YOUTH & URBAN PLANNING

Research of youngsters across 6 countries

Asociacija "Aktyvus jaunimas"

info@activeyouth.lt

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The research on youth involvement and willingness to get involved to urban planning decisions was carried out in Lithuania, France, Sweden, Cyprus, Italy and Spain. It is as a part of a wider project (funded by Erasmus+), dubbed "Project Your City" (acronym: PYC). PYC is a structural dialogue or a meeting between youth and policy makers, which is going to take place in Kaunas, Lithuania in the end of February, 2017. The goal of the research was two-fold:

1. *to further identify the needs of youngsters with regards to urban planning (i.e. making city spaces open-minded);*
2. *select the most motivated participants for the dialogue (project action) and provide them with task-related support.*

In this publication, we are going to provide: i) summary of the research; ii) its framework; iii) overview of any existing research on the subject; iv) examples of youth involvement in urban planning in Europe thus far; and v) key results and recommendations of the research.

First, however, the summary/key details of PYC and its project action is provided. This will help the reader to better acquaint him/herself with the objectives of the research.

*Please note that all the information/content/material within this publication is a sole of responsibility of its authors and **not of** Erasmus+ or European Commission.*

SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT

- The project is about higher youth involvement in the planning of relevant city spaces (read summary below)
- **Working language:** English; **framework:** Erasmus+ Key Action 3;
- The structured dialogue between youth and policy makers is going to take place in Kaunas, Lithuania;
- **Duration:** 8 days (from the 22nd of February to 1st of March, 2017) + 2 travel days;
- **Participating countries:** Lithuania, Spain, Italy, France, Sweden, Cyprus
- **Total number of participants:** 6x6 = 36 youngsters (aged 18-30) + 6 decision makers
- **Policy makers:** locals (from the municipality) +1 from each of the partner countries (working in local municipalities or similar institution (field of youth or urban planning, etc.)).

However, the project starts well before the actual meeting (total duration: 9 months (starting from 1-Jan-17)).

At first, the organisers will carry out research across the participating countries. The goals here are two-fold: i) to further identify the needs of youngsters with regards to urban planning (i.e. making city spaces open-minded); and ii) select the most motivated participants for the dialogue and provide them with task-related support.

After the meeting, results dissemination and continuation phase will follow. Timeline of the project can be seen below:

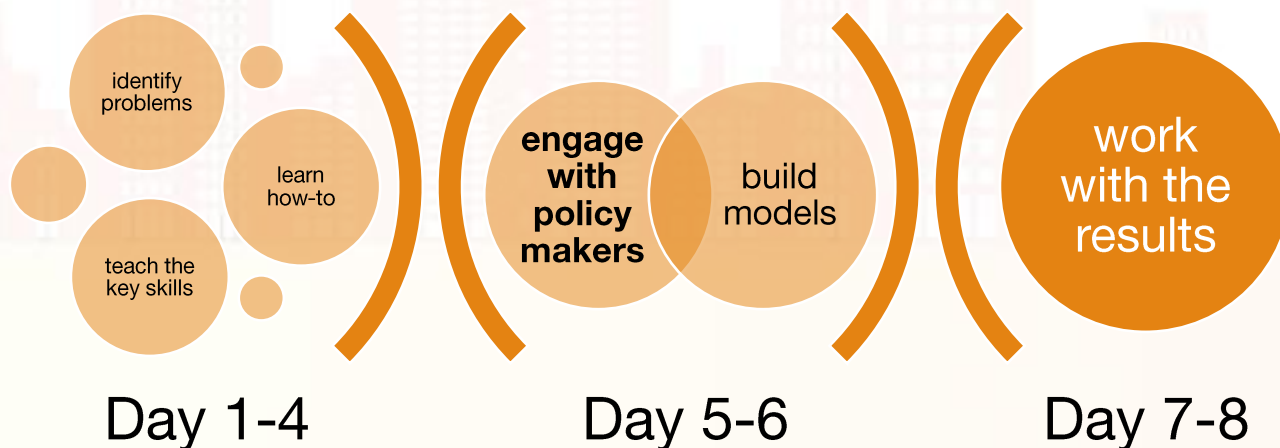| 01.01-20.02: Participants' homework | Research & report | Selection & preparation | Informing the decision-makers |
| 22.02-01.03: Action | Preparation | Meeting | Closure |
| 03.03-30.09: Post-project | Sharing the results | Info events in the partner countries | Continuation |

OBJECTIVES

Globally, more and more people live in urban areas. The question we are facing is: whether modern cities are ready for increasing diversity and what they should do to become more friendly to youth and other sensible groups. Another issue is that urban planners and policy makers tend to implement changes without consultations with local communities. Therefore, PYC aims to: 1) generate new ideas on how to have more friendly and peaceful city spaces; and 2) support youth involvement when taking planning decisions (through a reform in policy).

To reach that, the following OBJECTIVES have been set: (1) to **identify** the modern city challenges and to learn about good practices in tackling these; (2) **create** new ideas for making city spaces more open-minded, and share those with the relevant decision makers; (3) to **encourage** young people to be more engaged in decision making; (4) to **push** for a change in policy, wherein youth would have to be consulted when planning public spaces; (5) to **promote** the project's

identify problems

learn how-to

teach the key skills

engage with policy makers

build models

work with the results

Day 1-4   Day 5-6   Day 7-8

idea to wider audiences. Thus, the meeting (project action of PYC) will have the following structure:

To sum up, the project is anticipated to not only help the participating youth to enhance their skills and get involved in decision making, but to also facilitate a bigger regard to youth opinion in all the participating countries; thus, creating long-term benefits. It is expected that a positive change will be induced through the prepared resources/activities. All in all, we aspire to make the project's results as tangible as possible.

Erasmus+ | Kaunas | Feb 22 - Mar 1

Project Your City

Figure 1: logo of the project

RESEARCH

BRIEFING

In this publication, we are going to provide: i) sample & summary of the research; ii) its framework & existing research; iii) examples of youth involvement in urban planning thus far; and iv) key results and recommendations of the research.

SAMPLE

First, the sample of the research must be introduced and analysed:

In total: 194 youngsters have taken part. It is true however, that 143 (or a clear majority) of them were from Lithuania[1]. While the remainder was coming from France, Sweden, Italy, Spain & Cyprus. For that reason, we are going to divide our sample as following: Lithuanians and non-Lithuanians.

Looking at ages of the participants, the picture is somewhat less homogenous. There were four different groups in the survey: 1) under 18s, 2) 18 to 24s, 3) 25 to 30s and 4) over 30s. The division was as following:
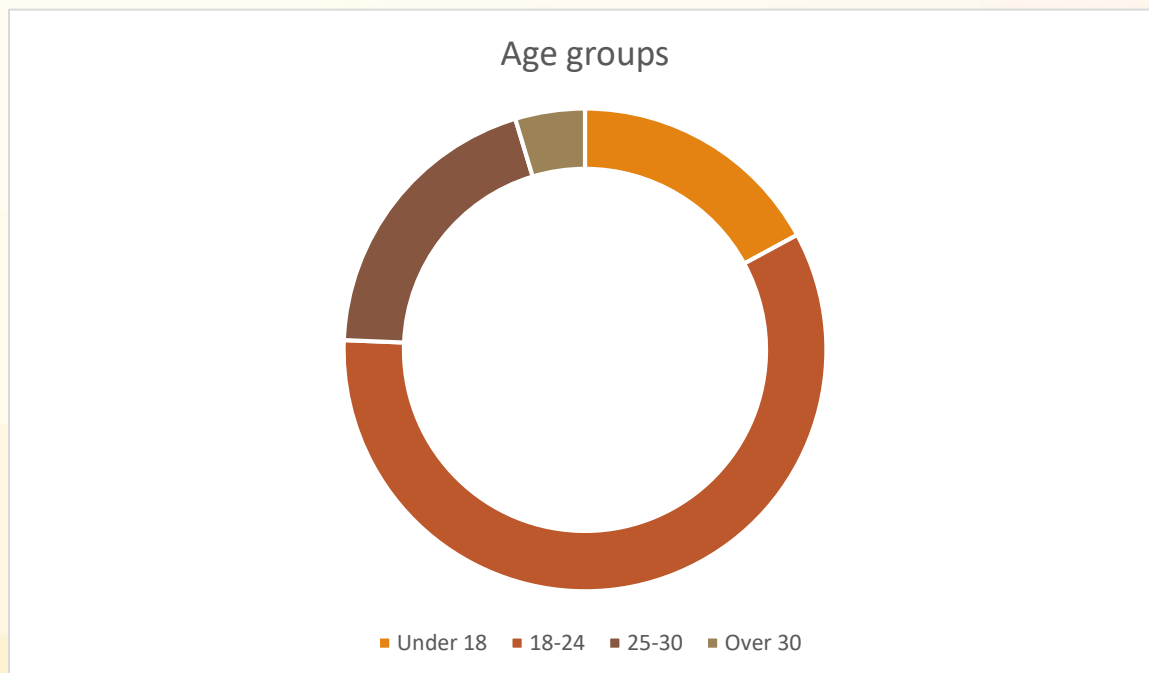

Such composition was to be expected, as youngsters aged 18-24 are usually students. This group is not only the most active when it comes to Erasmus+ projects of all kinds (Key Action 1s (KA1) and KA3s), but also is keen on participating

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[1] This can be explained by the fact that the coordinating organisation is Lithuania-based and, thus, it was able to dedicate more resources to the survey.

in various surveys. Other groups were much less represented. For that reason and for the sake of simplicity, further in the research we are going to look at the first two groups as one (under 24s) and the last two groups as one (over 25s).

Looking at the sexes of the participants, the results are similarly skewed: there were 71.65% of female participants as opposed to just 28.35% of males. As usually observed by organisations active in Erasmus+, there are much more females willing to take part in any kind of activities or project actions. Hence the survey sample is in line with that. *Please note that this research is not looking into reasons behind this trend.*

Lastly, part-takers were differentiated by the area they live-in. Three types of answers were allowed: 1) urban (city / town); 2) suburban (outskirts of cities/towns); 3) rural (small towns/villages). The division was as following:

AREA OF LIVING

■ Urban ■ Suburban ■ Rural

52% — 30% — 18%
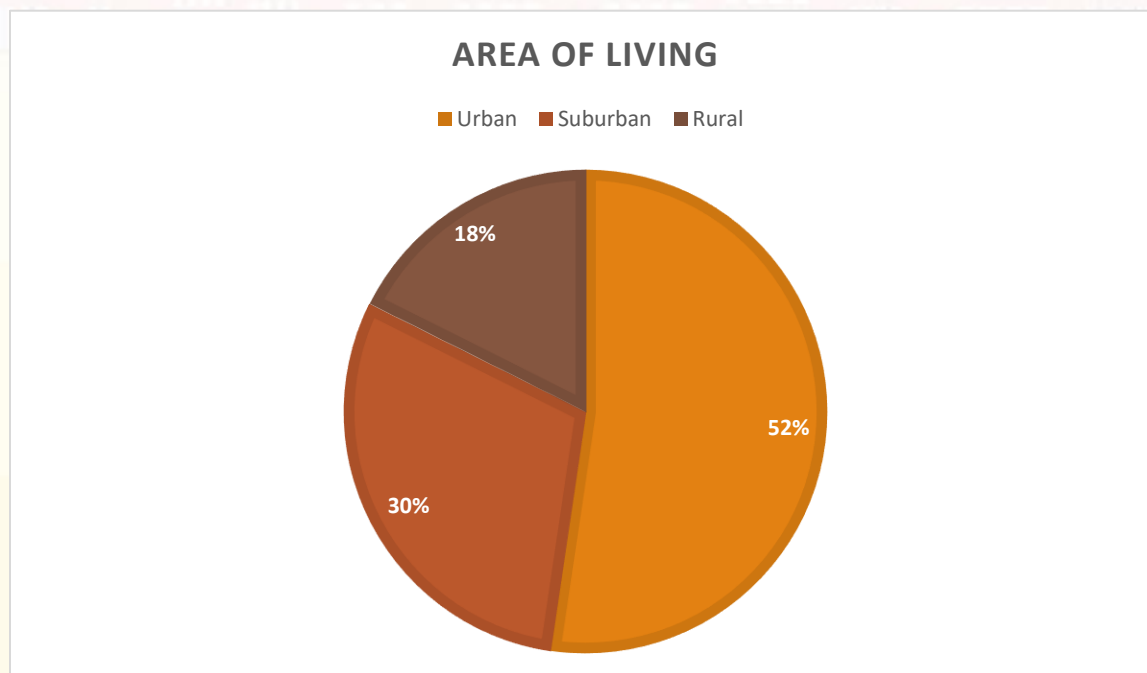
As one can see the biggest share was of youngsters living in urban areas (in line with the general statistical trend). Since, denizens of rural and suburban areas are much less in numbers in the survey, further they will be considered as one grouping (non-urban).

To conclude, the sample is somewhat skewed and doesn't not represent the general population. However, it is still useful to explore and gather the insights. Median participant of the questionnaire could be described as: Lithuanian female aged 18 to 24 living in an urban area.

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH

In short, the research has indicated the following (findings in detail are presented in the

Key results section below):

Youngsters mostly would like open youth centres (desirability: 75.39%) and infrastructure for biking (73.44%) in their neighbourhoods / areas of living. While, shopping zones (desirability: 41.88%) and skate parks (desirability: 44.27%) are of the least preference.

Most of the participants of the survey have never been consulted / has never heard of anyone being consulted by policy makers regarding urban / community planning. Their share was: 82.38%

Looking at the possible of communication with policy makers, the young participants had clear preferences. They have stated that the most desirable way to get involved in decision making, is when politicians (or urban planners) visit their schools/youth centres and discuss the plans. Such interaction received 71.49% desirability, whereas going to the city hall or similar institution was the least desirable option (58.84%).

Lastly, the participants have self-graded their readiness to help city/community planners in such consultations. The average grade given was 3.67 out of maximum 5 (when considering the required competences/knowledge).

FRAMEWORK

Survey was designed to identify the needs of youngsters with regards to urban planning (i.e. making city spaces open-minded). It was shared through social networks of partner organisations, as well as sent to the youngsters directly via emailing lists of said organisations (see **Acknowledgements**). The questionnaire was translated into three languages: English, French and Lithuanian.

Firstly, the participants of the questionnaire were asked to give in the following personal details: 1) their age; 2) country of residence; and 3) living area (with three different answers: city (central area); outskirts of a city; rural area (village / small town)).

These were aimed to help us differentiate between different groups in the subject-related questions, which may be seen below.

In short, the survey questions were asking about the desirability of certain public spaces in the neighbourhood/area of residence. Then it moved on to ask whether the youngsters were ever consulted by politicians/city-planners with regards to relevant city spaces nearby. If so, the follow-up question was to describe such consultations.

The second part of the questionnaire was asking about participation in decision making. I.e. which way of communication with policy makers would be the most desirable for youth. The next question went on about youngsters' readiness to take part in decision making (they were asked to self-grade themselves on the subject). This was followed-up with a question on what preparations/competences does the participant see as necessary for such involvement.

4. **How desirable are the following city spaces for youngsters in your neighbourhood/area?**
Mark only one oval per row.

	Not desirable	Desirable	Very desirable
Plaza/square (open space)	◯	◯	◯
Basketball court / football pitch / playground	◯	◯	◯
Biking lanes	◯	◯	◯
Shopping mall	◯	◯	◯
Cafes/bars	◯	◯	◯
Skatepark	◯	◯	◯
Park	◯	◯	◯
Open youth centre	◯	◯	◯

5. **Have you ever been consulted by city-planners about urban space(s) for youngsters?**
Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ No, but I have heard that other youngsters were consulted

6. **(If applicable) could you briefly tell how did this consulting process look like?**

_____

Participation in decision making

We intend to promote youth participation in city planning through our project. This means that your answers are going to be a part of the proposition for certain policy changes across the EU.

7. **If decision makers / city-planners were to consult you (through your youth organisation / school), what do you think is the best way?**
Only one response per column! I.e. least desirable can only be one of the options.
Mark only one oval per row.

	Least desirable (select only once)	More desirable (select only once)	Most desirable (select only once)	Not so desirable (select only once)
Visit to your youth organisation / centre or school	◯	◯	◯	◯
Communication online (surveys / emailing)	◯	◯	◯	◯
Open competitions to desing/plan urban space	◯	◯	◯	◯
Invitation to municipality / city hall for discussions	◯	◯	◯	◯

8. **How well prepared would you be to help city planners in such consultations?**
Grade your own knowledge in what city spaces are needed for youth (and what should be done) in your area.
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not prepared at all	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Fully prepared

9. **What preparations/competences do you think should be needed?**
Tick all that apply.

☐ How to communicate with decision makers / city planners

☐ How does urban planning process look like

☐ What should be taken into account (what is necessary) when planning city spaces

☐ Other:

Existing research:

Urban Millennials Survey gets at the pulse of urban youth globally. Now in its third year the Survey is bigger and deeper than ever. Back in 2014, it was used to answer a simple question: what is important to youth about their city? In 2015 a performance dimension was added to help establish a city's strengths and weaknesses according to Millennials.

For 2016 the Survey reveals a more comprehensive view of the big issues youth want cities to focus on. It showcases the benefits of cities being youthful and it highlights a looming youth retention problem cities may face. Young people 15-34 were asked about how they see their cities and their municipal governments. This report also offers a unique perspective on the lives of urban Millennials - from work to play and in between. Website: http://www.youthfulcities.com/

Figure 2: important factors, that were considered by Youth Millennials Survey of 2016

EXAMPLES

The research had a review of literature and found many youth involvement (in urban or community planning) examples across Europe, United States and beyond. These examples show that giving some degree of responsibility to the young is getting more common. Furthermore, such interaction is sought by policy makers themselves, who report the following benefits (quote from California Centre for Civic Participation and Youth Development):

1. **New ideas and perspectives:** youth provide adults with ideas and perspectives that otherwise might not be considered. Public policies – particularly those affecting teens – become stronger and more on-target when youth are consulted. Whether considering local issues, the implementation of government programs, or other community priorities, youth bring different insights and viewpoints. Thus, policymaking becomes stronger & more reflective of community needs. Bottom line: Policies or community plans should never be set without consulting the populations affected – including youth.
2. **Strenghtened public support for porposed policies:** When any citizens, including youth, are involved in setting new policies, the likelihood increases that the public will support those policies. The more open and inclusive the process, the more trust people will have in the outcomes.
3. **Generational barriers brought down:** When youth and adults work together constructively, existing fears and stereotypes about one another break down, producing benefits for both parties.
4. **Improved civic participation by local adults:** Youth who participate in policymaking become role models for adults. By including youth, you encourage other segments of the community – including relatives and neighbors – to get interested and active.
5. **Inspiration:** Youth concerned about their future will inspire adults in policymaking to work harder to resolve differences and make progress towards common goals.

Surely, it's not just the decision makers who gain from youth involvement. The biggest impact is to the youngsters themselves. They not only get to be heard, but also (as seen in the examples and reported by the same study):

1. **Develop personally:** Engaging youth in policymaking is an important youth development strategy that helps them grow into healthy, confident, well-rounded individuals and community leaders.
2. **Grow academically:** Youth engagement activities build critical thinking, public speaking, writing, and other skills that boost academic performance and workforce preparation.
3. **Become lifelong civic leaders:** Youth who have a foundation in civic engagement are much more likely to be responsible voters, local leaders, and future policymakers.

Below, a list of examples explored by the study may be found (note that only the most relevant ones were included):

CUBE, the Center for Understanding the Built Environment, specializes in community-based education which brings together educators, kids and community partners to effect change. Website: http://cubekc.org/

"**Minecraft: On the Waterfront**" involved elementary school classes who were challenged to reimagine, redesign and build what they think the Dundee waterfront should look like. The students over the course of several months used the

video game to create plans for the area. In addition, nine middle schools were invited to participate in a Minecraft Youth Camp to work on the same project. The students worked in groups using Xbox and Playstation consoles equipped with Minecraft, connected to whiteboards in classrooms. The plans were judged based on the aesthetics and ability to support job creation, tourism and education. The project was a huge hit with the students - http://www.planetizen.com/node/79362/games-are-kids-and-planners-too.

Local artists developed a video that showcases the waterfront design in Minecraft, allowing all of Dundee to see the future vision. The hope of the city is the plan will result in significant public and private revitalization.

Dundee is not alone, cities across the country have found Minecraft a helpful public engagement tool. The Swedish Centre for Architecture and Design worked to produce Stockholm and invited people to rebuild the city virtually in Minecraft in a project known as **Blockholm** (in Swedish).

'Mayor for a day' – It is an initiative of "TSD Vilnius" (national students' day in Vilnius), where student applicants get a chance to address certain issues to the municipality of Vilnius and give some advice or ideas. In 2015, Juozas Sadauskas was elected and he emphasized about open spaces for youth in Vilnius and creation of them.

'**Open contest for students to propose ideas for a park** (making Neris river bank unique)' – Vilnius city mayor Remigijus Šimašius proposed a contest for VGTU students to make their projects/ideas of what items would make Neris river bank look modern, unique and interesting. After he got the applications, he posted them in social media (Facebook) and asked his followers and people to vote on which ideas municipality would realise. Facebook link.

The Harrison county planner. Students' create a newsletter for the local community of the Harrison county, Mississippi. The newsletter focuses on community planning and seeks to encourage the locals to get involved. Webpage: http://co.harrison.ms.us/downloads/departmental%20downloads/zoning/newsletters/student%20editions/Harrison%20County%20Planner%20Student%20Edition%2001.pdf

Y-PLAN is our award-winning educational strategy to engage youth in urban planning and empower them to create change in their community that is closely aligned with contemporary school reform initiatives such as the Common Core.

It helps teachers around United States bring Y-PLAN's flexible methodology and tools into everything from government to physics classes. Students then go out and identify problems where they live and engage with local leaders in fixing these problems. The real-world, project-based learning that results builds both career and college readiness in students.

Students also often build powerful relationships with the adults they meet through their efforts. Website: http://y-plan.berkeley.edu/

In **Hampton, Virginia** the city maintains two permanent paid positions in the planning department for high school students. The decision strengthens relationships between youth and city officials and it gives youth an official voice within city government

In **Oakland, CA** students at McClymonds High School spent a semester creating a new design for a deteriorating park near their school. They presented their plan for a "History Park" in a public meeting at City Hall. The plan was subsequently endorsed by Friends of Oakland Parks and Recreation, a nonprofit that generates funding and support for city parks.

KEY RESULTS

In this section, 4 main questions of the survey will be analysed. These are as following:

1. What would youngsters prefer/desire in their surroundings (when considering the appeal / openness of the neighbourhood);
2. Youngsters' consultations with policy makers;
3. How would young people prefer to be involved in decision making;
4. Whether the young feel like they are ready to take part in any such consultations.

YOUNGSTERS' PREFERENCES FOR THEIR SURROUNDINGS

As briefly stated in summary of the research above, youngsters mostly would like open youth centres (desirability: 75.3%) and infrastructure for biking (73.44%) in their neighbourhoods / areas of living.

First, however let's look at how the desirability rating was calculated. Every venue listed (more on them below) could have been given the following labels: 'no desirability', 'low desirability' and 'much desirability'. These, respectively, were then transformed into the following scores: 0 for 'no desirability', 1 for 'low desirability' and 2 for 'much desirability'. The sum of the scores for any venue there afterwards divided by the total amount of answers (i.e. the average was taken). Afterwards, the average was once again divided by the maximum score of 2. This is how the desirability rating got into being. The formula below shows the formula for the rating:

$$desirability = \frac{\sum_{k=1}^{n}(x_k)}{2}$$

Venues available for answering (and their corresponding ratings) are listed below:
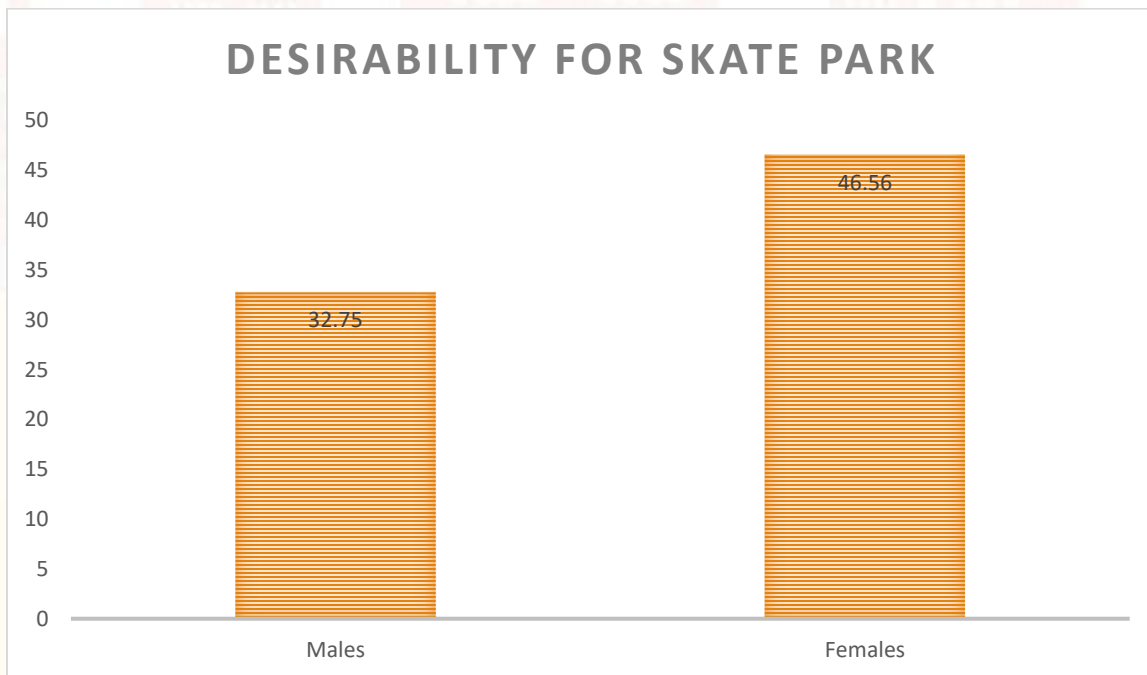
- Open youth centre - **75.3%** desirability
- Open square / plaza - **64%**
- Shopping zones - **41.8%**
- Cafes/bars - **65.7%**
- Basketball court / football pitch - **67.4%**
- Skate park - **44.2%**
- Park - **67.1%**
- Biking infrastructure (lanes, parking, etc.) - **73.4%**

It is obvious (from the ratings), that shopping zones and skate parks are the least desirable options for the sample in their surroundings. Low rating of the former (shopping area/mall) might be explained by the fact that it usually requires money to indulge in shopping. Especially, when the people researched are mostly students (73% of them aged 24 and under), whom are (usually) not known for high incomes.

Low desirability for skate parks is, however, harder to explain. It is true that skate parks might be associated with drug and illicit substances use[2]. Yet, as our sample is highly skewed towards females, it was decided to look at just the male of the sample and their rating for skate parks. Which produced a surprise, since the desirability rating went down to an abysmal 32.75%. *Please note that the aim of the research is not to show but not to explain such results.*

DESIRABILITY FOR SKATE PARK

Figure 3: desirability for a skate park (males vs females)

Looking at the opposite side of the spectrum, youth centres have preference over everything else (biking infrastructure being close second). This lead is seen across all the sub-groups and may be explained by the fact that youth centres are free to enter and offer a lot of different activities for everyone. Furthermore, they require relatively low resources and may be established (and are found) in crowded areas.

Other venues mentioned by the participants of the surveys: open libraries, co-working spaces and venues for various sports (climbing wall, etc.). These suggestions also focus on their openness, free entry & possibility to get engaged with others. Some part-takes have also mentioned night clubs, which are a place to hang out, albeit most of the time not for free.

CONSULTATIONS WITH POLICY MAKERS

Most of the participants of the survey have never been consulted and has never heard of anyone being consulted by policy makers regarding urban / community planning. The total share of these this groups was: 82.38%. Further 11.92%

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[2] Skate parks and crime: http://www.attn.com/stories/3043/skate-parks-and-crime

of part-takes have only heard of/know someone that has been involved in decision making processes. While only the remaining 5.7% has been directly engaged in urban planning consultations. Such level of involvement is dauntingly low.

To see whether the problem is universal, the sample was divided into urban & non-urban dwellers. The thinking went that since in rural/suburban areas policy makers are much closer to the voter (among them the youngsters), the rate of involvement there should be indeed higher. Graph representing this comparison can be found in the next page (Figure 4).

HAS BEEN CONSULTED / KNOW OTHERS THAT HAVE BEEN
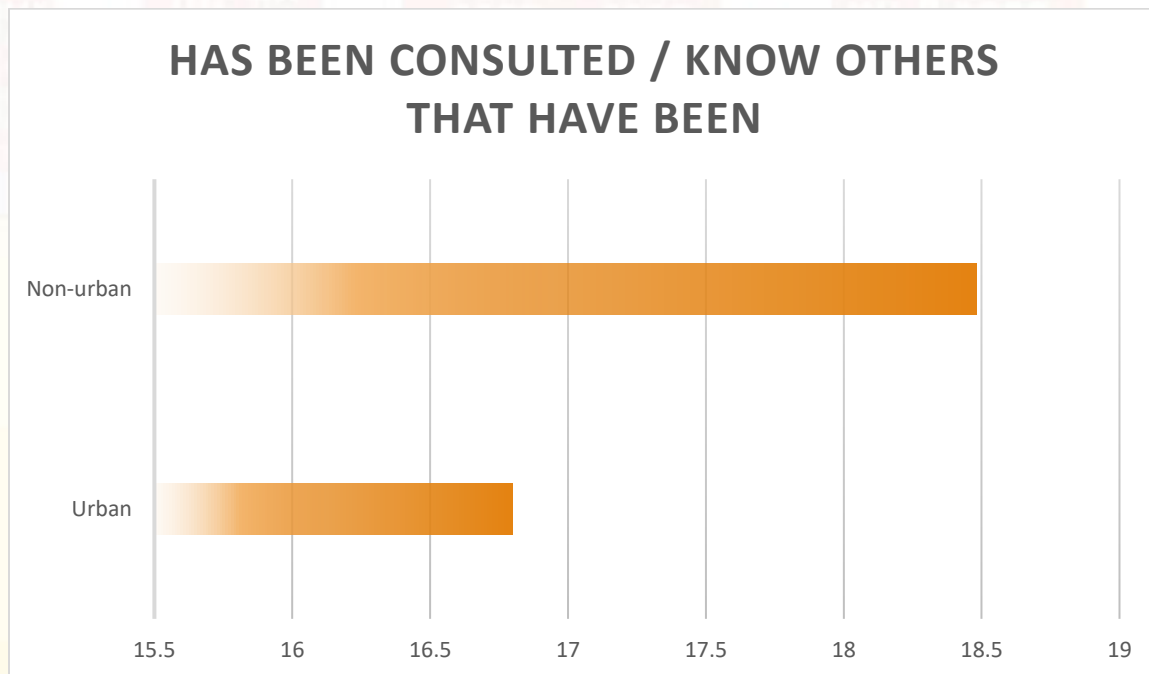
Figure 4: Urban vs. non-urban rate of involvement

It is seen from the graph that non-urban youth is just slightly more likely than their urban counterparts (almost 18.5% against 16.8%) to have been- or know others that have been involved in decision making processes.

Another focus of the survey was on youngsters whom were at least once involved in consultations with policy makers regarding urban / community planning. As stated above, the share of this groups was negligible. They were asked to describe their experience & their answers may be seen below:

- Taking part in a Lithuanian Youth Parliament (experience unrelated to urban/community planning)
- In direct consultations with policy makers regarding setting up of infrastructure for *downhill*
- Consultations by city council & city youth council
- Invitation to consultations (via youth organisations) regarding the planning of new projects. *The person describes such communication as sound; yet is disappointed, because much more attention is paid to other groups (businessmen or elderly)*
- Getting emails with a survey from the municipality regarding (biking infrastructure)

- Round-table discussions with policy makers during one-off events (such as youth forums)

PREFERENCES OF INVOLVEMENT

Next the survey looked at what preferences does youth have with regards to their involvement in policy making. 4 options were given and may be seen listed below. Then the youth was asked to rate these in an order from 1 to 4 (where 1 meant "least desirable" and 4 stood for "most desirable"). No two options could be rated the same, meaning different scores for every. Afterwards we have calculated the average of these ratings and divided it over the maximum of 4 (using the same equation as in the question for "Youngsters' preferences for their surroundings") to get desirability ratings. These (and the corresponding options) are given below:

- Invitation to municipality / city hall for discussions – **58.84%**
- Visit to your youth organisation / centre or school – **71.49%**
- Communication online (surveys / emailing) – **60.93%**
- Open competitions to design/plan urban space – **59.14%**

Looking at the ranking, the young participants had a clear preference. They have stated that the most desirable way to get involved in decision making, is when politicians (or urban planners) visit their schools/youth centres and discuss the plans. Such interaction received 71.49% desirability, whereas going to the city hall or similar institution was the least desirable option (58.84%). Communication online and open competitions were viewed only slightly more favourably (60.9% and 59.1% respectively).

A viable explanation to this could be that the youngsters feel the most comfortable at the surroundings they are familiar with, i.e. youth centres, schools. Hence, a visit of a policy maker or group of policy makers may be considered as a gesture that the he/she/they is indeed looking for youngsters' opinion. It is also clear that direct contact is preferred to the one online (through emails / open competitions).

As our sample is highly skewed towards Lithuanians (see Sample), it was desirable to see whether there is a difference across other countries. For that reason, all Lithuanian participants were excluded from the sample and the results are given in the next page (see Figure 5: youth preferences for involvement in urban planning**Figure 5**).
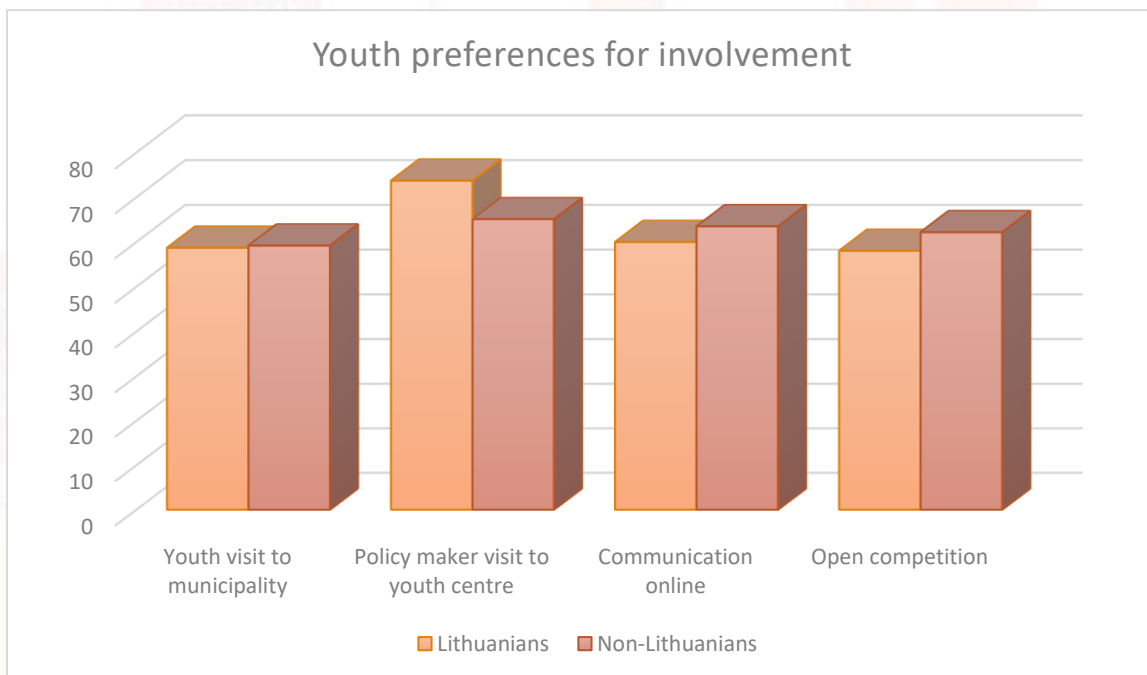
Figure 5: youth preferences for involvement in urban planning

	Lithuanians	Non-Lithuanians
Youth visit to municipality	58.71%	59.2%
Policy maker visit to youth centre	73.72%	65.1%
Communication online	60%	63.5%
Open competition	58.03%	62.2%

Observing the graph, it is seen that Lithuanians are way more likely (about 8.7% points higher) to prefer policy maker's visit than non-Lithuanian participants of the survey. However, non-Lithuanians view all the other options slightly more favourably. This is especially true for non-direct communication, i.e. emailing and open competitions to plan/design urban areas/communities for youngsters. *Note: the research was not looking-/is not going to look for reasons behind these differences.*

READINESS TO ENGAGE IN POLICY MAKING

Lastly, the part-takers of the survey were asked to self-grade their readiness to help city/community planners in such consultations. The question was phrased as following: "How well prepared would you be to help city planners in such consultations?" and the participants could choose marks from 1 to 5 (where 1 is '*not prepared at all*' and 5 is '*fully prepared*'). It was surprising to see that the average grade for oneself was: **3.67** (out of maximum 5). This entails that

youth at least feels ready to get involved in community/urban planning. Furthermore, it leads to an assumption that they would be keen on applying their presumed knowledge.

Surely, the data on hand allowed the research to go deeper into these numbers. It was decided by the authors that it is worth looking at how grading differed through age groups. The thinking went that older groups would feel more prepared than the younger ones (implying correlation with experience/age) or the other way around (implying that youngsters do feel more optimistic/enthusiastic about their competences and knowledge). The results may be seen below:
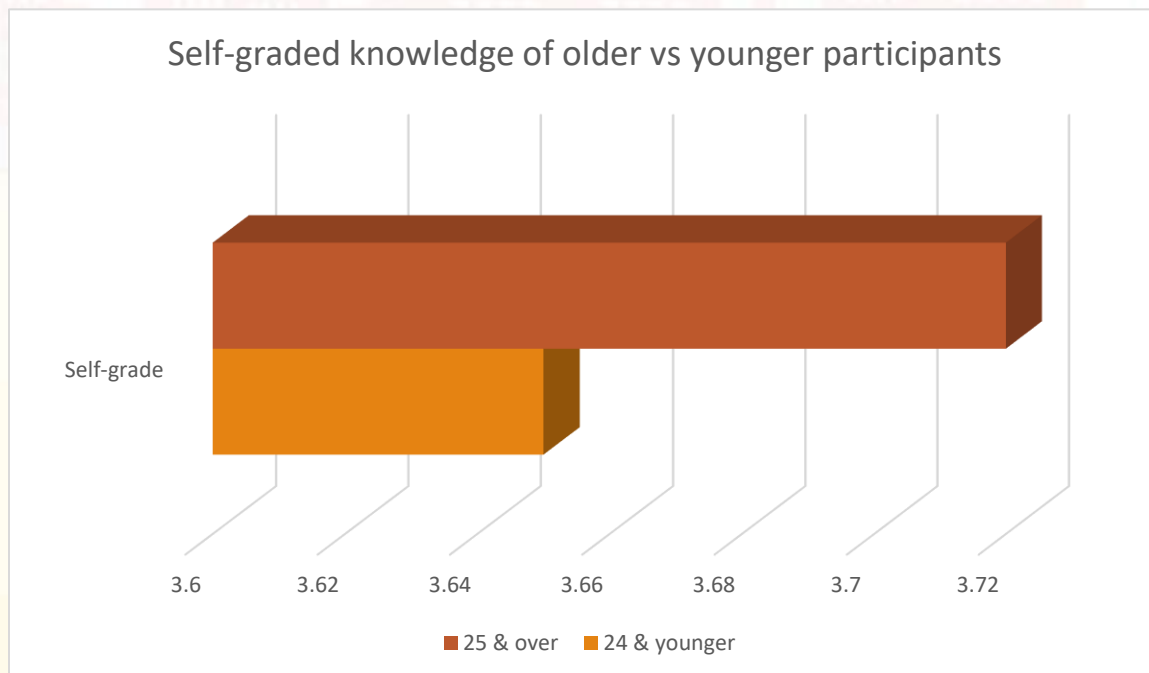
It is observable that the grade is a bit higher for the older group (the average of 3.72 against 3.64). However, the difference is neglectable and should not lead to any conclusions. Except for the fact that different ages groups of young populace feel equally well prepared to help in community planning.

The survey also went on to explore which skills/competences do the participants see as necessary for consultations with policy makers. Four options were given: 1) how to communicate with decision makers / city planners, 2) how does urban planning process look like; 3) what should be taken into account (what is necessary) when planning city spaces; and 4) other. Being a 'check-box' question, all the options could have been chosen by any single participant of the survey. The results are given in the graph in the next page (see **Figure 6**).

Figure 6: What is deemed important by youth when being involved in urban planning

Looking at the answers, it is obvious that the part-takers have though that most importantly is to know what is urban planning and how to plan urban spaces (options 1 & 2). Indeed, without that knowledge it would be difficult to make change. This signals sober thinking by the group behind the survey. Knowing how to communicate with urban planners was considered as something less necessary (only 52.5% marked it as important). This does reflect the beliefs (encouraged by emoji, texting and social networks) of millennials that communication (even when it comes to policy making) should be direct and informal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Report on the research is going to make four brief recommendations for: the youngsters (both the ones that are going to participate in the meeting, as well as the wider audiences); for adults/policy makers (both participants of the meeting and, in general); for the before mentioned meeting (see **Summary of the project**); and for future/further research.

For youngsters:

- From the research one can see that young people are confident regarding their ability to help when it comes to urban planning. For that reason, they should employ their knowledge and enthusiasm more often. How to do that? It would be advisable for youngsters to not to shy away when asking their schools or youth centres to organise policy makers' visits/open discussions within their premises. Such activities would allow youth to chip-in to the process of decision making; and, thus, be heard.
- There are plenty of good examples of youngsters' involvement into community/urban planning (see
- Examples). Most of them are encouraging – youth is indeed helping policy makers to shape the areas they live in. What is more, these existing practices could be extended/replicated further. I.e. American practices could be tried in Europe and *vice versa*. A recommendation for youth here would be to choose an example they prefer and simply adapt it to fit their needs and surroundings.

For policy makers:

- Research clearly states that youth these days prefer direct/informal contact. This entails that inviting youngsters over to the municipality or another government institution for consultations over planning decisions might constraint them. To truly tap in to their potential, it would be the best to visit youth organisations / schools and hold open discussions there. This way young people would feel more comfortable in being involved.
- Another observation from the research is that intuition is sometimes wrong. This can be verified by looking at the example of preference for skate parks (where males give them much lower rating than females – see **Figure 3**). The results of which were completely unexpected. This leads to a recommendation that research (as a tool for policy planning) should be used more often. It is worth noting that such researching can be carried out during visits to schools/youth's institutions.

For the meeting:

- Report (on the research) shows that youth is confident about their ability to help policy makers. It can also be implied that youngsters prefer informal communication. For this reason, the meeting should focus not on teaching the youth how to communicate with policy makers, but rather how to make viable propositions regarding urban / community planning. Such preference is clearly seen in **Figure 6** (hard skills are deemed as more important). The take-away for the organisers is, hence, to put emphasis on the following: i) urban planning process; ii) what should be considered when planning city spaces.

- More importantly, the meeting should set guidelines for future youth involvement. There are plentiful examples of youngsters getting engaged in policy making. Still, when willing to pull out something similar in their constituencies, both the policy makers and youngsters might not know where to begin. It is therefore worth setting a clear guide for any such future engagements. This should include: i) how to get into initial contact; ii) how to properly inform and prepare the other side of such consultations; iii) where and how to engage for maximum result; iv) how to follow-up and maintain contact.

For future research:

- One recommendation is to be more area specific. Going too wide (i.e. focusing on a number of countries) might not produce the wanted results, as the resources required to properly research are much higher. Moreover, focusing on one area might allow to touch concrete issues (such as whether a certain venue is indeed needed in that area). This all could be used further, i.e. for informed policy making / community planning.
- Finally, any future research should be two sided. That is not only inquiring the young, but also people in decision making institutions/government. This would allow to produce results that are more reflective of the real situation. Meaning that decision makers might have certain concerns or also in need for additional preparations when it comes to involving youth. It would also help to produce suggestions/recommendations that would suit the both sides (as the current research only focuses on youngsters' preferences).

ABOUT AUTHOR

"Active Youth" Association (Asociacija "Aktyvus jaunimas") is a non-profit organization based in Kaunas that unites young leaders from Lithuania willing to work on a voluntary basis to facilitate an intercultural dialogue and enhance competence of the European youth. We cooperate with organizations of similar profile from all over Europe (more than 50 partnerships) to organize events and trainings using non-formal education as a powerful instrument to encourage youth to take an active part in a society. By doing this we help young people to improve their skills and social awareness, share experiences and ideas, integrate them within the multinational environment of the EU, facilitate cooperation, create new joint initiatives, increase their social awareness, and promote healthy lifestyle. We concentrate on youth (18-30 years old) that have fewer opportunities and/or disadvantaged backgrounds.

Generally, our aims are to: (1) enhance entrepreneurial, social, leadership, communication skills, self-esteem, as well as multilingualism of youth through non-formal education; (2) help youth increase their social awareness, be tolerant towards others, be aware of the persisting social and environmental problems and help solve them; (3) educate youth workers and youth on how to join volunteering initiatives, cooperate with each other, and get employed more easily; (4) organize joint campaigns, projects and activities, where young people and youth workers can get involved in an intercultural dialogue, be a part of the decision making process, develop the spirit of volunteerism, facilitate youth cooperation and social values; (5) raise awareness about EU citizenship among young people, educate about social responsibility and work towards reducing youth unemployment in the EU; (6) organize youth seminars, exchanges, trainings for youth workers, conferences and discussions on relevant social topics, promote healthy, active, and ecologically friendly lifestyle in order to increase the well-being of youth. Inform about similar actions organized by others in Europe; (7) defend and promote human rights, universal values of tolerance, active citizenship, democracy, equal opportunities and work towards the elimination of discrimination in order to build a better integrated society; (8) organise Erasmus+ projects and spread information about the opportunities that lie behind it in order to further facilitate youth development.

Apart from other activities, we have also hosted Erasmus+ youth exchanges and youth worker mobility projects in Lithuania addressing key social topics for youth. Firstly, we have organised a youth exchange on tolerance for minorities ("Let's Turn Discrimination into Tolerance"), where young people gathered to help the minorities across Europe integrate easier to the society and get better opportunities both in social and work life. Secondly, we have organised both youth worker mobility and a youth exchange on the topic of Social Entrepreneurship ("More than Money: Social Entrepreneurship Heroes"). Since then we have hosted 8 more Erasmus+ projects (as of January 2017).

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