

Under Scrutiny

Report on the fourth phase of the scientific monitoring of YOUTH IN ACTION in Germany – Summary

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Bonn and Munich, August 2013

Unter der Lupe (Under Scrutiny) is a project carried out jointly by IKAB e.V. Bonn, the Research Group Youth and Europe at the CAP in Munich and JUGEND für Europa – the German Agency for the EU programme YOUTH IN ACTION. *Unter der Lupe* (Under Scrutiny) is part of RAY (Research based Analysis of Youth in Action)



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Under Scrutiny 2012

1. Introduction

The European study RAY – Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of the YOUTH IN ACTION Programme (YIA) – has been carried out in Germany since 2009 by the project known as *Unter der Lupe*, or Under Scrutiny. This is a cooperation between YOUTH for Europe – the German Agency for the EU programme YOUTH IN ACTION, IKAB e.V – Institute for Applied Communication Research in Non-Formal Education in Bonn – and the Research Group Youth and Europe (FGJE) at the CAP at Ludwig Maximilian University Munich. Under Scrutiny is supervised by the working group Monitoring and Evaluation of the National Advisory Board for YIA at the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ).

Alongside analyses of quantitative data from the online survey, qualitative interviews have been the focus of the German study since 2009. By collating all generated data, plausible interpretations and explanations of the effects and impacts of the YOUTH IN ACTION programme are possible. CAP is responsible for examining the effects of the YIA programme on the young participants and their perception of the programme. The IKAB documents first and foremost the views of organisational structures on educational and youth policy and their assessment of administrative and financial conditions.

The key focus of the 2012 RAY study was non-formal learning. Complex questions and an input matrix were developed for this purpose, however these were very critically assessed by interviewed youth work organisations, project leaders and young persons in Germany and in some cases considered too demanding. The Under Scrutiny 2012 survey consequently uses the quantitative data from the online survey only as a starting point and a trend in recent years, concentrating instead on the outcome of the qualitative interviews.

In principle, the results of 2012 endorse the previous year's trend with high correlations in all important questions on programme objectives, impacts and effects and positive experiences with non-formal learning.

The statements of participants as well as responsible organisations and project leaders corroborate each other in this respect. However, there is an increase in critical comments from organisations on the structural and financial conditions in international youth work in Germany, conditions that have to exist to actually make qualitative and successful youth work possible on a long-term basis.

2. Results: project participants (PP)

The quantitative data upon which the study is based relates to young people between the ages of 13 and 30 years living in Germany, who participated in an activity funded by the YIA programme in the period between September 2011 and August 2012. With a response rate of 34.5% to the online survey, 509 questionnaires were used in the evaluation. Additionally, 9 group interviews and one one-to-one interview with a total of 48 participants from all activities were conducted in the period April-July 2013. The qualitative survey was carried out according to the empirical method of semi-open, standardised and guided interviews. The focus was on questions about the impact of and learning experiences in the context of non-formal learning. The group interviews with participants were tape recorded, transcribed in anonymous form and the key statements were summarized.

The 2012 study endorses the previous results of positive learning experiences in the YOUTH IN ACTION projects. Alongside non-formal learning, informal forms of learning play an important role for young people. As was the case in previous years, participants' evaluations indicate that such learning forms clearly support personality development. As a result of positive experiences, 87% of young persons have already recommended the programme to other young people, and 80% said they would take part in a similar project again.

The RAY online questionnaire ascertains the impact of the YIA programme by asking targeted questions on eight key competences for lifelong learning. In the qualitative group interviews, in-depth information was collected about the methods and effectiveness of the respective projects. Respondents considered the development of social and intercultural competences, the promotion of personal initiative and social commitment as well as the improvement of foreign language skills to be especially important.

In response to the question about how learning experience was gained, the young participants cited numerous exercises, games and methods across all activities in the questionnaire which were part of the project in which they participated. Depending on the activity focus, certain methods were used more often than others. According to the more cognitive orientation of projects relating to participatory democracy and structured dialogue, presentations, lectures and discussions dominated, as did reflection either individually or in groups. In youth meetings, on the other hand, more artistic methods, explorations and outdoor or sporting activities were employed. In the case of the youth initiatives, however, experimentation with things learnt during the project was quoted with above-average frequency.

In the interviews, the young respondents described in detail which conditions, settings and educational approaches are critical for successful learning in the projects and what makes non-formal learning so special to them. The young participants consider it important that they take part in the projects voluntarily, are actively included in the organisation and execution of projects and that they gain experiences in groups and during encounters with other young people.

As a result of direct experience and involvement in a project, contents and contexts become clear to the participants and they understand their practical relevance, something that is not always possible in formal learning. Learning objectives are perceived in a less abstract and theoretical way, but are experienced subjectively and are therefore internalised more effectively. Activating approaches, action-based methods and peer group learning characterise the projects and enable young people to actually take part in activities, gain intercultural experiences and thus acquire the knowledge and skills that strengthen active citizenship in Europe. Real experiences on the ground with authentic settings and persons broaden young people's horizons, make them receptive to new learning experiences and allow them to develop their competencies, skills and capabilities.

3. Results: responsible organisations / project leaders (PL)

The focus of last November's questionnaire survey (response rate comparable to that of previous years: 41.4% = 398 responses from 961 submissions) was also non-formal forms of learning in and through YIA projects for project leaders; interviews with them consequently

had the same focus. The assessment of the quantitative data from questions which were identical with those in the previous year's survey confirm the positive evaluations of both participants and project leaders themselves regarding the impact and effects of participation in YIA projects.

An assessment of additional learning-related questions from the November survey, especially the complex input matrices, was renounced as a result of obvious methodical artefacts – too many essentially impossible combinations of situations and competences with high percentages which may be attributable to project leaders being unable to make well-considered judgements.

Responsible organisations / project leaders were selected for the interviews as follows: the National Agency JUGEND für Europa was asked to propose organisations that had a long track record in organising very good projects. All programme activities also had to be considered. This was based on the assumption that meta-reflective discussions would then be probable. IKAB made a selection on the basis of these proposals which is not known to the National Agency. The anonymity of all data also applies to this report.

Eight interviews were conducted as guided interviews with experts. To enable them to prepare for the interviews, the experts were sent an overview of particularly interesting questions:

- a) Overview of organisational structure, experiences with European / international youth work projects; position in the respective supporting institution and role in projects.
- b) Project-related aspects: inclusion of young persons with special needs; social and education policy objectives of the organisations responsible for European / international youth work; genesis of projects and recruitment of participants; work in a team.
- c) What do participants learn through YIA from the perspective of the project leaders, what in their own opinion do they learn themselves – effects / learning success (key competencies); subject Europe.
- d) Methodical-didactical approaches for successful learning in YIA projects; views on the recognition of non-formal learning and European youth work in particular.

All interviews took place in a very open atmosphere with well-prepared partners. The talks were described as interesting and stimulating and also as an appreciation of the international / European work of the responsible organisations.

Here are some figures from the November 2012 survey on the profile of project leaders / responsible organisations:

Almost 79% of project leaders have an academic qualification that qualifies them generally for educational work in the youth sector. Around two thirds are aged between 21 and 40, the ratio of women to men is balanced as in previous years (rounded 51% to 49%). Around 74% work in non-profit / non-government organisations and associations. Some 16% work for municipal organisations and the remaining 10% work in or with informal groups. This division has remained relatively stable over the past few years.

A critical eye still needs to be kept on what is obviously a continuing decrease in the number of employed workers in YIA projects and increase in volunteers. The number of volunteers has risen from 44% to 49% compared to the previous year. By contrast, the proportion of full-time employees stagnated at around 32% and the number of part-time workers dropped from 23.5% to around 19%. The shortage of structurally secured human resources as a result of lack of funding for personnel costs is also reflected in the fact that staff are having to take on more and more organisational duties:

Only around 16% still work in a primarily educational capacity and around 20% are entrusted with mostly organisational tasks. The staffing situation of responsible organisations also played a role in the interviews in terms of the quality of educational work and the conditions needed for successful learning in and through YIA projects.

Selected results from the spring 2013 interviews:

Organisations that carry out projects with the YOUTH IN ACTION programme (and other funding programmes) continually and on a larger scale also indicate that they see no alternative to European and international youth work both as a part of their self-conception and in their social and educational principles. As a rule, they regard their work as intercultural political education with broad-ranging focuses that aim to empower young people to gain relevant everyday experience that helps them see Europe as a place to live and work. Youth participation, sustainable peace, global solidarity, commitment to human rights and inclusion are the most important keywords in this context. Work in and with YIA

was frequently cited as being the decisive factor for the intercultural openness of the respective organisational structure with the result that the specific culture of the organisation gained a noticeable European dimension.

An increase in specialist knowledge and positive changes in attitude towards the European Union in and through YIA projects are usually less important to the organisations responsible for political education than raising an awareness of European citizenship through intercultural exchange and living and working together under one roof. The effects and impact of informal encounters are considered to be no less significant than those that can be initiated by thematically structured non-formal learning situations – what is ultimately at stake is the development and promotion of mutual respect and appreciation.

As a rule, YIA projects are designed as open opportunities that are available to everyone. Young people with special needs are explicitly targeted and if possible included. The high participation rate of disadvantaged young persons of 50%+ that has been documented in the questionnaire surveys for many years is not verified again in this round of interviews – in retrospect, a rate of a maximum of one fourth of all participants seems plausible.

This is why there is a need for action and discussion of the following theory, which is based on the results of these interviews: the question as to whether or not young people with special needs are included in YIA projects is determined above all by the financial capacities of an organisation.

Organisations with a focus on European / international youth work / intercultural political education are well networked on a European level. These networks generate new ideas and concrete projects which are jointly prepared and implemented. The recruitment of participants is also usually carried out by the partners. The persons responsible for a project have only a limited influence on how well individual groups are prepared for a project and how actively involved young people are in the preparation process. There is consequently a general consensus that the continuity of partnerships and sufficient numbers of full-time staff who are responsible for this area of work are key to the quality of projects and thus to the sustainable effects and impacts on participants.

The following conclusion from last year's report is still applicable this year: YOUTH IN ACTION projects demonstrate in all programme activities that they have a direct positive influence on the development of key competences, above all on social, personal, foreign

language and intercultural competencies. In this respect, YIA projects at least indirectly provide an impetus for an improvement in the professional career development and employability of many young people." The organisations / project leaders can verify this statement to varying degrees (depending on activity), but as in previous years all respondents refer to the applied evaluation procedure during the projects and their feedback sources (former participants and network partners) for ex-post assessments of effects and impacts of a project on participants. Even if this procedure can never produce statements that are valid for all participants – "the sum total of individual cases over the years also speaks for itself".

Thanks to the specific selection of interviewed organisations / project leaders, as described above, the interviews produced concurring statements in tendency – if not in formulation – with regard to assessments of the opportunities of non-formal learning and conditions for the successful learning of participants. These correspond to the standards of non-formal political education which are largely based on consensus in the Federal Republic of Germany despite the "educators' dispute" in the 70s and 80s.

4. Conclusion

- Even if a lot happens in each project and participants always learn something: sustainable intercultural learning does not occur automatically, it requires specific learning situations – including informal settings – as well as the reflection of the respective experiences by the participants themselves. The extent to which these reflections have to be facilitated should be decided according to the participant's premises and conditions.
- The respectful treatment of participants motivates them to participate actively in a project and makes them receptive to new learning experiences. A learning environment has to be created which inspires confidence and in which participants can engage themselves. This requires qualified staff who takes participants seriously in terms of their needs and what they can contribute to a project, and who treat them as equals. This subject and resource-oriented approach is an important element of non-formal education.

- Interactive and participatory methods are considered to be most effective forms of non-formal learning because they differ significantly from those usually applied in formal education. This means that non-formal education can correct or at least relativize negative experience; especially those made in schools, and provide new motivation and learning impulses.
- The more active young people are allowed to be, the greater their willingness to commit to and become involved in society and politics. Preoccupation with project content also reinforces their interest in social issues. Young people want to be active themselves and be part of a lively citizenship.
- As a result of a conscious preoccupation with project content, concerns and developments, personal objectives and their implementation, possible grievances and challenges, the young people get to know themselves and their learning progress in the projects better. "Learning about others and learning about themselves – this is the quintessence of successful non-formal learning through international youth work".