainly), outreach strategies, and facilitation skills, as part of the objective of exploring key competencies needed to strengthen their leadership);
- Participants brainstormed and developed action plans to undertake in their working environment and understood the possibilities to link these with existing support from the Youth Department (Democracy here, Democracy Now Youth Campaign, European Youth Foundation) and the DYPALL Network's Youth Advisory Board and Pool of facilitators.
- Motivation – for DYPALL Network, it was essential to motivate these young leaders to continue playing a key role in revitalising democratic processes throughout Europe, which could be harvested even further in the framework of the activities of the Youth Department.



CONCLUSIONS

The background features a large, abstract geometric design. A dark blue shape, resembling a downward-pointing arrow or a wide triangle, is positioned on the left side. To its right, a large green shape, resembling an upward-pointing arrow or a wide triangle, is positioned. The two shapes overlap, creating a white triangular area in the center. The overall composition is clean and modern.



In conclusion, the study session “Climbing the Ladder - Capacitating youth leaders to facilitate youth participation in decision-making processes at the local level” was a great learning process not only for participants but also for the team members that had the opportunity to foster their skills as facilitators and build up a positive environment to equip youth leaders with meaningful tools in the field of advocacy. The personal skills and experience of the youngsters involved were a real added value for the whole activity, which was a common path through which everyone was enriched and inspired to pursue their actions in their local realities in order to revitalise democracy across the Council of Europe’s Member countries.

The partnership between DYPALL Network, Assembly of European Regions (AER) and the Youth Department of the CoE, was insightful cooperation that brought together the expertise of these three different entities and their work at the European level.

Moreover, it was a chance for the organizations and the participants to exchange practices, find solutions to the common challenges in the youth field and set the basis for a common understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 on youth participation, focusing on the local level.

The people involved in the process had a positive insight from the activities conducted. The main outcomes, such as the advocacy plan, the outreach strategy and the networking between the entities involved, were and are useful tools that will enable all the participants to foster their actions. Indeed, the follow-up opportunities are an incentive for the continuous commitment of everyone to keep contributing with a worthy impact to the communities.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

ALBANIA /ALBANIE

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AZERBAIJAN / AZERBAIDJAN

Safarli Lala

Boyuk Yol Youth Public Union

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McDonagh Danielle

Údarás na Gaeltachta

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KOSOVO / KOSOVO²

Daku Fatlinda

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MALTA / MALTE

Zarb Carlos

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Y-PEER Macedonia

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RUSSIAN FEDERATION / FEDERATION DE RUSSIE

Baskina Anastasia

Soliya

² All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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APPENDIX 1. PARTICIPANTS

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ITALY

Gianluca Rossino

EDUCATIONAL ADVISOR

Internal

Agata Stajer

External

Elizabeth Kasa-Mälksoo

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Patrick Norlain

Sunday,
24th of April 2022

Arrival of participants

- 19:00** Dinner
- 21:00** Welcome evening

Monday,
25th of April 2022

- 09:30** Opening with welcome words and team-building activity
- 11:00** Break
- 11:30** Official intro of the Council of Europe and the Youth Department and their work on youth participation; aims & objectives of the Study Session / Expectations & programme
- 13:00** Lunch
- 14:30** The impact of Covid19: What, how, when and where
- 16:00** Break
- 16:30** The “new normal”: pros, cons, opportunities, challenges for youth participation
- 18:00** Reflection group
- 19:00** Dinner

Tuesday,
26th of April 2022

(with the participation of Hrvoje Kovac, lecturer)

- 09:30** Theoretical background pt.1
- 11:00** Break
- 11:30** Theoretical background pt.2 and mapping of stakeholders
- 13:00** Lunch break
- 14:30** Exchange of practices (case studies, best practices)
- 16:00** Break
- 16:30** Exchange of practices and finalization of the toolbox
- 18:00** Reflection group
- 19:00** Dinner
- 21:00** Optional activity: the Youth Centre Olympics

Wednesday,
27th of April 2022

(with the participation of Hrvoje Kovac, lecturer)

09:30 Tools and approaches to advocacy

11:00 Break

11:30 From challenges to opportunities: drafting your advocacy plan

13:00 Lunch break

Free afternoon

19:00 Dinner

21:00 Optional activity (TBD)

Thursday,
28th of April 2022

09:30 What can be done next? Target audience and possible actions

11:00 Break

11:30 Implementation strategy

13:00 Lunch

14:30 Where are we? Presenting the conclusions from the advocacy exercise

16:00 Break

16:30 Sharing and disseminating conclusions and ideas

18:00 Reflection group

19:30 Dinner out in the city center

Friday,
29th of April 2022

09:30 Harvesting and conclusions

"Democracy Here. Democracy Now campaign"

11:00 Break

11:30 Closing session: what did you learn? What are our next steps?

13:00 Lunch

14:30 Departures

19:00 Dinner

