

EUROPE THROUGH YOUNG EYES

Exchange, Explore, Exhibit

EUROPE3E STARTS AT YOUR DOORSTEP!

Key messages -
Making young people's voice heard



“Europe3E starts at your doorstep!”

Key Messages – Making young people’s voices heard

From 2019 to 2021, the **Erasmus+ project Europe3E** (*Europe through young Eyes: Exchange, Explore, Exhibit*) gathered young people with diverse, including underprivileged, backgrounds and youth workers from Austria, France, Germany, Greece and the Netherlands.

Through the **combination of a creative method** for self- and collective expression, **Photovoice**, and the participative design of an **inclusive political simulation** of the European Parliament, the partnership experimented and fine-tuned an innovative way to raise awareness about the European Union while offering young participants an adapted, accessible space to express themselves on this topic.

While all detailed results and publications are available on the [project website](#)¹, the following Key Messages provide a short summary of the main highlights of the exchanges and experiences of both the young participants and the youth & social work practitioners involved in the project. They are based on:

- **Photovoice results:** Pictures taken through a facilitation process helping participants expressing themselves on complex issues through a creative mean, Photography. More details on this method and a full Photo Exhibit are [available online](#)².
- **European Parliament simulations results:** The project implemented small simulations, designed to be inclusive and accessible. Young participants co-designed the simulations in many ways, including the choice of themes and topics, and then roleplayed as Members of the Europe3E Parliament. While their results, the texts each “Europe3E Parliament” adopted, do not entirely express the participants’ own opinions due to the roleplay involved in such simulations, similarities between all groups, who did not have direct contact beforehand due to EU-wide Covid-19 restrictions, remain striking. All results are presented in the annexes.
- **The overall partnership’s experience through the Covid-19 pandemic:** The project “perfectly coincided” with the Covid-19 outbreak, leading partners to experiment diverse coping strategies, and draw lessons from their success or failure.

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Covid-19 has not “replaced” all social issues, but made them more pressing

The Covid-19 pandemic has naturally remained in all participants and partners’ minds throughout the entire project. While it has had an impact not only on project activities but also on its content and results, it has not been as central as one could have expected.

Pre-existing social issues have indeed, on the contrary, been the main concerns raised and discussed by young people despite the diversity of their national and cultural backgrounds. The Photovoice results, expressing the young participants’ voice on the question “Which important issues do young people (in your area) face today?”, show that

¹ <https://www.yes-forum.eu/our-work/projects/europe3e-europe-through-young-eyes-exchange-explore-exhibit/>

² <https://europe3e.yes-forum.eu/>

societal challenges that existed before the Covid-19 outbreak are still at the forefront of youth’s concerns. Photovoice pictures indeed covered a wide array of social issues, especially Climate change, Fair access to education, Fighting discriminations of all kinds (e.g. sexism, racism, homophobia) or even International solidarity.

Most of these issues were impacted by the Covid-19 crisis nonetheless, but only by making them more pressing than ever. In the case of Climate change and more generally the protection of environment, the Covid-19 was pointed out as both an additional symptom of the climate crisis, a potential additional threat due to new “Covid-wastes” (i.e. face masks littering not only the street but even nature), as well as – more surprisingly – a potential inspiration for new solutions, such as a “Climate lock-down” aimed at reducing CO2-emissions.

Environment & Education: a call for fair, balanced policies

Among the many themes identified by the young participants through the Photovoice method, two were selected by them to be the focus of the Europe3E simulation of the European Parliament: **Climate change & Education**.

Although it is not possible to consider these European Parliament simulations’ results (*cf. Annexes 2 & 3*) as the young participants’ recommendations to policy-makers in these fields because of the roleplay component of such “political games”, a careful analysis highlights the following striking aspects nonetheless.

The most striking of them is how young participants came to very similar results despite the fact they went through separate simulations at the local level, had not had prior in-person contact beforehand due to the impossibility to organise large-scale international events throughout the duration of the project, and have very diverse cultural backgrounds.

- **Environment & Climate change:** The original “Europe3E Text Proposal” was a rather ambitious, even radical one, planning to implement yearly “Climate lock-downs” all over the European Union to reduce CO2-emissions. All simulations led to very similar negotiations: the planned “Climate lock-down” measure was in all cases deleted or amended and replaced by other measures aiming at the same goal. These were different for each group, but in all cases they shared a common concern: **fighting against climate change in a fair way, by relying on the contribution of both citizens and businesses alike.**
- **Education:** The feeling of a “sacrifice generation” was prevalent when discussing the “Europe3E Text Proposal” on this theme, as young participants felt that, especially as students, their future was directly threatened by Covid-19 restrictions. The results on this theme focused their efforts on **tailoring Covid-19 restrictions to allow students to receive proper education.**

Overall, these results are a powerful reminder that **young people are not the “unrealistic, idealistic, radical dreamers” they are often regarded as.** When offered the opportunity to have their say in any matter, young Europeans are on the contrary able to consider different perspectives and come to balanced compromises!

Online collaboration is not a miracle, one-fits-all solution in social work

The Europe3E project started in late 2019, and therefore had to cope from its very start with the coinciding Covid-19 outbreak. Partners, like all international partnership in this period, experimented diverse ways to cope with the ensuing restrictions.

In particular, this experience has made it more obvious than ever that, **even though online tools can be a great source of opportunities for most target groups, social & youth work can not be overly dependent on them.**

Online tools as an exclusion factor

Although technically possible, it was indeed decided early on to avoid switching to online solutions for the entirety of the project activities.

Online activities have indeed a great, undeniable educational potential but YES Forum’s experience and experiments through the Covid-19 pandemic has systematically shown they can, on the contrary, become an **exclusion factor for diverse and disadvantaged target groups**.

Online formats work well with certain homogeneous groups (e.g. higher education students already used to online collaboration tools through their studies long before the Covid-19 outbreak), they are however no miracle solution and can on the contrary become an exclusion factor when working with broader groups, including young people with fewer opportunities.

Among many other factors making **online tools a double-edged sword** for YES Forum’s work are the fact that:

- Disadvantaged young people do not always have a personal laptop to comfortably take part in an online meeting at home, or even personal space at home to do so;
- Not all young people are digital experts despite clichés in that regard: many don’t have the digital skills sufficient to focus on the content of online activities rather than their technical aspects;
- Young people who have not been used to online collaboration in a familiar setting such as school are rarely comfortable with speaking to a group of total strangers through a screen while being alone at home.
- More generally, vulnerable groups need personal support which can only be provided in person to feel at ease before joining an international event (e.g. trust building within the group, developing confidence and self-esteem).
- Online collaboration removes many motivation factors which usually help engaging young disadvantaged people in EU-awareness activities they would not be interested in otherwise, such as enjoying trips abroad and meeting new people in an intercultural context.

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A need for balanced solutions adapted to diverse target groups

That is why, while acknowledging online solutions are unavoidable up to a certain extent, YES Forum attempted to avoid them for young participants as much as possible and explored alternative solutions.

This experience calls both decision-makers and the youth & social field as a whole for careful policies in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic.

While Covid-19 restrictions cannot be avoided when public health is at stake, they should be designed after **carefully considering the specific needs of the youth & social field**, among others. Adapted policies should for instance plan realistic **exceptions for social & youth work**, such as allowing in-person meetings with young vulnerable people when interpersonal contact is key to accompany them, and avoid the gap between the “privileged” and “underprivileged” European youth to grow bigger and bigger.



Europe3E is a two-year Strategic Partnership for Youth funded by the Erasmus+ programme, Key Action 2, and coordinated by the YES Forum (Grant Agreement 2019-2-DE04-KA205-018351). From 2019 to 2021, the project experimented innovative methods to open political education to all youth. That is, ways to help young people engaging in the public debate, regardless of their difficulties.

With the involvement of youth workers and young people with fewer opportunities from different EU countries, Europe3E especially explored the benefits of combining two youth work approaches:

- **Creativity as an obstacle-free channel for youth expression:** EU politics, through the Photovoice method! More details in the first output *“Europe and me – participatory photovoice research”* (https://www.yes-forum.eu/site/assets/files/2245/io1_fulldraft.pdf)
- **Accessible & Inclusive Political Education through games:** Political simulation of the European Parliament with young disadvantaged people to better fit their specific needs. More details in the second output *“How to involve all youth in the European project”* (https://www.yes-forum.eu/site/assets/files/2245/io2_fulldraft.pdf)

A thorough presentation of the project, how it led to and implemented the above-mentioned recommendations, can be found on the **project’s website** (<https://www.yes-forum.eu/our-work/projects/europe3e-europe-through-young-eyes-exchange-explore-exhibit/>) or contact us.

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