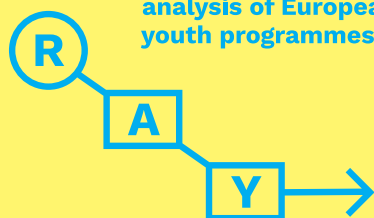Research-based analysis of European youth programmes

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Written by

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Research Report

RAY–LTE *EXT*

Main findings of interviews

2015, 2016, 2018, 2023

Long-term effects of Erasmus+ Youth in Action on participation and citizenship *- extension*

Transnational Research Report

'Erasmus+ Youth' and 'Erasmus+ Youth in Action' have been part of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union in its current (2021–2027) and previous (2014–2020) programme generation. The RAY Network, which includes the National Agencies of the European youth programmes and their research partners in 34 countries*, conducts quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method projects for the research-based analysis of the European youth programmes, including Erasmus+ Youth.

This research report summarises the transnational analysis of the longitudinal study on long-term effects of Erasmus+ Youth in Action on participation and citizenship, which started in 2015 (as RAY LTE) and has concluded in 2025 (as RAY LTE EXT) with the publication of this report. Interviews for the study were conducted in 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2023.

The research work underpinning this report was designed and implemented by the University of Innsbruck and the Generation and Educational Science Institute in cooperation with the RAY Network and supported by Youth Policy Labs.

The research work underpinning this report was co-funded through the Transnational Cooperation Activities (TCA) of Erasmus+ Youth and Erasmus+ Youth in Action.

This report, however, reflects the views only of its authors, and neither the European Commission nor a National Agency can be held responsible for any use, which may be made of the information contained therein.

* 34 countries in 2024/2025: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, North Macedonia¹, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia¹, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland¹, and Türkiye.

WWW

Where available, national research reports can be requested from the respective National Agencies and their research partners

↓

www.researchyouth.net/network

Further RAY publications can be retrieved from

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This report as well as the accompanying annexes can be retrieved from www.researchyouth.net/lte

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https://www.researchyouth.net/projects/lteext/

and

https://www.researchyouth.net/projects/lte/

Research Report

RAY-LTE EXT

Long-term effects of
Erasmus+ Youth in Action
on participation and
citizenship - *extension*

Transnational Analysis

Interviews conducted in 2023

Previous interviews conducted
in 2015, 2016 and 2018

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

E+	European Union Programme Erasmus+ (2021-2027)
E+/YiA	Erasmus+ Youth in Action (2014-2020) – predessesor programme of Erasmus+ Youth (2021-2027)
EVS	European Voluntary Service (Key Action 1). As of 2018, this format is coverered by a new Europe-an youth programme, the European Solidarity Corpsyouth programme, the European Solidarity Corps
EU	European Union
RAY	Researched-based Analysis of European youth programmes. The RAY Network consists of the Youth in Action National Agencies and their research partners involved in the RAY project.
RAY LTE	Research project on the long-term effects of the European youth programmes on participation and citizenship
RAY LTE EXT	Extension of the research project on the long-term effects of the European youth programmes on participation and citizenship
RAY PART	Research project on participation and citizenship education and learning in the European youth programmes

ACTIVITY TYPES OF E+/YIA THE INTERVIEW PARTNERS TOOK PART IN

European Voluntary Service
Mobility of youth workers
Structured Dialogue
Training course
Youth Exchange

PROJECT PARTNER COUNTRIES

AT	Austria
CZ	Czechia
DE	Germany
FI	Finland
IT	Italy
MT	Malta

PROJECT COORDINATION

This research project has been coordinated at transnational level by the Austrian RAY research partner, the University of Innsbruck.

SPECIAL THANKS

to the National Agencies of the project partner countries and, in particular, to their research partners: Ondřej Bárta; Joanne Cassar; Eva Feldmann-Wojtachnia; Kari Saari; Barbara Tham and Adele Tinaburri.

1 — EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This study is an extension of the study on Long-term Effects of Erasmus+ Youth in Action on Participation and Citizenship (RAY LTE) conducted between 2015 and 2018[1].

RAY LTE aimed at exploring long-term effects of Erasmus+ Youth in Action (E+/YiA) projects on participants and project leaders with respect to the development of participation and citizenship competence and practice.

RAY LTE was designed as a longitudinal/panel study with a mixed-method approach using quantitative and qualitative social research methods: a series of four multilingual online surveys and – in parallel – of three semi-structured interviews at various stages before and after the core activity of the project.

Following the RAY LTE study, an obvious subsequent question was how European youth projects contribute to the development participation and citizenship competence and practice – in particular, which project designs, learning approaches, methodologies and methods contribute to this development. This question was explored in the RAY research project 'Participation and citizenship education and learning in European Youth Programmes' (RAY PART, 2019-2021)[2], in which a qualitative research approach with case studies of projects funded through European youth programmes was applied.

1.2 RAY LTE EXTENSION (RAY LTE EXT)

RAY LTE EXT aims at exploring the learning effects on participants over a longer period of time – seven to eight years after the project – in particular with respect to

- the development of participation and citizenship competence and practice;
- the sustainability of learning effects discovered through three interviews;
- the impact of other experiences and events on participation and citizenship competence and practice;

- the meaning participants attribute to their project participation with respect to their personal development as well as their educational and professional career.

RAY LTE EXT was implemented through a fourth interview in 2023 with participants who had been interviewed three times within the RAY LTE study between 2015 and 2018.

RAY LTE EXT involved 30 of 52 participants (from six of the 10 RAY partners involved in RAY LTE) who had been interviewed three times between 2015 and 2018.

1.3 MAIN FINDINGS

Persistent effects on participation and citizenship competence and practice

- Two thirds of the interview partners were confirming that learning effect(s) of their project participation with respect to participation and citizenship are still meaningful to them.
- Five interviewees did not refer to the learning effects mentioned in the second and third interview, but describe a learning through the project, which they became aware of in retrospect later.
- The effects of their E+/YiA projects reported by the interviewees cover all competence areas related to participation and citizenship – as in the two previous rounds of interviews.
- Two thirds of the interview partners reported in the fourth interview, that the European dimension – European identity, interest in as well as knowledge about Europe etc. – reported in the first interview before the project, which had been enhanced through the project as reported in the second and third interview, is still present today respectively increased; for example, for two of these interviewees this European dimension is a main aspect of their professional work as screenwriters.

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[1] See Bárta, Fennes, Gadinger (2021); see also https://www.researchyouth.net/projects/lte/
[2] See Fennes, Gadinger (2021a)

Effects of other experiences of life on participation and citizenship competence

Interview partners mentioned numerous other experiences having an effect on their participation and citizenship competence and practice, e.g.,

- living, studying and working abroad;
- involvement in other youth projects in other countries;
- social and/or political occurrences e.g., war in Ukraine, climate change, corruption, conspiracy theories during the Corona pandemic, authoritarian and right-wing extremist tendencies in Europe etc.

Interview partners were also describing connections between project effects and effects of other experiences in their lives.

Project effects on personal development and educational/professional careers

Around two thirds of the interviewees expressed that the project had an influence on their personal development such as learning more about oneself, becoming more open and sociable, becoming more self-confident, reducing prejudices and gaining more courage to do something new etc. The interviewees also talked about getting out of their comfort zone, going beyond their limits, overcoming their shyness and acquiring life competences like flexibility, decision-making as well as awareness.

More than half of the participants reported, that the project participation had an effect on their decision for a certain field of studies or profession, respectively that they developed competences, which enabled them to do their work in a better way.

Four fifth of the interviewees described the project as an important experience, assessing the importance equally as other influences or at least attributing a rather strong general meaning to their project.

1.4   RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations of the RAY LTE and RAY PART research projects are supported by the results of the RAY LTE EXT study and were refined against this background, summarised and re-arranged. Selected recommendations are:

On the project level, it is mainly recommended to emphasise project objectives and to address explicitly topics related to participation and citizenship. With respect to project design and implementation, a considerable number of recommendations is presented, such as linking social and political events and developments to the project theme, using adequate non-formal education and learning methods and providing for adequate preparation of and follow-up to the projects. Recommendations on the programme implementation level refer to the promotion of participation and active citizenship as project themes and to the elaboration of youth work competences, which are important for fostering participation and citizenship education and learning. Recommendations at the programme and policy level are the provision of sufficient/additional funding for projects fostering participation and citizenship and the initiation of a 'real' dialogue between policy makers and young people as well as youth workers.

The RAY LTE-recommendation "to highlight environmental protection and sustainable development as topics included in E+/YiA objectives related to participation and active citizenship" was derived from the observation that persistent learning effects connected to the protection of the environment were mentioned frequently in the second and third interviews although only one or two projects touched this topic. With the priority "Environment and fight against climate change" in the programme period 2021-2027 this recommendation was put into practice. However, it must also be mentioned that in the fourth interview no interviewee mentioned learning effects related to these topics.

2 — INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

For more than 20 years, a main objective of European youth programmes[3] has been the promotion of active citizenship and participation in civil society and democratic life in line with the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty (European Union, 2007)[4]. This objective is also reflected in the European Union Youth Strategy (2019-2027)[5], in the Youth Participation Strategy of the SALTO Participation & Information Resource Centre[6] and in the programme decisions of European youth programmes for the period 2014 to 2020 and earlier. In this spirit, projects funded through European youth programmes should contribute to the development of competences relevant for participation and active citizenship as well as to the engagement of young people as active citizens in society[7]. In line with this, "participation in democratic life" became a priority of Erasmus+ (E+) for the period 2021 to 2027[8]. Furthermore, the new activity type 'Youth participation activities' was established, supporting "activities outside formal education and training that encourage, foster and facilitate young people's participation in Europe's democratic life at local, regional, national and European level"[9].

In view of these policies and programme objectives, the RAY Network[10] has explored since 2009 the effects of projects funded through Youth in Action (YiA, 2007-2013) and Erasmus+ Youth in Action (E+/YiA, 2014-2020) on young people, youth workers and youth leaders involved in these projects. This was done every second year in the RAY Monitoring (RAY MON) surveys, asking respondents after their project participation about the effects of their project participation[11]. The analysis of these surveys indicates that participants as well as project team members develop participation and citizenship competence and practice as a result of their involvement in such projects,

and that the percentages of positive responses for most items related to the development of participation/citizenship knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and actions are higher than 50%, sometimes up to 95%. Nevertheless, it needs to be noted that these responses reflect subjective perceptions of the respondents if they developed these competences or not, but they do not actually measure how much these competences were developed.

In order to verify these findings, three consecutive thematic studies on participation and active citizenship were conducted by the RAY Network between 2015 and 2023; this report presents the third study, which is an extension of the first study. The first and the second study are summarised in the following passages in order to provide for an overview.

2.1 THE RAY LTE STUDY (2015-2018)

The RAY research project 'Long-term effects of Erasmus+ Youth in Action on participation and citizenship' (RAY LTE) was developed and implemented between 2015 and 2018. This study aimed to explore long-term effects of projects funded through E+/YiA on project participants and project leaders. Specific research questions were:

- How does E+/YiA contribute to the development of citizenship competence and the ability to participate as active citizens?
- What are long-term effects related to participation and active citizenship on participants and project leaders resulting from their involvement in E+/YiA?

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[3] Presently, Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps.

[4] Furthermore, a number of other specific objectives of E+/YiA can also be linked to active citizenship and participation in civil society and democratic life, e.g., fostering solidarity, respect for cultural diversity, inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities or special needs as well as working against discrimination, intolerance, racism and xenophobia. Indirectly, such links can also be found for objectives related to capacity building, quality development and European cooperation in the youth field as well as for objectives related to education and work.

[5] European Commission, 2018.

[6] SALTO Participation & Information, 2020.

[7] European Commission, 2015.

[8] European Commission, 2021a, p. 10. There are three further priorities: Inclusion and Diversity; Digital Transformation; Environment and fight against climate change. The same priorities were established for the European Solidarity Corps in the same programme generation, but there are slight differences in the wording and order of the priorities: Inclusion and Diversity; Environmental protection, sustainable development and climate action; Digital transformation; Participation in democratic life (European Commission, 2021b, p. 8.) This is mentioned, because three interview partners being part of this research project took part in a project funded by the European Voluntary Service (EVS), which was an activity type of E+ Youth in Action until 2018, and became an activity type of the European Solidarity Corps from 2018 onwards.

[9] ibid, p. 149.

[10] Research-based Analysis of European youth programmes (RAY). The RAY Network consists of the National Agencies of the European youth programmes and their research partners in more than 30 countries (www.researchyouth.net).

[11] See Böhler et al., 2021, and Böhler et al., 2022.

These research questions were addressed through a mixed-method approach using quantitative and qualitative social research methods. Standardised multilingual online surveys were conducted with project participants and project leaders/team members as well as with a control group at four stages over a period of three years, starting before the beginning of the project. In parallel, qualitative interviews were conducted at three different stages, also over a period of three years and starting before the beginning of the project. Furthermore, a research conference was implemented with most of the interviewees – as well as with representatives of the National Agencies of the project partners and their national research partners, who had conducted the interviews – at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg to discuss and validate communicatively the preliminary results of the first three surveys and the first two interviews. Through this research design, participation and citizenship competence and practice development could actually be measured more objectively than through the RAY Monitoring surveys.

Overall, the findings of this study showed that participation and citizenship competence and practice are developed through E+/YiA projects, although not equally for all participants and differing in the degree of development depending on the areas of competence and practice: knowledge and skills, which are needed for participation and active citizenship were deepened and/or developed; values inherent to democracy, such as solidarity and tolerance, and the European dimension were strengthened; participation in civil society and democratic life increased for some groups of participants. Interviews indicated that many of these effects were still existent and important for the participants two to three years after the project.

In particular, the surveys showed an increase in the fields of knowledge and skills, which was underlined through the surveys of the control group showing no effects at all.

Interviews also showed, that different groups of participants profited in different ways. E.g., for participants, who were already engaged in or informed about a certain topic and chose a respective project to deepen their knowledge and develop their skills, a so-called cumulative advantage was observed: these participants further developed competences and practices, building

on their prior learning. On rather young and less educated participants, the projects had a strong motivating and empowering effect with respect to participation. The latter often came to participate in E+/YiA projects not because of primarily being interested in the topic of the project, but rather aiming to go to another country, to meet new people from abroad, to try something new or to simply bridge a certain period of time. Nevertheless, some of these participants were sensitised for engaging in society, got respective ideas and inspirations, acquired knowledge related to participation and citizenship and developed related skills. Last but not least, for some young people with fewer opportunities the projects had been 'stepping stones' to a more active participation in civil society. For others, the projects were a first step in the sense, that they at least participated in a project and got in contact with the field of participation and citizenship; in order to take further steps towards participation in society individual follow up and support would be needed.

The findings of the RAY LTE research project included a number of recommendations referring to the development of promoting participation and active citizenship in E+/YiA.[12]

2.2 THE RAY PART STUDY (2019-2021)

Since the RAY LTE study provided sufficient evidence that E+/YiA projects actually contribute to the development of participation and citizenship competence and practice, an obvious subsequent question was how European youth projects contribute to this development. This question was explored in the RAY research project 'Participation and citizenship education and learning in European Youth Programmes' (RAY PART, 2019-2021),[13] in which a qualitative research approach with case studies of projects funded through European youth programmes was applied; the methods mainly used were observation of core project activities as well as group discussions with participants and interviews with project leaders/team members, the latter ideally directly after the observed project activities.

The study results show that project designs involving participants in actual practice of participation in civil society and democratic life are effective in fostering participation competence and practice, e.g. by implementing actions against

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[12] See Bárta et al., 2021.

[13] See Fennes, Gadinger 2021a; see also the summary report: Fennes, Gadinger 2021b. In 2018, the European Solidarity Corps was established as stand-alone programme and, subsequently, the RAY Network changed its name into "Research-based analysis of European youth programmes", including Erasmus+ Youth in Action and the European Solidarity Corps.

climate change, the simulation of a political process, in which the participants play the roles of parliamentarians, or the development and maybe also implementation of an own activity for fostering participation of other people in civil society and democratic life. This applies also to the empowerment of specific target groups to actively take part in civil society, for example enabling young people with migration background to conduct their life independently in the society they live in, or the work on and exploration of a topic related to participation and citizenship, for example fostering the discussion about human rights through artistic expression like theatre, dance, collage or music. Within these designs, the following main ways of learning were identified:

- participatory learning, involving the participants actively in all project activities from the very beginning, also in the decision making processes and in design and development of the project;
- xperiential learning through doing something concretely, maybe something that one does not usually do that often or does not have the opportunity to do – for example moderating an event etc.;
- learning from and with others (peer learning) facilitated through the focus of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action projects on working together etc.

Besides this, a number of educational approaches and key learning elements emerged from the researched projects, such as, e.g.: a big variety of non-formal learning methods combined with informal settings, in which also learning took place; a learner-centred approach with respect to content and methods; a strong focus on team building activities; the creation of an appreciative atmosphere through project teams members being empathic, attentive and interested in the participants' suggestions; or using challenges, excitement, playful and funny elements, especially for rather young participants at the age from 13 to 15/16 years.

2.3 REASONS TO EXTEND THE RAY LTE STUDY

Since a timeframe of three years must be considered to be only a very first approach to long-term effects – this aspect was mentioned in the RAY LTE research report in the sub-chapter "Limitations of the study"[14] – the idea to continue at least the interviews some years after the third interview was already born in 2018. Almost all interview partners expressed their willingness to also take part in a fourth interview some years later when they were asked about this in the third interview. In 2022, some of the RAY LTE project partners decided to use the unique opportunity to build on the existing valuable data base of the RAY LTE interviews. The extension of the qualitative research strand with a fourth interview was put into practice in 2023, seven to eight years after the first interviews. This fourth interview aimed to explore truly long-term effects and to reveal insights into the persistency of learning effects triggered through project participation over a longer period of time. Beyond that, the epistemological interest also referred to other developments and events in the lives of the interview partners having an influence on their participation and citizenship competence and practice as well as on the meaning the interviewees attribute retrospectively to their project in general with regard to their personal development and professional career. The results of the RAY research project "Long-term effects of Erasmus+ Youth in Action on participation and citizenship – Extension" (RAY LTE EXT) are presented in this report.

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[14] Bárta et al., 2021, p. 142.

3 — THE RAY LTE EXT STUDY

3.1 AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this project is to explore learning effects of E+/YiA projects on the development of participation and citizenship competence and practice of project participants seven to eight years after the project participation and to explore possible changes of respective learning effects over time.

In addition, the study aims to explore the meaning the participants attribute to their participation in an E+/YiA project seven to eight years after the project in general as well as with regard to their personal development and their educational and professional career.

The main research question was derived against this background:

Looking back after seven to eight years: How does participation in E+/YiA contribute to participation in civil society and in democratic life as well as to active citizenship? What meaning do participants attribute to their project participation in general as well as with regard to their personal development and their educational and professional career?

Specific research questions are:

- How does participation in E+/YiA contribute to participation and citizenship competence and practice of participants from the view seven to eight years after their project participation?
- How persistent are the learning effects with respect to participation and citizenship competence and practice, which the participants reported about one year (second interview) and two to three years (third interview) after their project participation?
- Which other experiences and events had an impact on participation and citizenship competence and practice of the participants

from the view seven to eight years after their project participation?
- What meaning do participants attribute to their project participation in general and with regard to their personal development as well as educational and professional career from the view seven to eight years after their project participation?

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN, SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Research design and sample

In order to be able to answer the research questions, the qualitative research strand of the RAY LTE project, which included three interviews with E+/YiA project participants at different stages (before their project participation as well as one and three years later), was to be continued with a fourth cycle of semi-structured qualitative interviews. In line with the research design of the RAY LTE project, only those RAY LTE interview partners who took part in all three previous interview cycles were eligible for the sample. As shown in table 1 this was a group of 52 persons from the six RAY partner countries[15]. At the end, 30 of these 52 participants were interviewed a fourth time.[16]

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[15] RAY partners in Austria, Czechia, Finland, Germany, Italy and Malta. The RAY LTE project between 2015 and 2018 included also the RAY partners in Estonia, Hungary, Netherlands (only participating in the online-surveys), Slovenia and Sweden; most of them would have liked to join LTE EXT but did not have enough resources, e.g., because they were already involved in several other RAY research projects.

[16] The sampling at the beginning of the LTE project in 2015 was challenging in two regards: There often was only little short time to get in contact with the future participants asking them for their willingness to take part in an interview before their project participation. Many potential interviewees refused to be interviewed due to numerous other obligations, for example education or work. "Therefore, the plan to achieve a sample of young people participating first of all in projects focusing on participation and citizenship could only be put into practice to a certain extent." Bárta et al., 2021, p. 128.

TABLE 1: **Number of interviewees per interview cycle and funding country**

			Funding countries					
Interview cycles		AT	CZ	DE	FI	IT	MT	Total
LTE	1st interview cycle before project participation (2015/16) 1st & 2nd interview cycle 1 year after	16	12	20	15	13	9	85
LTE	1st & 2nd interview cycle 1 year after project participation (2016/17)	13	6	14	13	10	7	63
LTE	1st, 2nd & 3rd interview cycle 3 years after project participation (2018/19)	11	5	8	13	8	7	52
LTE EXT	1st, 2nd, 3rd & 4th interview cycle 7-8 years after project participation (2023)	**7**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**5**	**3**	**30**

Table 1 also documents the inevitable 'panel mortality' between the interview cycles. Although a certain number of participants who took part in the first interview did not want to do a second interview, were too busy or even were not found any more, three querters of 85 participants who had done the first interview were interviewed a second time. The 'loss' between the second and the third interview is only 11 participants. Most of the 52 persons who did also the third interview were pleased afterwards to have done it.

Although the third interview was four years earlier and the living conditions of the interviewees (also their places of residence, their occupations etc.) might have changed, the researchers estimated the chances that these 52 RAY LTE interviewees were willing to be interviewed again in 2023 as good. The interview partners had been asked in the third interview if they would attend a possible fourth interview and all 52 except one or two expressed their willingness.[17] They also had been asked, how it had been for them to be interviewed and again almost all answered that they had appreciated it: they highlighted the reflective function of the interviews and that they became aware of their learning. Rather young participants reported that only the questions of the interviews helped them to find out about their opinions about certain issues such as Europe or the protection of the environment. Furthermore, many interviewees were interested in the research and were proud to contribute to a research project. A few interviewees were reminded of the importance of being active and even got new ideas about how to participate in society or political life.[18]

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[17] This applies also for the interviewees of the former LTE project partners Estonia, Hungary, Slovenia and Sweden.
[18] Bárta et al., 2021, p. 56f.

In order to test the present willingness of the RAY LTE interview partners to take part in a fourth interview, the Austrian researchers sent an initial inquiry to the 11 Austrian RAY LTE interviewees in September 2022 – and the result was impressive: Within three days, seven interview partners sent a positive answer; in the end two of them did not take part, but two other Austrian interviewees who had been answering some days later, did take part.

Against this background, the RAY LTE EXT project partners decided do a fourth cycle of interviews. Besides the listed reasons it surely was helpful, that the contacted RAY LTE interviewees already knew what the request of the National Agencies and researches was about and were familiar with being interviewed and – in the case of four project partners – with the interviewer. The fact that 30 former interviewees finally took part in a fourth interview seven to eight years after taking part in their Erasmus+ Youth in Action project was considered as a great success especially because the big majority of interviewees are still young and very busy, be it with training, studies, work or founding a family. The contact data of these 30 young people appeared to be still valid and 26 of them agreed immediately to take part in the fourth interview; three persons agreed after a while or being asked again and one person agreed a while after she had rejected the invitation.

The sample was composed of 15 female and 15 male interview partners. In average, they were 29 years old at the time of the fourth interview, two thirds of them being between 21 and 30 years. 26 of the interviewees had done university studies and 6 of them a vocational training – this means that two interviewees had done both, studies and vocational training. At the time of the fourth interview, 27 interview partners had finished university or school and were in jobs; 3 participants were still studying at university. At least nine interview partners were living together with their partners, partly were married, partly had built a house together; two interviewees had become mothers.[19] Further eight interviewees were permanently or from time to time in a relationship. With respect to voluntary engagement in civil society and/or political life, approximately five of the 30 interview partners had not been active before they participated in the project. Among the majority of those participants, who were already active, some participants were strongly active. Most of the in-

terview partners took part in a youth exchange (21 persons), three persons each in the European voluntary service and in structured dialogue projects, two in mobilities for youth workers and one in a training course. The main project topics were the support of young people with disadvantages or disabilities (eight interview partners), participation (seven), interculturality (six), environment (four), Europe (three), digitalisation and leadership (one each).

16 interviewees had taken part in the RAY LTE research conference in Strasbourg.

More detailed anonymised individual profiles of the interviewees can be found here: https://www.researchyouth.net/lte.

Method of data collection

If possible, each interview partner was interviewed by the researcher who also did the previous three interviews. It was assumed that, through meeting three times for the interviews over a period of three years and in many cases also at the research conference in Strasbourg 2018, a trusting relationship had developed between the researcher and his/her interview partners. 21 interview partners were interviewed by the interviewer who had already done the previous interviews. 9 interviewees from two RAY LTE EXT partners were interviewed by other researchers. All researchers needed to be prepared for an interview by going through the three previous interviews of the interview partner and by summarising the main information in a table in order to be able to refer to that in the fourth interview:

- the basic data such as gender, age etc.[20];
- the initial situation before the project participation including the motivation to take part in the project;
- the values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and practice in terms of participation and citizenship and beyond mentioned in the three previous interviews as well as the respective learning effects resulting from project participation mentioned in the second and third interview.

According to the interview guidelines, the interviewer started with a short recollection with regard to the RAY LTE project and interviews between 2015 and 2018 and giving a general

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[19] For some interviewees this kind of information was not available.

[20] gender; age; country of residence; studies; training/profession; project topic; activity type; project venue country; participants from; number of participants; interview setting; interview date; interview duration; participated in the research conference in Strasbourg

information about the purpose of the interview in, at the same time avoiding to create a perception of the interviewee, that it is socially desirable to mention long-term effects. Besides thanking the interviewee for taking part in the fourth interview, the interviewer should give him/her information about the procedure of the interview and assure him/her of the anonymisation and exclusive usage of the interview data for this research project.

In the sense of a narrative approach, the interviewees should look at their life course in a holistic way, describe what has happened since the last interview and what they are doing today, in particular, if they participate in civil society and democratic life. In this context, questions about the personal development and the educational and professional career, the engagement in civil society and political life and the European dimension of participation and citizenship were foreseen. Only towards the end of the interview, the interviewee should be asked about the connection between her/his participation and citizenship competence and practice today and her/his participation in the project seven to eight years ago. The interviewer should also refer to the project effects mentioned in the second and third interview and ask if they are still persistent. Additionally, the interviewee should be asked about his/her memories about the Strasbourg conference and his/her notion of being interviewed four times over a time period of seven to eight years.

Basically, the interviews should be implemented in a face-to-face setting, meeting common social research standards. If a face-to-face interview was not possible due to geographic reasons or restrictions related to the pandemic, alternatively an interview could be done online, preferably with video, thus ensuring a setting as close as possible to face-to-face. Finally, 14 interviews took place face-to-face and 16 online.

The interview should cover all topics addressed in the guidelines assuming that this could take up to 75 minutes but should not be longer. In average, the interviews lasted 56 minutes, the longest 105 minutes and the shortest 32 minutes.

A relaxed atmosphere was stated in all interviews with slight tenses once in a while in one interview. In all cases the flow of the conversation was fluent with hesitant phases in three cases. The majority of interview partners were (very) talkative, four persons partly monosyllabic and one person informative while dissecting almost each question. In seven interviews minor disturbances

from the surrounding or because of technical reasons appeared, but could be solved easily.

All interviews were recorded electronically and analysed according to the analysis guidelines provided by the Austrian researchers who coordinated the project at transnational level.

Data analysis

The analysis grid was basically structured in line with the content sections of the interview guidelines and started with the completion of the above-mentioned table with the basic data of the fourth interview (part "A"). Part "B" contained a summary of the first, second and third interview with a focus on the learning effects through the project with respect to participation and citizenship. The analysis of the fourth interview (part "C") was structured according to the following categories:

(1) Engagement in society and politics – project effects and changes due to other reasons
(2) Personal development as well as educational and professional career – project effects and changes due to other reasons
(3) European dimension of participation and citizenship – project effects and changes due to other reasons
(4) Persistency of the project learning effects with respect to participation and citizenship competence and practice reported in previous interviews
(5) General meaning the interview partner attributes to the project
(6) Non-formal learning in the project
(7) Spontaneous memories of the project, the Strasbourg conference and being interviewed
(8) Brief impression of getting in contact with the interview partner and of the interview

The national researchers contracted by their National Agencies for conducting, translating and analysing the interviews were asked to define new categories if applicable and to develop the analysis further accordingly. These categories as well as all the analyses and contributions of the national researchers were discussed at a research meeting bringing together the results and their interpretations at transnational level. The researchers also added quotations of focal statements to the analysis in order to illustrate the main results in the transnational research report.

3.3 RESEARCH PARTNERS

Since RAY LTE EXT was a follow-up project of RAY LTE only the partners involved in the LTE project could potentially be partners of the RAY LTE EXT project. Six out of ten RAY LTE partners having interviewed project participants – in Austria, Czechia, Finland, Germany, Italy and Malta – decided to be part of the extension of the project; the other RAY LTE partners would have liked to join the project but did not have enough resources, e.g., because they were already involved in several other RAY research projects.

3.4 POLICY FRAMEWORK

According to the research interest in effects of projects of the youth chapter of the Erasmus+ programme (in the period of 2014-2020) on participation and citizenship competence and practice, the policy framework includes several policies and programme objectives referring to participation and active citizenship. While the policy framework was already drafted in the introduction, it is explained in this section in more detail.

In line with the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty to "encourage the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe"[21], the Erasmus+ programme guide of 2015 (the year when the RAY LTE study started) formulated, among others, the challenge of the programme to develop social capital among young people as well as to empower young people and their ability to participate actively in society.[22]

The "European Union Youth Strategy – Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people", which has been adopted in 2018 (thus at the end of the RAY LTE research project), confirms the relevance of RAY PART and of extending RAY LTE. It is also the framework for the EU youth policy cooperation for the period 2019 to 2027. This policy cooperation "shall make the most of youth policy's potential. It fosters youth participation in democratic life; it also supports social and

civic engagement and aims to ensure that all young people have the necessary resources to take part in society."[23] The term "engage" in the title of the youth strategy "aims towards a meaningful civic, economic, social, cultural and political participation of young people."[24] Among other aims, the EU member states are invited to "foster the development of citizenship competencies, through citizenship education and learning strategies."[25] With the Youth Goal 9 "Space and participation for all" the topic of participation is also represented in the 11 European Youth Goals, which were developed during a dialogue process in 2017 and 2018 – an initiative within the development of the youth strategy – involving young people from all over Europe.[26]

According to the programme guide for Erasmus+ 2024, the programme "is a key component supporting the objectives of the ... European Union Youth Strategy."[27] The aims, "strengthening European identity and the participation of young people in democratic processes"[28], are mentioned in the general objective of the programme and "participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement" is a priority of the Erasmus+ Programme since 2021. "The Erasmus+ programme addresses the citizens´ limited participation in democratic processes and their lack of knowledge about the European Union, and tries to help them overcome the difficulties in actively engaging and participating in their communities and in the Union's future."[29] The programme guide also refers to the Youth Participation Strategy, which "has been designed to provide a common framework and support the use of the Programme to foster youth participation in democratic life."[30] This means, that "the primary stakeholders of this strategy are those who are involved in supporting the implementation of the programmes, so that they in turn can better support programme beneficiaries around youth participation, and improve the overall impact the programmes have on youth participation in democratic life."[31] Among others, primary stakeholders are National Agencies of the European youth programmes, youth information providers and youth organisations.

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[21] European Union, 2007.
[22] European Commission, 2015, p. 5.
[23] European Union, 2018.
[24] ibid.
[25] ibid.
[26] Also, the youth goals 1 (Connecting EU with youth), 7 (Quality learning), 3 (Inclusive societies) and 6 (Moving rural youth forward) are closely linked to participation.
[27] European Commission, 2024, p. 4.
[28] ibid, p. 5.
[29] ibid, p 10.
[30] ibid.
[31] SALTO Participation & Information, 2020, p. 30.

3.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK[32]

Participation

Participation, as understood in the RAY studies on participation and citizenship competence and practice (RAY LTE, RAY PART and RAY LTE EXT), can take place in a broad spectrum of domains. It can be participation in society at large, simply by actively doing more for the society than one is obliged to, e.g., by living in an ecological way and using public transport, avoiding pollution and waste, minimising CO_2 emission or by actively supporting people in need etc. This could be referred to 'participation in public life' – a term frequently used – in a sense that it is in the 'third sector', thus distinct from government and business, but it could also be referred to as 'personalised' or 'individualised (political) participation'. In this respect, it could also be referred to as 'participation in civil society'. While 'civil society' can also be understood as the collective of non-governmental organisations, institutions and movements engaging in order to contribute to society at large, this term is understood for this study in a broader sense, thus participation in society as described above. Participation can also take the form of 'participation in political life' or 'political participation', which can be conventional political participation (voting in elections or running for an office) or non-conventional political participation, such as participating in demonstrations, signing petitions or collecting signatures for petitions, donating to a social, humanitarian, environmental or political cause etc. A term frequently used in policies is 'participation in democratic life', which overlaps with political participation but also can be interpreted in a broader sense, referring to any behaviour or action contributing to a democratic society, such as fostering values and principles inherent to democracy, such as equal rights, freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of assembly, non-violence, respect for human rights etc.

Citizenship

There is no single and universally valid definition of citizenship[33]: constructions of citizenship are influenced by specific historical, social, cultural and political contexts. The various elements and dimensions of citizenship can well overlap, especially in regions sharing histories and cultures. This is the case for countries in Europe, which share a common cultural heritage and history to a relatively high degree. Nevertheless, also in this region notions of citizenship differ noticeably.[34]

A literature review on concepts of citizenship allows a consolidation into the following core features of citizenship:[35]

A central conclusion emerging from the literature is that active participation in society is inherent to citizenship, although authors differ in the scope of active participation, i.e., to which extent it implies political participation, participation in civil society, at the workplace or in private life.[36] This shows a direct link between participation as outlined above and citizenship.

Citizenship implies a membership in a community with a sense of identity with that community and shared values. While the scope of such a community would traditionally be limited to a state, it can also have a local, regional, national or international dimension. Furthermore, these different dimensions can overlap and result in multiple identities.

Citizenship involves rights and obligations within a community, which are equal for all members of the community, regulating the relationships between members of the community as well as between citizens and the community. These rights and obligations, which can have both a formal as well as an informal quality, provide for people living together in a community in a peaceful and constructive way.

As indicated above – active participation being inherent to citizenship – citizenship implies participation in community life, which can be related to different domains such as participation in political life, in civil society at large, at work and in private life, with friends or in the family – the latter linking the socialisation of children in families as well as the relations in private life to community life.[37]

In view of this, 'active citizenship' could be considered to be a pleonasm. Similarly, this is the

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[32] This sub-chapter has been taken from the RAY LTE research report, since it is fully relevant also for RAY LTE EXT.
[33] See also Crick, 2000, p. 3; Marshall, 1977.
[34] Hoskins & Mascherini, 2008.
[35] Fennes, 2009.
[36] Bîrzéa, 2005; Cogan, 2000; Holford & van der Veen, 2003; Kubow, Grossman, & Ninomiya, 2000; Veldhuis, 1997.
[37] Fennes, 2009.

case for 'democratic citizenship', since free participation in a non-democratic entity would, most likely, not be possible. Nevertheless, these terms are used in this study since they are used in the respective policies.[38]

Fennes (2009) proposes a three-dimensional reframing of citizenship that could be relevant for citizenship education and learning, conceptualising citizenship in terms of three interrelated dimensions with community membership linking them:

- citizenship as a way of being – referring to an identity as a citizen with values, beliefs, attitudes and a view of life and the world;
- citizenship as a way of relating – relating to other members of the community and to the community as such;
- citizenship as a way of acting – citizenship as a practice.

Citizenship competence

In accordance with Hoskins and others, competence is defined as a "complex combination of knowledge, skills, understanding, values, attitudes and desire which lead to effective, embodied human action in the world, in a particular domain."[39] Furthermore, it can be defined as "the ability to apply knowledge, know-how and skills in a habitual or changing situation."[40]

Models of citizenship competence found in the literature have the following in common:

- they refer to knowledge, skills, attitudes and values – sometimes also using different terms such as awareness, understanding, insight, aptitudes, capacities, abilities, dispositions, virtues;
- they refer to knowledge, which is required for action and empowers for active participation, thus practical knowledge;
- they refer to skills, which are directly or indirectly necessary for active participation, at least in political life;

- they refer to core values, attitudes and principles such freedom, equality, solidarity, democracy and the rule of law.[41]

In line with the reviewed literature on this subject[42], knowledge, skills, values and attitudes as four main areas and complemented by identity[43], were operationalised in concrete indicators for the RAY LTE study. The identity of the individual is taken into account, specifically looking into the sense of national identity of the respondents[44] as well as of their allegiance to their community, their country, the European Union, Europe and beyond.

Citizenship practice

In the area of citizenship practice, habits and activities connected to being an active citizen are explored, such as voting, participating in a peaceful demonstration, signing a petition etc. represents political participation. Keeping oneself informed about social and political affairs, discussing social and political issues, living in an environmentally friendly way, volunteering in the interest of the community, engaging in civil society organisations or acting as citizen responsibly in the closer or wider communities they feel being part of etc. all represent other ways of participation in society. As for political participation, conventional and non-conventional political participation are taken into account[45]. Conventional political participation includes voting and running for an office. Non-conventional political participation aims at activities such as signing a petition, participating in demonstrations, making donations etc.

The outlined theory helps to capture the very complex phenomena of participation, active citizenship and citizenship competence. The development of these has to be seen as a life-long and life-wide process, which includes a variety of influences at play. Therefore, the participation in an E+/YiA project has to be taken as one potential influence alongside others.[46]

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[38] The term 'active citizenship' is used in policies of the European Union. The term 'democratic citizenship' is used in policies of the Council of Europe. A comparison of respective policy documents shows that the meaning of the two terms are synonymous to a high degree (Fennes, 2009).

[39] Hoskins & Crick, 2008a, p. 4; cf. Crick in Hoskins & Crick, 2008b, p. 313.

[40] Tissot, 2004, p. 47.

[41] Fennes, 2009; Hoskins & Campbell, 2008; Hoskins et al., 2006; Hoskins & Mascherini, 2008.

[42] Fennes, 2009; Hoskins et. al, 2006; Hoskins et. al, 2008; Hoskins in Hoskins & Crick, 2008.

[43] Hoskins & Crick, 2008, p. 8.

[44] cf. Hoskins & Crick, 2008, p. 8.

[45] cf. Marquart-Pyatt, 2013; Hoskins & Mascherini, 2008.

[46] The above text has been taken from Bárta et al., 2021.

3.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Logically, most of the limitations of the RAY LTE study also apply to this extension of it[47]; they are summarised and adapted to the new study and presented here in bullet point style:

- It has to be taken into account that – as described in the sub-chapter 3.2 – the overall conditions prevented to include especially participants of projects with a focus on citizenship and participation in the study in 2015.
- It is assumed that young people who have already been active (and maybe are higher educated and interested in certain topics) are more willing to take part in an interview. This seems to be confirmed in the study, because the sample description (see sub-chapter 3.2) shows, that the majority of interviewees were already active in society and political life before they took part in the project. The assumed effect increases with each round of interviews and is highly suitable to create a one-sided, positively selected sample, in which interview partners who are particularly interested in the topic, better educated or – in the case of this study – already engaged in society and politics, are disproportionately represented.
- Possible effects on the interviewees through being interviewed repeatedly about participation and citizenship, for example an increased reflexivity on or a fostered appreciation of participation and citizenship, might have developed. A tendency to answer questions in a socially desirable way cannot be ruled out completely.
- Different reflective, linguistic and communication skills of interview partners are likely to have an influence on the participants' statements.
- For the one or other interview partner it might have been a challenge to distinguish between effects of the project and of other events and occurrences in their lives.
- The work of the interviewers from different countries might have been influenced by potentially different understandings of citizenship, participation and other concepts shaped by different social, cultural and political traditions.
- Due to the transnational implementation, a conceptual blurring of the study is considered to be inevitable to a certain degree.

These limitations have to be considered when analysing and interpreting the study results. The limitation of the RAY LTE project, that collecting data one and three years after the project participation can only be considered as a first approach to long-term effects, became obsolete with the fourth interview seven to eight years after the project.

3.7 STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

In the executive summary, the context, research interest and findings of the study as well as the recommendations derived from the findings are summarised (chapter 1).

Since the RAY LTE EXT study has to be seen in the context with two other research projects being the extension of one of those studies, the report starts with illustrating this context and summarising the main aims and results of these two studies. Furthermore, the reasons to extend the RAY LTE study are presented (chapter 2). This is followed by the presentation of the research questions, the research design, the sample, the methodological approach, the research partners, the policy and theoretical framework as well as the limitations of the RAY LTE EXT study (chapter 3).

Chapter four on the results starts with the analysis of the answers to the main research question about the persistency of the project learning effects, which the interview partners had mentioned in the second and third interviews. After that, the report shows the results related to the European dimension of the persistent project learning effects and outlines the impact of other experiences and events on participation and citizenship competence and practice. The general meaning the interviewees attributed to their project and the project effects on their personal development as well as on their educational and professional career conclude the section with the main results. The sub-chapter 'Further results' contains the motivation of the interview partners to take part in the project, their spontaneous memory of the project and the RAY LTE research conference, their perception of the non-formal learning in the projects and the notion of having been interviewed four times for the research project.

Last but not least, main recommendations are presented as result of a synopsis of the findings of the research projects RAY LTE, RAY PART and RAY LTE EXT.

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47 ibid., p. 144.

4 — RESULTS OF THE RAY LTE EXT STUDY

4.1 PERSISTENT PROJECT EFFECTS ON PARTICIPATION AND CITIZENSHIP COMPETENCE AND PRACTICE

In the second and third interview of the RAY LTE study (one year as well as two to three years after the project) the interviewees reported their learning with respect to participation and citizenship competence and practice. In order to find out about the persistency of these learning effects seven to eight years after the project – this research interest is formulated in the second specific research question – the interviewees were asked about this again in the fourth interview within the extension of the RAY LTE study. The extent of persistency is also an important element when answering the first specific research question focusing on a more general contribution of the participation in E+/YiA projects on participation and citizenship competence and practice. The answer to this question includes possible new views on the projects they participated in, which came to the minds of the interviewees only with the time distance and possible changes of previously expressed effects.

With two thirds of the interview partners confirming that one or several learning effect(s) of their project participation with respect to participation and citizenship are still meaningful to them seven to eight years after their participation, the fourth interviews provide strong evidence for E+/YiA projects as learning environment exhibiting important long-term effects on participation and citizenship competence and practice.

Five interviewees do not refer to the learning effects mentioned in the second and third interview, but describe a learning through the project, which they perceived only from the view seven to eight years later. A few interviewees are hesitant with regard to project effects, which are still meaningful to them, or do not see such effects at all. One interviewee changed her opinion expressed in the second and third interview

completely and described Erasmus+ projects as counterproductive in the fourth interview.

As outlined in sub-chapter 2.1, all competence areas related to participation and citizenship were developed through E+/YiA projects according to what the interview partners reported one year after the project. And for most interviewees these effects were still important two to three years after the project. The effects confirmed by the interviewees in the fourth interviews also cover all competence areas with the area of skills standing out due to its frequent mention. Interview partners report a broad scope of social, communication and intercultural skills, language and practical skills and – most frequently – different types of management skills such as the ability to work in a team effectively, to lead a group, to organise a project or event on international as well as on local level etc.

> "*I wanted to create a system, to promote information about Europe; here [in the interviewees local and rural environment] they are not exactly Europe.*" (IT8)

> "*It gave me lots of purely practical skills, such as writing up a project, debate, explain.*" (CZ4)

> "*Yes, I have learnt to be more organised and got skills to organise, for example, events.*" (FI1)

> "*I think that project taught me that there's always another way of seeing things ... learning to see things from another point of view.*" (IT2)

> "*I developed social skills and assertiveness since during the project the group had to work together and find solutions to carry out the activities.*" (MT1)

Within the (inter)personal field, the interviewees profited from the project, for example with respect to dealing with prejudices, solving conflicts in a constructive way, being more organised, thinking critically, being able to analyse situations and different perspectives, tackling the complexity of life etc.

> "*I also feel that through these projects I am able to take more decisions.*" (MT2)

Communicating unpleasant information or even disagreeing with people are tracked back from an interview partner to the project very clearly. Furthermore, presenting ideas, speaking in public, compromising or communicating in a group are mentioned by other interviewees.

> "*I do not fear the communication trouble as much as I feared it years ago.*" (CZ2)

Within the area of values and attitudes, the interview partners report different project effects, which are still important for them: an intensified interest in social and political topics such as human rights; a renewed appreciation of democracy – due to hosting countries, which do not fully comply to democratic principles – and of values inherent to democracy; a fostered awareness for the importance of participation; and last but not least a strengthened interest in and appreciation of Europe.

> "*Yes, the project has influenced me to the extent that I still see the topic very critically: it raised my awareness for how post-colonialism is reproduced.*" (AT2)

> "*Others brought up 'feminist Germany' during my EVS in Russia. This shaped my view on the value of equality, it was the reason to think about equality.*" (DE7)

Interview partners still recognise the empowering effect through the project; they describe it with strong expressions such as:

> "*I felt empowered after each of those projects.*" (CZ2)

> "*You suddenly know that there are no limits to what you can do.*" (CZ4)

> "*The project was not 100% the triggering factor, but it was very important, it was extremely encouraging.*" (DE5)

> "*The realisation of the project was an 'aha moment' ... Yes, that was definitely a very formative moment for me and also the discussions around it.*" (DE8)

> "*I gained confidence that there are no limits! ... I recall what it was to be a young teenager then and it gave confidence and maybe a boost to life that 'Hey, you can do many things!' I believe that many others who participated have got similar positive vibrations in their minds and gained certitude to act in their own lives.*" (FI3)

Concerning knowledge, the interviewees recall the fields of topics they reported in the second and third interviews. They mentioned knowledge about Europe, in particular the different countries, their political systems and how they function as well as their cultures; knowledge about the work and functioning of NGOs; wider insights into public matters, local legislations and procedures of administrations; environment, societal phenomena like the agenda setting effect; project management and non-formal learning methods.

> "*During my EVS, I have learned a lot at the municipal level. We turned this dump into a garden, so to speak, and for that we simply needed the appropriate materials, we needed permission to paint the walls and to hold workshops with young people.*" (DE8)

According to the findings of the RAY LTE study, several participants became more active in participation practice, predominantly in social life and society in general, as consequence of the project participation. Around one third of the former participants taking part in the fourth interview described effects with respect to their practical engagement. They mostly remembered that their engagement already existing before the project participation was fostered, for example,

through getting to know other very engaged people, through specific offers for participation by the supporting organisation or through the idea to transfer project activities to the local level at home. They called the project effect "booster", "reinforcement" or "push". For others, the engagement was influenced on content level, for example one interviewee was enabled through more in-depth information about the topic he already was engaged for to act differently in his engagement; he still reported this improvement in his voluntary work in the fourth interview although he had changed the field of engagement in the meantime. Others were encouraged through the project to start being an active person, to organise events, to stand up for their rights or to approach others with work-related issues.

Of course, this does not mean, that the interview partners are still practising the same activities, which were fostered or initiated through the project or that they are active to the same extent. But for some of the interviewees it meant that the project was the starting point for being engaged. They were more or less engaged in the following years, for example less engaged in intensive phases of their studies, when starting a job – maybe in a new town – or when founding a family, and for example more engaged, when having been settled in a new place.

4.2 EUROPEAN DIMENSION OF PERSISTENT PROJECT EFFECTS ON PARTICIPATION AND CITIZENSHIP COMPETENCE AND PRACTICE

In varying degrees of intensity, the European Union and its values are important to and appreciated by all but one interview partner. Examples for a strong commitment come from two Austrian interviewees: One young man, who was born in the German speaking part of Italy, grew up in Germany and has lived in Austria for a long time, said, that Europe is important to him, because "we as Europeans approach topics of course from a European point of view. Today the global player is not Austria, Italy or Germany, but Europe." Another young man from Lithuania who came to Austria only some years ago is veritably enthusiastic about Europe, the European Union and democracy, because his parents never stopped believing in democracy when Lithuania still belonged to the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the interviewees have

a feeling of being European and citizens of the European Union, have knowledge about European topics, appreciate the free trade and especially the free movement in the European Union:

> "*The Schengen area is just awesome. We are already used to this, but nevertheless it is very valuable.*" (AT14)

Sometimes the interviewees are aware of their appreciation for the European Union, but not of the reasons:

> "*In general, I am very thankful that the European Union exists. I like to be here. ... Damn difficult to say. I can't answer to this ... I would like to make it more clear to myself, which matters I take for granted. I can't tell.*" (FI1)

Two thirds of the interview partners reported in the fourth interview, that the already strong European dimension had been even enhanced through the project and that they still remembered this effect. They followed up on what they said in the third interview, that they consider Erasmus+ projects ideal to gain knowledge about Europe, get to know other European countries, become motivated to go abroad for studying, working and living abroad, become more interested in foreign languages, face different realities, exchange with people from other countries and – most importantly – foster European cohesion and identity. This was reflected in many statements, some of which will be highlighted. A very strong effect was expressed by two interview partners from Austria, who took part in several Erasmus+ projects of a youth theatre, became both screenwriters and did all interviews together. They said, that there is a European dimension in all their film projects due to their Erasmus+ projects:

> "*We really heard numerous different opinions. And from these experiences, we do not only know the bigger picture, but we faced it. So, these projects were formative for us. This is of course mentioned in our pitch documents.*" (AT13)

> "*We really emotionally perceived and experienced Europe – besides the intellectual understanding. We got a strong influence from the Erasmus+ projects with regard to Europe.*" (AT12)

The next statements also demonstrate very strong project effects on becoming aware of the free movement in the Schengen area, on developing a much more differentiated view on Europe, that goes beyond a one-sided fixation on the country of origin, as well as on an emerging European identity and solidarity of the participants. Moreover, interviewees wanted to share and promote information about Europe on local level:

> "*Maybe the experiences in the project influenced a bit my view on certain topics, which were discussed there and my view on other European countries ... My contact points with European issues were the Erasmus+ projects.*" (AT14)

Some interviewees only dared to study or work abroad because of their project experience; the projects also fostered the interest of interview partners to travel and live abroad, whereas only two interview partners connected their strong gain of language skills to their decision to go to a foreign country.

> "*You get a different feeling for what Europe actually means. When you meet participants who are doing an EVS and don't come from the EU, you realise what it actually means to be able to travel freely as a European, to be able to move freely, to be able to cross a border without needing a visa and not to think: Am I allowed to do that at all?*" (DE4)

> "*Maybe it has an impact to the willingness to go abroad to work. I'm interested in the idea. I want to see more the world and do international work.*" (FI3)

> "*Even though the youth exchange only lasted one week, so much could be achieved, it strengthened the view of Europe. In the project I got insights into other countries, which made me more open to politics, to look at things more broadly and not just Germany-centred. I became aware that there is not only Germany, but also Europe. In the project, we learned not only to look at things from our own national perspective, but also to look beyond our own country to understand all the political structures.*" (DE5)

> "*Well, it increased in any way interests in other cultures. It has enriched own interests towards different cultures, habits and foods. To be more international and encouraged to travelling ... I'm more open to the idea that I could work abroad.*" (FI9)

The basis of this European dimension can be seen in the intercultural learning, which is mentioned by some interviewees: the getting to know of and a fostered interest in other cultures, the overcoming of shyness towards people from other countries, the breaking-down of prejudices and the development of understanding of and respect for these other cultures:

> "*I think it opened my eyes to different styles of living within the EU, and you got a chance to meet people to understand that it's not so different than here in Finland. You got enlightened a lot and got an important touch of internationality, which is extremely useful.*" (FI3)

> "*Through interacting with people from a different country with whom I lived together for a week, I feel that I learned how to live with people from different cultures in Europe.*" (MT3)

> "*I think that all these Erasmus projects and youth exchanges are really important. In my view, these really build European citizenship in people, and also the feeling of solidarity with Europe and with the European Union. So, I think this is extremely important for formation of civil society.*" (CZ2)

> "*But I also learned a lot about living and working together with other people, especially from other nations. That was such a big topic at the EVS. And also, how to deal with prejudices against both me and my nation, as well as prejudices that one has against others.*" (DE4)

And even an interviewee who was not that sure about the project effect, clearly saw the important function of the project:

"Yes, definitely" or "Yes, of course" was the answer of a big majority of interviewees when they were asked if they would vote in the elections of the European Parliament in June 2024. They

based this on their believe in European citizenship respectively in Europe as a space to share values and opportunities or saw voting as a civic duty, as part of their culture or as an obviousness. For only a few interviewees, the decision to vote still depended on finding a suitable candidate or party; they were rather sure to vote, but still had to inform themselves.

The interview partners were also asked if they are still in contact with people from their project, in how many projects they participated and if they led projects on their own. All in all, the answers show a strong connectedness of the interviewees with Erasmus+. About half of the interviewees were still in contact with former project comrades via social media seven to eight years after the project. About one third of the interviewees took part in several Erasmus+ projects and five interview partners in international trainings of their NGO, international sports activities or discussion events on European topics.[48] Five interviewees developed and/or guided international youth projects, two of them as full- or part-time employees; the other three stopped doing it because they had to focus on their studies or preferred a job promising financial security. One other interview partner was designing and implementing a European project within her research activities and one informed herself about funding possibilities in order to do research on how her work is done in other countries.

4.3 IMPACT OF OTHER EXPERIENCES AND EVENTS ON PARTICIPATION AND CITIZENSHIP COMPETENCE AND PRACTICE

The third specific research question refers to other experiences and events during the life course, which might have had an effect on the interviewees' participation and citizenship competence and practice.

While living, studying and working abroad are most often mentioned as a strong influence on participation competence and practice, a smaller number of interview partners refer to their involvement in other youth projects in other countries. The feeling of being European is for example fostered through being employed in an international venture. Noticeably, three Italian interview partners left their native town, because it was not possible for them to find a job. They went abroad and tried to integrate in a foreign country, but returned, because this was more difficult than expected. Back home they started to become engaged in society and realised, that this was difficult as well, because in the local environment people know each other – with limited space for anonymity – observe the engagement of others and comment on or react to it. This has an influence on such an engagement – potentially in a positive way but as well in a discouraging way, because one's engagement might be challenged and needs to be justified. This experience had an impact on their participation and citizenship competence and practice.

Another big cluster of influences on the interview partners participation and citizenship competence and practice could be titled 'politics'. It contains almost exclusively statements about started or fostered engagement as reaction to negatively perceived occurrences, for example, the corruption scandal in the European Parliament in December 2022, the conspiracy theorists doubting the democratic order of the state during the corona pandemic, the invasion of the Russian army in Ukraine or observing how former democratic states become more and more authoritarian – all this resulted in a fostered importance of values inherent to democracy and human rights.

Furthermore, there is one statement stressing the self-enforcement of one's own engagement in civil society (CZ1).

While the above-mentioned experiences and events occurred primarily after the project participation, 'experiences in the origin family' before the project participation could be the title of a further category resulting from the statements of two interview partners. The international circle of friends of her parents founded the interest in and the appreciation of Europe, its different countries and cultures of one interview partner (AT10). The negative experience of "challenges in childhood, feelings of inequality and injustices … have given the most powerful influence on my motivation to guarantee that nobody else will face the same issues." (FI11)

For one interview partner a positively perceived political decision, the freedom of movement within the Schengen area, had a motivating effect on her participation competence and practice,

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[48] One interviewee meets from time to time with other local participants; one interviewee applied for Erasmus funding for studies abroad.

although the Schengen agreement was already concluded in 1985. The importance the interviewee attributes to this occurrence – she mentioned it in all four interviews – must be seen in her origin as German speaking citizen of South Tyrol (Italy), the strong connection of her and her family to Austria and the possibility of crossing the border very easily since then.

There are also statements of some interview partners describing the relation between the project and other influences on participation and citizenship competence and practice. One interview partner sees them equally important, another one says, that the "project experiences fade against many other new experiences." (AT14)

4.4 GENERAL MEANING PARTICIPANTS ATTRIBUTE TO THEIR PROJECT

Eight interview partners described the general meaning of the project, when they were asked about their spontaneous memory of the project in general. Beyond that, all interview partners were also asked explicitly about their perception of the general meaning of the project for them. An impressive majority of the sample – 24 interviewees – described the project as an important experience, including 17 interview partners who assessed the importance equally as other influences, and 7 interview partners, who attributed a rather strong general meaning to their project. Two interviewees are not sure, if the effects are due to the project, and again two said, that the project was interesting, but had no further impact on their lives. One interview partner expressed the opinion, that the first of a series of projects was the most inspiring one (the interviewee took part in eleven projects). One interviewee expressed the opinion, that Erasmus+ Youth projects are counterproductive – this interviewee changed her opinion completely in comparison to the preceding two interviews.

The perception of a rather strong general meaning of the project is shown by the following quotations:

> "The fact that the contest [the project was designed like a contest] went well for me, and despite some things not really going well I still managed to overcome them, that is the feeling you have inside you forever, and when challenges change in the future, this feeling is still there, that you will manage." (CZ4)

> "The project ... was very important, it was extremely encouraging." (DE5)

> "The EVS has still a formative influence and shaped the personality. Many things are still present for me." (DE8)

> "It [the project] had the biggest impact on project management competences and personal development." (IT8)

> "Well, if I remember it now, we organised the whole project by ourselves, especially the welcoming of partners to Finland. Of course, I was already then active and participated in many activities ... I gained confidence that there are no limits!" (FI3)

> "But now I realise that, oh my god, how big the project which I participated in was .... A meaningful project which I remember warmly, and it's for sure one reason why I still cooperate with the supervisor of the project." (FI11)

The interview partners assessing the projects' general meaning as important express, that the project "had a lasting meaning on me" (AT2), that "you can see where that [the project] has led you years after" (AT13) or that "all these effects have become self-evidence" (FI2).

4.5 PROJECT EFFECTS ON PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND ON THE EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CAREER

Within the framework of an epistemological interest, in the fourth interview the interview partners were also asked about the meaning they attribute to their project with regard to their personal development as well as to their educational and professional career.

From the answers of almost two thirds of the interviewees could be seen, that the project had more or less an influence on their personal

development. This ranges from gaining knowledge about oneself, becoming more open, reducing fears of contact and prejudices, being encouraged to dare something to a fostered self-confidence. The interviewees talk about getting out of their comfort zone, going beyond their borders, overcoming their shyness and acquiring life competences like flexibility, decision-taking as well as awareness.

> "To some extent, I have always been open-minded, but it was reinforced by the project." (DE7)

> "I have become so confident that I feel ok if I do not agree with others and that I can stand by my own values without any problem now – due to the project." (MT1)

> "Yes, it was a kind of social rehearsal. … Social strength, it is more about personality that is important, not language skills and other stuff. (FI2)

> "I recall what it was to be a young teenager then and it gave confidence and maybe a boost to life that 'Hey, you can do many things!' I believe that many others who participated have got similar positive vibrations in their minds and gained certitude to act in their own lives." (FI3)

> "It acted as a springboard towards my personal growth." (IT2)

> "The EVS has still a formative influence and shaped the personality." (DE8)

More than half of the interviewees report, that the project participation had an effect on their decision for a certain study subject or professional field respectively that they developed skills and acquired knowledge in the project, which enabled them to do their job in a better way. Although not all interviewees answered the question, it can be stated, that at least seven of them chose an occupation in the field of youth work, teaching, developmental work or work serving public interests, because on one hand they perceived their

activity in the project as fulfilling, and on the other hand, they valued their experiences in the project so much, that they wanted to enable also other people to have these experiences. This is expressed in the following two quotations:

> "The elementary school teaching studies, that is certainly also influenced by my work in the youth centre there in France during my EVS, where I also worked with elementary school students most of the time." (DE8)

> "Because without it [the Erasmus+ projects], I would perhaps be somewhere else today [not doing developmental work for an NGO], and I am extremely glad that I stumbled upon these opportunities and used them, because I know that it gave me really a lot." (CZ2)

Some interviewees take a double-track approach like a Finnish project participant working full-time as an electrician and part-time as an assistant in the youth house (FI6), or the interviewee, who changed to her job as software developer after ten years in the youth field, but still creates a website on topics and tools about non-formal education for teachers and sees it as a way to continue to work in Erasmus+ (IT2). Another interview partner profited so much about professional orientation from Erasmus+ projects that he himself designed and implemented successfully own projects on this topic. Through doing the accounting for the project he got interested in this topic and finally decided to become an accountant to be financially secure, but never stopped to pursue the topic 'Europe', his passion, in other contexts (AT3).

At least three of the interview partners were motivated through the project to study/work abroad, in an international environment or to focus on the topic of Europe in their work. This applies to two friends who did several Erasmus+ projects in the context of a youth theatre and realised their dream to become screenwriters, although this is not easy. They always have film projects with the topic Europe; in the fourth interview they say:

> "The E+ projects influenced our understanding of European identity, our understanding of politics, and because we are political persons it influenced persistently our work." (AT12, AT13)

For another interviewee "the project and my project experiences made it easier … to go abroad to study. … Speaking foreign languages and switching between different languages was nothing new for me. That's why I did not have as many fears of contact as others." (DE5)

Two further interviewees combined the educational with the international/European aspect. One of them did her Bachelor degree in social pedagogy, wrote her thesis about international youth work and Erasmus+ programmes and works in a regional youth work centre, which organises Erasmus+ projects:

> "*It is possible that if I would not have gone there I would not have become a social pedagogist or work with international topics. I realised the meaning or impact a bit later … Hey, I have experienced it and could work with the same kind of things. It showed that I can be a meaningful adult for young people in the international field."* (FI11)

At least six interviewees profit from skills and knowledge they acquired in the project, for example project management competences, communication, intercultural and educational skills as well as knowledge about non-formal learning. Partly, the interviewees consider their learning as decisive for their work, for example an interviewee who has completed a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and who works in the field of victim support:

> "*Interpersonal skills developed due to the project have opened opportunities for me, which – had I not participated – I would not have had …."* (MT1)

Another interview partner who works as a special education teacher describes the project as

> "*… a sort of training gym to understand how to adapt tools … I learned to manage everything. I can grasp their [the students'] trust … They are nice with me, while with other teachers they get bored and they do not pay attention. I never need to capture their attention … then I realised that this was a first step I started with the project."* (IT9)

One interviewee uses "teamwork regularly in my part-time job" (MT3) and another one "learned how to communicate better with people of different cultures in my work where I deal with many foreigners. The impact of these projects was very large. I also feel that through these projects I am able to take more decisions." (MT2)

4.6 FURTHER RESULTS

4.6.1 MOTIVATION TO TAKE PART IN THE PROJECT

With two thirds, a vast majority of interview partners took part in the project because they were interested in a certain topic the project was about. The interviewees report of many different socio-political topics like global south, leadership, protection of environment, youth rights, the situation of specific groups with fewer opportunities, the work of specific NGOs or professional orientation. Several interviewees wanted to get to know different learning methods, for example non-formal learning or creative tools and approaches like theatre or graphic novel.

Half of the interviewees wanted to go abroad, get to know different European countries, gain international contacts and exchange with participants from different cultures.

The aim to work with specific groups of young people with fewer opportunities was mentioned twice, the development of one's own personality three times and the improvement of one's language skills and receiving information about jobs twice each.

Five different interviewees also mention, that the project organisers were still searching for participants, that they had heard from friends about the project (and therefore took part in the project) or that they took part, because the EVS was free of charge.

4.6.2 SPONTANEOUS MEMORY OF THE ERASMUS+ YOUTH IN ACTION PROJECT AND MEMORY OF THE RAY LTE CONFERENCE IN STRASBOURG

The encounter and exchange with participants from other countries was the most often mentioned spontaneous memory of the project in the

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49 See Bárta et al. 2021, p. 54.
50 Böhler et al 2021.

fourth interview.[49] In accordance with the main feedback in the third interview and in line with known effects of international youth projects[50], the participants appreciated to get to know the ideas of people with different cultural backgrounds and took the chance to exchange and network.

Some interviewees referred to single events during the project, which were mostly linked to emotions, for example disappointment about cancelling a programme activity or having fallen in love with another participant.

As a spontaneus memory, eight interview partners referred to the general meaning of the project, with four persons speaking about a life-changing experience, one about learning and one about an interesting, but not formative experience; one interview partner completely changed her view since the third interview and expressed a very critical attitude towards the project. Two participants mentioned the project topic, which in both cases was the topic of participation; this topic was also remembered spontaneously in the third interview.

A general comparison of the spontaneous memories in the third and fourth interview suggests the interpretation, that over time the spontaneous memories tend to refer either to single events or to the project as a whole.

The conference in May 2018 in Strasbourg took place after the second interview and aimed at discussing the preliminary findings with project participants having been interviewed twice, project leaders/team members as well as researchers and representatives of E+/YiA National Agencies involved in the RAY LTE study. 16 out of the 30 interview partners of the fourth interview had taken part in this conference. In the third[51] and fourth interview, these interviewees still remembered their experiences during the Strasbourg conference and talked about a "great" (FI9), "impressive" (FI1) or "cool" (AT10, AT14) experience, also mentioning the visit of the European Parliament, meetings with non-profit initiatives in Strasbourg and the town itself. The discussions about the preliminary findings were only remembered by a few participants spontaneously; they contributed to a better understanding of the research project

(FI11), were difficult to understand (FI1) or brought up similarities between participants from different countries – "that is when I felt a sense of being European." (MT1)

4.6.3 PERCEPTION OF NON-FORMAL LEARNING

There is strong evidence found from the RAY PART project that the non-formal methods and approaches used in the researched projects are successful in fostering participation and citizenship competence and practice[52]. Therefore, the interviewees were also asked how they benefited from the non-formal learning approach in the projects.[53] Some of the twelve interviewees answering this question learned about non-formal learning methods in the projects and all of them appreciated them and profited from them. A considerable number of the twelve interviewees also used and uses these methods in their own work.

> "It made me understand how effective ... non-formal activities are versus formal ones: you have to get your hands dirty within the activities in order to know each other. Through the games and the activities, you can understand what people are thinking specifically, what they feel ... it was useful in my work life, I used these methodologies with youngsters." (IT8)

The interviewees also mentioned some educational approaches, settings and means, which mainly triggered their learning, first of all the field of interaction between people (from different backgrounds), dialogue, communication, group work and "how to listen to others, even if they hold different beliefs." (MT3)

> "I developed social skills and assertiveness when during the project the group had to work together and find solutions to carry out the activities." (MT1)

Furthermore, encouragement and support, art work and humour/irony were mentioned.

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[51] ibid, p. 56f.
[52] Fennes, Gadinger, 2021a.
[53] Since this question was not of main interest it was not asked in all interviews.

4.6.4 NOTION OF HAVING BEEN INTER-VIEWED FOUR TIMES FOR THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Like in the third interview, the interview partners were asked in the fourth interview how it was to have been interviewed several times and – like in the third interview – all perceived the interviews as an exclusively positive experience and a majority highlighted the reflective effect of the interviews. Within the reflection on the main question on the persistency of the project effects on participation and citizenship, the interview partners became aware of the consistency and the differences between their statements in 2015/2016 and in 2023, and of how much they are engaging right now (AT14). Initially, partly sceptical interviewees understood that "Erasmus+ projects have a long-term impact which one may not realise just after the project" (MT2) and that "with the distance ... you can see where that has led you years later" (AT12).

The interviewees also expressed their appreciation for reflecting in general, because there are only "rare possibilities to reflect otherwise" (DE7). They found it interesting to compare the situation in Europe or their personal situation today with the situation eight years before. Partly, the reflection was perceived as "a tough therapy" (CZ4), which pushed them to face if one's former expectations became true, or as an "inside moment" (IT5) being overwhelmed by looking back on one's life. One interview partner had the feeling, that he "got equally as much from these interview sessions as the researchers from my answers." (FI11) Some participants found it worth supporting the interviews because they might help to improve Erasmus+ projects.

Supporting the research process, being interested in it and being part of a long-term research project were other aspects of the exclusively positive perceived interviews, which were also mentioned in the third interview. In contrary to the first interview, nobody reported to have been nervous or afraid of maybe challenging questions.[54]

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[54] See Bárta et al. 2021, p. 53ff.

5 — RECOMMENDATIONS

In the interviews one year as well as two to three years after the project, the interview partners mentioned many effects of their project participation on participation competence and practice. They also described how the learning in the projects took place, which factors were more or less beneficial, which difficulties or problems they had to face etc. On the basis of these deep and revealing insights a number of recommendations were elaborated. These recommendations were largely confirmed by the findings of the RAY PART study, which focused on the question which approaches to participation and citizenship education and learning applied in projects funded by European youth programmes were effective in developing participation and citizenship competences and practices. Furthermore, the RAY PART findings resulted in some additional recommendations[55].

The findings of the RAY LTE EXT project showed, that many of the previously mentioned learning effects were still persistent for the interviewees seven to eight years after the project and that a few interview partners became aware of project effects only after this period of time. Thus, the research provides strong evidence, that projects of European youth programmes have long-term effects on participation and citizenship competence and practice of project participants on a broad scale.

The recommendations of the RAY LTE and RAY PART projects are supported by the results of the RAY LTE EXT study and were refined against this background. They are outlined below.

Recommendations for the project level

The findings of the RAY LTE and RAY PART study indicate that participants are frequently not aware of the objectives of European youth programmes[56] related explicitly or implicitly to participation and active citizenship, even if linked to their project theme. Furthermore, younger and less educated participants often have difficulties understanding the rather abstract notion and concept of 'active citizenship' and translating it into their real lives.

Therefore, it is recommended

- to emphasise objectives related to participation and active citizenship in projects of European youth programmes;
- to communicate explicitly the concepts of 'active citizenship' and 'participation in civil society and democratic life' in a language, phrasing and terminology that is comprehensible and close to the reality of participants and project team members;
- to address explicitly topics related to participation and citizenship and to clarify the links between these topics and participation and citizenship;
- to use a variety of non-formal learning methods, providing for affective, interactive, experiential as well as cognitive learning, including periods of reflection as integral element of the methodology of European youth projects.

In the fourth interview, none of the interview partners mentioned persistent learning effects connected to the protection of the environment; in contrast, this topic was mentioned often in the second and third interview, although only one or two projects touched this topic. Maybe the focus on environmental protection in 2015 and 2018 had to do with the increasing importance of the topic for young people during the last ten, fifteen years; maybe the topic is overshadowed by the war in Ukraine, the Gaza Strip or the increasing strength of right-wing extremist movements. Since participation implies solidarity with future generations as well as with people suffering from pollution and an unfair distribution of resources, the respective recommendation is still valid and amended as follows: it is recommended

- to highlight environmental protection, sustainable development and action against climate change as topics included in European youth programmes related to participation and active citizenship.

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[55] See Fennes & Gadinger 2021a, p. 46ff.
[56] Since the foundation of the European Solidarity Corps in 2018 – as a second youth programme besides the youth chapter of Erasmus+ – the wording 'European youth programmes' was introduced within the RAY network and was already used in the RAY PART project. The term is used here, too, because the findings of the three research projects are assembled in this chapter.

Project design and implementation

The following recommendations were also derieved from both, the RAY LTE and the RAY PART project, and are supported through the RAY LTE EXT results:

- Establishing a project design and project settings that provide for encountering differences as a basis for learning through exchange and discourse.
- Linking 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.
- Using adequate non-formal education and learning methods.
- Providing time and space for informal learning.
- Providing for adequate preparation as part of the project, in particular with respect to the development of participation and citizenship competence and practice, as well as to the European dimension of the project.
- Providing adequate guidance to participants.
- Fostering participation and active citizenship by involving the hosting community.
- Providing adequate time, space and guidance for reflection, individually and in groups, of experiences and learning related to participation and active citizenship.
- Providing for adequate follow-up as part of the project, in particular to the development of participation and citizenship competence and practice, as well as to the European dimension of the project.

Programme implementation level

The recommendations for the project level outlined above imply the following recommendations for the programme implementation level:

- Promoting participation and active citizenship as project themes.
- Explicitly communicating the concepts of 'active citizenship' and 'participation in civil society and democratic life' in a language, phrasing and terminology that is comprehensible to beneficiaries, project organisers and project team members, in order to be operationalised in their projects (see above complementary recommendation for the project level).

- Giving special emphasis to promoting projects fostering participation and active citizenship of young people with fewer opportunities. This could be achieved by specifically addressing youth work actors working with young people with fewer opportunities and providing additional funding for respective activities.
- Providing adequate training opportunities for youth workers and youth leaders, including exchange of good practice, on developing and implementing projects fostering participation and citizenship competence and practice of young people in line with the findings of this research project; in this respect, it is necessary to further elaborate youth work competences, which are important for fostering participation and citizenship education and learning. This is necessary since the specific competences required to develop and implement these projects are going beyond those necessary for regular (European) youth projects, thus require specific training.
- Exploring how digital youth work formats can complement face-to-face interaction and actually create synergies between them, to develop respective methods and project designs, and to provide respective training opportunities for youth workers. While there is general agreement that online activities cannot replace face-to-face interactions in (European) youth projects, they can be very useful and effective as complementary settings for blended learning. In order to make best use of potential synergies further developments in this respect are necessary.
- Informing SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres, in particular SALTO Participation & Information, SALTO Training & Cooperation and SALTO Inclusion & Diversity, about the RAY LTE, RAY PART and RAY LTE EXT research findings and discuss possible implications for their work and projects.

Programme level

- Providing sufficient/additional funding explicitly for project elements and measures as recommended above or for new activity types.
- Reviewing the evaluation criteria for project applications in the light of the RAY LTE, RAY PART and RAY LTE EXT research findings; in particular, establishing criteria for participation and citizenship projects funded through European youth programmes, which provide

for follow-up participation and citizenship projects developed and implemented by participants of funded projects, thus contributing to the sustainability and a multiplying effect of the original projects and of the learning outcomes of participants. Ideally, this funding for follow-up activities would already be allocated as part of the grant for the initial project, to be confirmed if the follow-up project is well planned and meeting the funding criteria of the respective European youth programme. This would encourage the participants and project organisers that the project outcomes could actually be used for a future project.

Recommendations for participation and citizenship education and learning in general

- Establishing a European Agency for Citizenship education[57] and drawing on the findings of the RAY LTE, RAY PART and RAY LTE EXT research projects in order to inform the development of this Agency, in particular with respect to educational approaches, designs and methodologies to be promoted by this Agency.
- Promoting participation and citizenship education and learning as an integral element of youth work.

Recommendations for research

- Extending research on participation and citizenship education and learning to contexts outside European youth programmes and to feed the respective findings into the European youth programmes; in particular, such research should address the participation of young people with fewer opportunities in society and political life.

Recommendations for the policy level

- Promoting participation of young people in the development of European youth policies and programmes so that they reflect the needs and interests of young people. In this respect, there should be an effective dialogue between the youth field and policy makers in the European Union, in particular involving the European Parliament more intensively.
- Developing an ongoing and 'real' dialogue between policy makers and young people and youth workers at all levels (additionally to big events taking place once a year); in this respect, it is suggested to further develop the European Youth Week and link it with local participation initiatives and grass-root participation all over Europe; as for the latter, it is recommended to offer specific training to youth workers and local policy makers in order to promote this dialogue at local level.
- Reviewing European youth policies and programmes in the light of the RAY LTE, RAY PART and RAY LTE EXT research findings; furthermore, these research findings could also contribute to the development of participation and citizenship education and learning in other chapters of Erasmus+.
- Establishing policies and structures providing citizenship education and learning for young people and respective training for youth workers/youth leaders in a sustainable way. Citizenship education and learning for young people and youth workers needs stable structures in order to be available continuously and accessible across Europe.

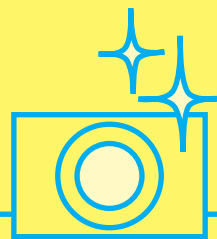[57] See https://valuesunite.eu/supporters/

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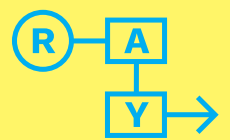
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