

Summary

The impact of Youth in Action

Dutch National Analysis of the RAY survey

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In this report, we present the results of the study into the effects of Youth in Action in the Netherlands. The Netherlands has been part of what is known as the RAY network (Research-based Analysis of Youth in Action) since 2010, a network in which various Youth in Action countries take part with the aim of monitoring the effects of Youth in Action in a uniform manner.

Study set up

The central question of this study is what impact Youth in Action has on participants, project managers and organisations. The study questions are:

- Who are the young people who participate in Youth in Action?
- What effects does Youth in Action have on participants, project leaders, organisations and communities?
- What do the results say about the degree to which the objectives of Youth in Action have been met?

Data was collected from participants as well as from project managers by means of questionnaires developed jointly by the RAY countries. The questionnaires were posted on the Internet centrally at two times by RAY team at the University of Innsbruck. The collected data pertains to projects that were completed between 1 January 2010 and 30 April 2011. Table 1 provides the response figures.

Table 1. Response to questionnaires

Respondent group	Number of questionnaires sent	Number of people reached	Number of completed questionnaires	Response percentage
Participants	967	916	299	32.6%
Project leaders	426	394	97	24.6%

Participants

There are 264 participants who took part in projects that were financed by the Dutch agency. Of those, 77 participants (29%) were Dutch. Most of the participants (85%) took part in a project that was conducted in the Netherlands. Table 2 shows which type of actions participants took part in. The most commonly occurring activities were youth exchanges. Other characteristics of the participants are discussed in the replies to the first question.

Table 2. Type of actions (N=264)

Action	Number of participants	Percentage
Youth exchange (1.1/3.1)	131	50%
Youth initiative (1.2)	29	11%
Democracy project (1.3)	9	3%
European volunteer work (EVS; 2.1)	38	14%
Training & networking (3.1/4.3)	57	22%

Project leaders

There were 89 project leaders who directed a project that was financed by the Dutch agency. About three-quarters of the project leaders (74%) came from the Netherlands. Most project leaders (71%) led a project that took place in the Netherlands. Table 3 shows what type of actions they were project leaders for.

Table 3. Type actions (N=89)

Action	Number of participants	Percentage
Youth exchange (1.1/3.1)	45	51%
Youth initiative (1.2)	10	11%
Democracy project (1.3)	2	2%
European volunteer work (EVS; 2.1)	15	17%
Training & networking (3.1/4.3)	17	19%

Forty-four per cent of the project leaders were women and 56% men. They were well-educated: 91% had at least an HBO (higher professional education) education or comparable background. Most of the project leaders (61%) were involved in the project as volunteers. Twenty project leaders self-reported being part of a cultural, ethnic, religious or linguistic minority (23%).

Participation, Youthpass and Structured Dialogue

Among both the participants and the project leaders, the largest group was comprised of people who became involved in the project through a youth group or youth organisation. For most of the participants, the motivation to participate had to do with a specific interest in the topic of exchange, meeting new people or intercultural learning.

Almost half of the participants had a Youthpass. According to the project leaders, more than half had a Youthpass. Over half of the project leaders found the Youthpass to be broadly integrated into the project. The participants were somewhat less familiar with what is known as the “Structured Dialogue”. Only 45 (17%) of the participants had heard of the Structured Dialogue. A little more than half of them, 24 participants (9% of the total group), had experience with Structured Dialogue.

Answers to research questions

Who are the young people who take part in Youth in Action?

A large part of the young people who participate in a Youth in Action project financed by the Netherlands are not from the Netherlands. Only 29% of the respondents come from the Netherlands. Although the participants are predominantly young, there are some older people taking part in the programme. The age varies from 14 to 57 years and the average age is 22. A few more women participate in the programme than do men.

Judging from the data provided by the participants, there do not seem to be many “disadvantaged youth” taking part in Youth in Action. In general, the participants are well-educated, many are current or former HBO (higher professional education) or university students. There is a small group

of participants (10%) who are part of a cultural, ethnic, religious or linguistic minority. A larger group (42%) report being faced with obstacles to access to education, work, active societal participation and/or political freedom or freedom of movement. This seems to involve students who obviously have fewer resources, i.e. money, at their disposal.

The project leaders present a different picture of the participants, specifically that there are indeed disadvantage youth who are being reached. Approximately 60% of the project leaders has led a project in which disadvantaged youth were involved. In about 30% of the projects, over half of the group consisted of disadvantaged youth.

What effects does Youth in Action have on participants, project leaders, organisations and communities?

The results clearly demonstrate that participation in Youth in Action impacts multiple areas for participants, project leaders as well as organisations.

The participants are very satisfied with their project. No less than 96% of the participants would recommend participation in a similar project to others. Participation has an effect on the behaviour and attitude of the participants:

- Nearly half of the participants had a greater interest in European issues after completion. Participants learned new things about Europe, and their European awareness was expanded.
- The programme also affected the personal development and educational and career plans of the participants.
- Approximately half of the participants can cope better with new situations and a just under half developed greater self-confidence thanks to the project. Otherwise, approximately half is definitely planning to expand their knowledge of language and/or to go abroad for a more extended period.
- Two-thirds of the participants believes their employment opportunities have improved.
- In addition, the project contributed toward the development of different skills, especially being able to communicate in foreign languages, and toward interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic skills, such as cooperating.

The project leaders evaluated the effects on the participants roughly equivalent as did the participants themselves.

The results show that the projects not only affect the participants, but also the project leaders. Over half feel better prepared to study, work or live in a different country, and somewhat more than half believes their employment opportunities have improved. The European awareness of the project leaders has also been enhanced. Other effects on project leaders were not examined.

Finally, the Youth in Action programme also had an effect on the organisations that were involved in the project and the environment in which the projects took place. Project leaders and participants agree that the project yields greater contacts/partnerships with other countries for their organisation. The project leaders estimate that the communities involved perceive the project to be an enrichment and report that the communities are receptive to comparable projects in the future.

What do the results say about the extent to which the objectives of Youth in Action have been achieved?

The general objectives of the Youth in Action programme are:

- to stimulate participation and active “European citizenry” among young people;
- to develop solidarity among young people, mainly aimed at handling diversity and promoting social cohesion in the European Union;
- to improve the quality of the support structure for youth activities and the possibilities of social youth organisations;
- to encourage European cooperation when it comes to youth policy, and
- to involve vulnerable youth.

Based on the results of the study, it seems that most of the objectives of Youth in Action have been achieved. The results clearly show that youth are encouraged to participate and become active “European citizens”. Young people come into contact with other cultures and learn to work together with people from other cultures. A portion of the participants are more active participants in social and/or political life after completion. In addition, knowledge of Europe was increased for many participants; many participants are more interested in European issues and the European consciousness of many participants was expanded.

The participants develop their interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic skills during the project. Among the lessons learned is how to work together in a team and get along with people with a different cultural background than their own. The project also made them more receptive to the multiculturalism of Europe and they feel more involved with people who come from a disadvantaged situation. These results suggest that the second objective stated above was achieved.

As for the third objective, a significant outcome is that the projects contributed to the expansion of networking and the focus of the organisations involved. Organisations expanded their network (internationally) thanks to involvement in the project and found certain topics to be more important such as cultural diversity and inclusion of youth who have fewer opportunities, increasing their prospects. The increased contacts/partnerships also indicate that there is greater European cooperation in work with youth and exchange of knowledge in the area of youth policy.

Whether the last objective is being achieved is still up for debate. Judging from the data reported by the young people themselves, it seems only a limited number of vulnerable youth take part in the projects. The project leaders state however that there are indeed disadvantaged youth participating. The fact is that most participants are attending higher education or have completed it (higher professional education or university), suggesting that it can be assumed that vulnerable youth are being reached to only a limited degree. This applies in any case to the participants who completed the questionnaires. It is possible that the study presents a distorted picture because vulnerable youth may be less inclined to complete the questionnaire.

Discussion

The results clearly demonstrate, as stated above, that the Youth in Action programme has effects in various areas. The effects described mainly pertain to the attitude/consciousness/involvement of young people. Whether these effects also lead to different behaviour, namely participation and active "European citizenship" cannot be conclusively stated based on this survey. A follow-up assessment could provide insight into the extent to which there is a change in behaviour and a lasting change in attitude. It is clear that participants are indeed stimulated by the programme to participate more and more actively in society.

Some caveats should be made about the study. First of all, this report uses the term "effects" throughout. That implies that changes can be ascribed to the Youth in Action programme. However, the possibility cannot be ruled out that changes can be attributed in part to something else, such as studies someone is following at the same time. The performance of a qualitative study, for example using interviews as were conducted in Germany, may yield greater insights into how Youth in Action impacts participants and into other factors that influence a change in attitude and behaviour. Also, changes have not been determined objectively: the participants evaluated themselves afterwards. There is no information from the situation before the project. Participants who reflect positively on the project will tend to agree with the statement for many questions or agree that a certain development or change in attitude applies. It is true that the project leaders and participants present the same picture so the picture is probably reasonably reliable.

Finally, it is not known whether the group of respondents is an accurate reflection of the total group of participants and project leaders and so whether the results are representative for Youth in Action. The results cannot be automatically generalised for Dutch participants, because only a minority of the participants are of Dutch origin. It is evident from a comparison with the reports from a number of other RAY countries that the results are largely similar. So it is plausible that the results from this study present a reasonably reliable picture of Youth in Action and that these results also apply to Dutch participants.

Even if there are some caveats to be stated for the study, the results of the study offer adequate grounds to support the conclusion that Youth in Action has a big impact on participants and project leaders as well as on the organisations and communities involved and has added value.