

# Pedagogical Booklet

## Project-based learning in non-formal education



## Imprint

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# INTRODUCTION

## What is the LEAP Project?

LEAP is an acronym that stands for “Learning to Participate”. It is a project financed within the framework of the European Union Erasmus+ programme. It is a strategic partnership between three youth organisations and two universities. What brought the partnership together is their interest and objectives on young people’s participation.

Actual or alleged lack of youth interest and participation in political, social and civic matters is an issue of great concern in policy and research. To address this issue, the project works on an approach that aims to tackle youth workers training, young people’s empowerment, organisational changes and policy debates. According to the partnership, this is fundamental to work on such a complex issue.

The objectives of the project are to:

- Promote **youth-centred pedagogical approaches** in non-formal education youth organisations.
- Reinforce young people's empowerment intended as **capacity for action**.

In the framework of the LEAP project, we acknowledge that the skills, attitudes and knowledge needed to educate to participation are intertwined with those of the profession of youth worker. Our work is based on a research/practice approach whereby we firstly analysed the contexts and needs of youth workers and researched on project-based learning in academic literature and current organisational practices. Then, we developed trainings for youth workers based on the results of this work. We experimented this training with professionals from Austria, Croatia, Italy and Germany and assessed what we have learnt. This whole process, along with concrete examples of our work, can be found in this Booklet.

The booklet contains information about the first steps of the project. In fact, within our project, we had a comprehensive idea about how to develop project-based learning in the youth sector. After addressing the training of educational professionals’ dimension, we worked with young people. The results of this work are included in two other resources of the project:



**PEDAGOGICAL  
BOOKLET PROJECT-  
BASED LEARNING IN  
NON-FORMAL  
EDUCATION**



**PROJECT-BASED  
LEARNING  
METHODOLOGY**




**YOUTH  
PARTICIPATION  
CHARTER**

The Booklet is one of the three results it is meant for youth workers trainers and youth researchers. The three outputs of the project must be intended as independent yet complementary resources. This Booklet deals with content related to PBL in the framework of youth workers training; the methodology and the charter are, on the other hand, for youth workers to engage young people.


# TO WHOM IS THIS BOOKLET DIRECTED?

*What's  
in it for you if you are:*




**A YOUTH WORK TRAINER**

As youth worker trainer it will give you ideas about possible content for trainings, project-based learning, a how-to set of ideas and information that are relevant for instructional purposes.



**A YOUTH WORKER**

This booklet presents the fundamentals of project-based learning. It will give you an understanding of what is it about and why it is relevant in your work practice.



**A YOUTH RESEARCHER**

It can give an insight about how youth workers concretely get trained and how, a literature review and bibliography about project-based learning and access to educational practices and education to political participation.

The Pedagogical Booklet is thought as a resource for youth workers, youth workers trainers and facilitators and as well as youth researchers.

The partnership acknowledges that the landscape of the youth work sector is substantially diverse across EU countries.

Our definition of youth work is derived from the Council of Europe<sup>1</sup>:

Youth work is a broad term covering a wide variety of activities of a **social, cultural, educational, environmental and/or political** nature by, with and for young people, in groups or individually. Youth work is delivered by **paid and volunteer youth workers** and is based on **non-formal and informal** learning processes focused on young people and on voluntary participation. Youth work is quintessentially a social practice, working with young people and the societies in which they live, facilitating young people's **active participation and inclusion in their communities and in decision making**.

This definition is suited to the purposes of our project and the purposes of this Booklet because it clarifies the scope and tasks of the youth work sector key to the LEAP project.

In addition to this, it seems necessary for us to clarify as well that the youth sector in LEAP is embedded in non-formal education, which is defined by the Cedefop<sup>2</sup> glossary as:

Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically does not lead to certification.

Lastly, we refer, with the term youth workers, to all those individuals who both **professionally or voluntarily work with young people**. As defined by the *Glossary on youth* of the European Commission and Council of Europe "young people are persons 13 – 30 years old".

For clarity purposes, we will use the term "youth workers trainers" to identify any individual who, professionally or voluntarily, oversee delivering training to youth workers.

## Structure and Aims of the Booklet

This booklet serves as a resource to support youth trainers in developing knowledge and skills. To address the issue of youth participation, LEAP builds its work on Project-based Learning (PBL). PBL is a model that organises learning around projects.

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<sup>1</sup> Source here: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/youth-work>. Accessed on 31 August 2020.

<sup>2</sup> European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop): <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory/european-inventory-glossary#N>. Accessed on 31 August 2020.

This Booklet is therefore divided into three main parts, the first part focusing on the theoretical background, followed by two practice-oriented sections.

- Part I outlines the theoretical background of PBL, exploring the origins and basic principles of the approach based on existing literature.
- Part II aims to demonstrate how elements of PBL are applied within the context of non-formal education. To do this, we first “map the field”, offering a short introduction to the youth sector in the participating countries as well as a presentation of the participating youth organisations. Then, we provide examples of how these organisations had previously incorporated various elements of the PBL approach in their projects.
- Finally, Part III will offer guidance on how to train youth workers about PBL and on the topics of youth projects, youth participation and European mobility. The materials, practices and suggestions presented are based on the experiences from the Youth Workers’ Trainings, which were carried out within the LEAP Project.
- A “resources” document that complements this Booklet is created as a separate appendix. It contains hands-on information, a training programme and examples of tools.



# I. BACKGROUND:

## THEORETICAL FUNDAMENTALS OF PBL

### 1. Background of project-based learning

The fundamental idea of Project-based learning (PBL) is rooted in the progressive education movement developed in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a student-centred pedagogical approach. PBL has been developed by and upon the philosophy and ideas of John Dewey (1859-1952) and William H. Kilpatrick (1871-1965). Based on constructivist philosophy, in PBL knowledge is individually constructed, directed by interaction with the environment, and the processing of the subject (Pecore 2015 160). For Kilpatrick, key to the project method is the chance that students can undertake activity they are interested in and pursuing from their initiative (Ravitch 2000, 179). The teachers or community workers' role in PBL is that of a "guide" they are not acting as authoritarian figures, one major difference with traditional teacher-centred education. Defined is modern PBL as "student-driven, teacher-facilitated approach to learning, because students pursue knowledge by asking questions that have attracted their natural curiosity" (Bell 2010, 39-40). Along with the student-centered view, the exploration of real-world challenges and problems based on a "**driving question**" is one core characteristics of PBL. Moreover, it is described as an active style of learning "considered to be a particular type of **inquiry-based learning** where the context of learning is provided through authentic questions and problems within real-world practices". (Al-Balushi and Al-Aamri, 2014; Peterson 2012).

The pioneers of the project method had the idea of a concept developing capabilities for individuals to foster democracy and build democratic and participatory citizenship. Kilpatrick was convinced that students need to realise and express their intentions to acquire new knowledge, necessary accomplishments and in particular attitudes and character that foster life in and for democracy (Kilpatrick 1918). According to Dewey, the project-approach embodies democracy as a governmental form but also as a form of "living together" with common values and shared experiences (Dewey 1916). Dewey defined the individual child as an active being, acquiring knowledge, skills and habits important for life by interacting with his social and natural environment. According to that, learning content should be mediated through life as it is lived. This underlines the meaning of democracy as participatory in that context. A basic idea within this progressive approach is to discuss and solve problems and to involve as many people as possible. What Dewey was striving for, was not a decision by the majority but through a problem-solving consensus.

The work of both pedagogues was crucial for the new orientation towards the individual and new pedagogical approaches as a starting point of the concept of project-based learning. Unanimously children learn **working together in a group** and to develop respect towards

others. Kilpatrick's and Dewey's ideas were disseminated widely during the progressive education movement and afterwards among teachers and school-administrators (Knoll 1997). However, there has been further developed since (Ravitch 2000). But one core objective of the project method is unquestioned, as stated by Knoll (1997: 59): It "is generally considered a mean by which students can (a) develop independence and responsibility, and (b) practice social and democratic modes of behaviour".

The work of Dewey and Kilpatrick had and has a lasting influence on education practices. In the work of LEAP, it is worth mentioning two other educationalists whose ideas are key to understand Project-based learning.

The first one is Célestin Freinet (1866 – 1966), while the second one is Danilo Dolci (1924 – 1997).

Resuming Project-based learning as a pedagogical practice means taking into account experiential learning, where learners grow through hands-on learning. Freinet, being an educational reformist, introduced the idea of the "printing press", which gave students the possibility to explore their own social world by researching on issues, writing articles and publishing them in school journals. His work was developed in the school context and giving students the possibility to take ownership of the printing press meant giving them the authority to decide how to engage with the press and its results (Carlin, Clendenin, 2018). This specific form of learning and the use of the printing press is key for Project-based Learning since it impacts the relations between teachers and students, it develops autonomy and grounds students' learning into the community around them. The printing press indeed, allowed "to give children the word" (Carlin, Clendenin, 2018).

With the work of Danilo Dolci, on the other hand, a similar approach to learning and listening to youth's voices is developed through the idea of the Reciprocal Maieutic Approach. In this approach, educators are considered "midwives" and their role is to support others in identifying their own ideas, in learning to learn and discovering what they already know (Longo, 2020). In this approach, the key is to connect and communicate and explore different points of views to create a common perspective. In this conversation, in his work, he did not exclude children and youth. In the process of building a school in Sicily, as an example, he not only consulted with educators and but as well with children so that the school might reflect their needs and demands rather than just being built solely on decisions of adults that know their best interest (Klineberg, in Danilo Dolci 1973).

What all these authors have in common is precisely the idea of a reverse perspective on youth, whereby their pedagogical theories require the development of a space where their voice has space to be expressed and heard. Other key aspects are as well the roles of educators as facilitators rather than leaders, the idea of rooting learning in real-life situations and

connections with the general environment of the learner. These ideas will be explored further in this booklet and they represent the starting point of our reflection on Project-based learning.

## 2. Features and the concept of project-based learning

There is no universally accepted narrow definition or determined set of practices determined that are universally accepted in literature establishing a common understanding of PBL (Thomas 2000). In literature, the goals of the PBL-approach are more clearly defined than the essential components and design principles. The distinction between PBL and other student-based and problem-solving pedagogical approaches is still in discussion due to the many overlaps of the concepts (Ertmer, Simons 2006).

From that perspective, PBL is considered a method enhancing intrinsic motivation, developing independent thinking, transferring knowledge into practice, promoting democratic values and democratic modes of behaviour, creating self-confidence and training social responsibility. After the implementation of a project, during the project stage students have to organize their work and manage their time on their own. Strengthening the creativity of young people through individual responsibilities is another momentous aspect of PBL.

Most literature treats PBL as an inquiry- and student-centred approach for school or curricula-based school-implementation (Veletsianos, Lin and Russell, 2016; Fogleman, McNeill and Krajcik, J. 2011). But it is generally transferable to less-formal contexts (Milosevic Zupancic, 2018), such as community-working or general social-working (Halvorsen et. al. 2018). Starting with a non-school-like problem is a good tactic to encourage students' interest. Blumenfeld and colleagues (1991) have accentuated that the project method was developed in a school-context but not necessarily for a school-context. Thus, we do not necessarily need a classroom for implementing PBL, what we need is a group of young people, a guiding figure and a driving question, containing a task which can be solved by individuals or the group.

Besides the question about the institutional framework, in the discussion about progressive pedagogical approaches, it is emphasised that theoretically the PBL approach can be implemented in various subject areas or topics. It is not depending on age or educational background of the individuals or group. PBL can be used from basic education up to master graduates; it is applicable in comprehensive and professional settings.

Even though different authors emphasize various priorities, there are some widely accepted basic design principles of PBL, coming up as essential components. Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2005) are naming five key features of project-based learning: a driving question, a situated inquiry, collaborations, the use of technology tools to support learning and the creation of artefacts.

The first is core and starting-point of any project-based learning: a ***driving question***. A driving question is a question that is elaborated, explored, and answered throughout a project (Krajcik,

Mamlok-Naaman 2006). Krajcik, Czerniak and Berger (2002) mention five characteristics a driving question should have. Thus, a good driving question has to be (1) feasible in a sense that it is possible to be answer answered by proper design and a practicable investigation, it outlines a task. (2) it should be meaningful i.e. it asks for substantial content. (3) it has to be contextualized in a real-world context. (4) it should be meaningful, i.e. interesting and exciting to learners, and (5) it must be ethical, not causing harm to any individual or the environment (Krajcik, Blumenfeld 2005, 321).

Hmelo-Silver (2004) described PBL as *situated learning* while working “in small collaborative groups and learn what they need to know in order to solve a problem”. Most frequently a group size of three to five is mentioned for curriculum-based PBL approaches, the duration of most projects is about three months (Helle, Tynjälä and Olkinuora 2006: 301). Dependent on the context the groups can be larger. **Collaboration** is a feature of all project stages. The learning-experience in a group allows students to develop a sense of teamwork and pride based on “achieving a goal together” (Glasgow 1997).

In addition to this, collaboration and the relations between the individual and collective learning are key in progressive education. As argued by Carlin and Clendenin (2019) about the work of Freinet “relative knowledge is replaced by a shared form of learning that instead of being determined by the demands of the teacher and standardized curriculum is propelled forward by the kinds of interests and desires produced from the collective engagement with the new component that now sits in the spot formerly occupied by the expert and his platform.”

The PBL learning process is described as learning by engagement instead of rote memorization in traditional textbook learning. The role of the teacher or social worker as a guide is under discussion, while Kirschner et. al. (2006) see PBL as a minimal guided method, Hmelo-Silver and colleagues reject that view and describe the constructivist approach as “rather providing extensive scaffolding and guidance to facilitate student learning” (2006, 99).

PBL settings often present learners ill-defined problems with ill-structured paths to solutions, it is described as a good working method to generate new knowledge (Hmelo-Silver et. al. 2007), while traditional textbook-based teaching provides well-defined problems, which are suitable to deepening, applying and examine already existing knowledge. In this project environment, students typically work in small groups and construct knowledge through activating prior understandings (is PBL a way to address, as well as by engaging in collaborative discourse during the learning process (Chiccano 2015). Through that process “students become responsible for their own learning, which necessitates reflective, critical thinking about what is being learned” (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1989). Such experiences are strengthening the ability to anticipatory acting.

Table 1: PBL as Approach to Learning Situated Problem-Solving Experiences	
Problem	Realistic ill-structured problem
Role of problem	Focus for learning information and reasoning strategies
Process	Identify facts, generate ideas and learning issues, self-directed learning, revisit, and reflect
Role of teacher	Facilitate learning process and model reasoning
Collaboration	Negotiation of ideas Individual students bring new knowledge to group for application to problem
Tool	Structured whiteboard
Source: Hmelo-Silver 2004	

In collaborative groups, young people can ask each other to develop a shared and a common understanding of problems and their solution within a discipline or scientific field. They use ***technology tools*** within the setting or to collaborate with others to support learning (Ravitz and Blazeovski, 2014); and it has been proved that tangible results increase the effectiveness of learning processes; the ***creation of artefacts*** can be an important feature of PBL. Examples of artefacts are not necessarily items but also texts, recipes, guidance, technical or digital solutions etc. Youngsters develop a self-image as producers or authors of knowledge (Krajcik and Shin, 2014). Another important reflection of PBL as a constructivist approach is that the artefacts should be personally meaningful (M. Grant: 2002). In that sense, Knoll (1997) said that “the project method is not a matter of empirical, hermeneutical, or strategic studies, but of construction”. The construction of artefacts within a project can be collaborative or individual.

In addition to the five key features of PBL (Krajcik and Blumenfeld, 2005; similar: Breitner and Bereiter and Scardamalia 1993) the concept is regularly characterized as **interdisciplinary**. The working process can lead to connections between different subjects. By offering challenges on interdisciplinary subjects, students get a chance to understand and to solve large scale and open-ended projects. By practising, young people acquire the ability to link theory to practice.

An additional differentiation within ways of describing PBL-approaches, asks whether a project is built more or less on existing knowledge (Morgan 1995).

The procedure of PBL-projects is depicted less abstract by Adderley and colleagues (quoted in Helle et. al., 2006, 99) in five steps: *first*, projects involve the solution of a problem; the problem can be set by the students themselves, but the task can also be implemented; *second*, problems involve initiative by an individual student or a group of students, and require a variety of educational activities; *third*, projects usually result in an end product (e.g., thesis, report, design plans, computer programme or model, i.e. artefacts); *fourth*, work in projects regularly takes a considerable length of time; *fifth*, the teacher is only involved in an advisory role, rather than an authoritarian role in some or all of the project stages.

Some necessary steps to complete the task or answer the driving question in the PBL-process include **initiation, analysis, conduct, synthesis, conclusion and evaluation** of the information or data collected during the project. Probably learners need help, guidance and scaffolding, which can include student-teacher interactions, practice worksheets, peer counselling, supporting questions, job aides, project templates, etc. (Grant 2002). Most projects include groups or teams, especially when resources are limited. But cooperative learning may also employ some rounds of peer reviews or group brainstorming sessions.

### 3. Impact of project-based learning

What are the findings of research after decades of PBL practices in schools and beyond? First of all, a look at the studies investigating the impact of project-based learning shows that it is difficult to prove the direct influence on social and civic participation of young people. But empirical findings confirm the strengthening of skills and attitudes needed for this type of participation.

There are various insights within the PBL-literature, derived from case studies and further empirical evidence. The overall picture shows that PBL is strengthening individual learning-motivation, participation rates, social skills, professional skills and self-confidence of children and students. PBL leads for many skills to better results than traditional lecture-based teaching.

In their meta-analysis of 43 studies, Dochy and colleagues (2003) investigated the impact of PBL on students, addressing knowledge and professional skills. They were able to prove a mostly weak but continuously positive effect, in particular on students' conceptual knowledge and application or transfer of knowledge, compared with traditional lecture-based teaching. However, the investigation of the impact on vocational students and university students includes a large number of studies. Most of them asking for the effectiveness of PBL on strengthening professional skills and the individual capability to "engage in meaningful learning that will allow them to manage the fast-changing, knowledge-based society of the twenty-first century" (Darling and Hammond 2008, 197).

The comparison of project-based learning with rote learning by teacher-centred teaching shows that PBL leads mostly to better results. Only when it comes to factual knowledge, traditional curricula education is competitive with project-based learning, showing equal or slightly better results. The application of knowledge and the attitudes towards learning scored much higher through the PBL-method (Hmelo-Silver et. al. 2007).

Consistent with some origin and basic ideas of project-based learning it has been confirmed by longitudinal investigations that the method is strengthening the capability to intuitive learning and broader understanding of treated subjects (Summers and Dickinson 2012). Hmelo-Silver (2004) concludes that project-based learning improves in particular problem-solving skills and self-directed learning skills, while the impact of PBL of collaboration skills and intrinsic motivation is weak but verified.

Hernández-Ramos and De La Paz (2009) compared two groups of history students in the United States, taught with traditional methods with groups of students participating in PBL. PBL-students reported significantly more positive attitudes toward learning than groups of students who were taught using more traditional methods. Another study made in Greece showed major differences between pre- and post-scores in public schools for nine to ten-year-old children. Attitudes and knowledge about the subject, in that case, an environmental science unit, was more positive respectively higher (Kaldi, Filippatou and Govaris 2011). PBL-studies among socially disadvantaged and lower-achieving students showed positive effects (Blumenfeld et. al., 1991; Geier 2008), as well as for disadvantaged young people (Creghan and Adair-Creghan 2015). Besides these positive effects, PBL is also a successful approach to help reduce dropout numbers and improve approval rates for disadvantaged students (Lima et. al 2007; Guven and Duman 2007). The method has also been approved and field-tested in higher education and professional vocational schools.

#### 4. Discussion: Project-based learning and participation

The question here is, what do these findings of project-based learning tell us for a project focused on providing a framework for young people's social and civic participation in non-formal learning contexts? The impact of project-based learning on youth participation in non-formal Organisations or educational settings has rarely been investigated. But the evidence from studies of formal and curricula-based PBL shows the effects of that method on skills, knowledge and attitudes young people need for participation in modern and inclusive democracy.

Who needs PBL in non-formal organisations and why? Empirical studies show strong evidence that social characteristics are important for the probability of social and civic participation. Socially deprived and disadvantaged people are underrepresented in participation. This explains the importance of education as a factor of influence on the willingness to participate and the participation rate. The involvement of citizens in politics is declining and witnessing

less political participation and waning civic commitment. These developments affect mainly traditional associations, interest groups and political parties (Dalton 2004). The individual motivation for civic or political engagement can develop from individual interests and intentions to contribute to the public good. PBL in non-formal organisations can partly replace the weakening effect of traditional organisation in socialising citizens.

Socialisation and learning processes determine how citizens behave in that regard, is a lifelong process. However, foundations and standards for individual political behaviour are mainly settled in the first two decades of life. Individual behaviour patterns increasingly solidify with increasing age. Hence, the early years of socialisation determine to a significant extent if and how frequently social and civic participation takes place during the course of life. This underscores the need to act.

The decisive skills and values are mediated and strengthened by the constructivist project-based learning method. PBL is leading to a better understanding of how and when one's activity makes a difference; it is improving the capability to guide interpersonal relations and to cooperate with others, aiming for the same goal; it helps to understand how to communicate and argue with others, how to handle conflicts in a way that treats different opinions respectfully.

However, the capability of project-based learning to empower young people is widely undisputed. What is lacking are investigations of how and how much PBL is increasing civic and social participation (rates) of young people indirectly and directly. Indirectly through knowledge and skills transferred in formal curricula-based education; and directly through activation in non-formal contexts. The development and implementation of project-based learning projects in non-formal organisations is therefore an innovative contribution to build participatory citizenship.



# SUMMARY of Key Findings

1

The fundamental idea of project-based learning (PBL) is rooted in the progressive education movement.

2

Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2009) are naming five key features of project-based learning: a driving question, a situated inquiry, collaborations, the use of technology tools to support learning and the creation of artifacts.

3

Blumenfeld and colleagues (1991) have accentuated that the project method was developed in a school-context but not necessarily for a school-context. Thus, we do not necessarily need a classroom for implementing PBL, what we need is a group of young people, a guiding figure and a driving question, containing a task which can be solved by individuals or the group.

4

The procedure of PBL-projects is depicted less abstract by Adderley and colleagues (quoted in Helle et. al., 2006, 99) in five steps: **first**, projects involve the solution of a problem; the problem can be set by the students themselves, but the task can also be implemented; **second**, problems involve initiative by an individual student or a group of students, and require a variety of educational activities; **third**, projects usually result in an end product (e.g., thesis, report, design plans, computer programme or model, i.e. artifacts); **fourth**, work in projects regularly takes a considerable length of time; **fifth**, the teacher is only involved in an advisory role, rather than authoritarian role in some or in all of the project stages.

## II. FROM THE SCHOOL CONTEXT TO THE YOUTH SECTOR: PROJECT-BASED LEARNING IN PRACTICE

Today, organisations and youth workers and professionals of the youth sector, implement projects as tools to foster the development of skills and competences. One of the core objectives of the LEAP Project was to apply the PBL approach within the non-formal education sector of youth organisations.

As highlighted in the previous section, PBL is an approach that was born in the school context. However, since it is a youth-centred method that can promote learning in real-life situations, it is a practice that is well suited to the youth sector.

An assumption behind LEAP is that projects are an important part of the work of youth organisations; furthermore, their implementation follows some features and steps of project-based learning. However, PBL is not widely used by non-formal education organisations, let alone for the organisation of mobility projects. PBL potential is therefore high since “the flow between informal and formal educational practices, and especially the practice of project-based learning – in the school, and outside, in the workplace and the community – as a critical pedagogy holding the potential for personal development, creativity, and social transformation.” (Maida, 2011).

LEAP has the ambition to be a “systemic” project, where not only young people but as well youth workers and staff members’ partners of the project are impacted by the development of the LEAP PBL methodology. Therefore, it seemed fundamental to assess partner organisations’ current practices before introducing the methodology. This is furthermore necessary since it can allow to better understand the conditions that allow for the methodology to be rooted in youth organisations.

To explore applications of PBL within the youth sector, partner organisations compiled and analysed a sample of 18 youth projects which were previously implemented by the LEAP Partners Centro per lo Sviluppo Creativo Danilo Dolci, Udruga Mladi u EU and Sapere Aude. The aim was to understand to what extent these youth organisations have already been implementing (elements of) the PBL approach. The results of this analysis clarify the applicability of PBL within the non-formal education context. For youth workers, these examples also inspire reflections on where they see the potential for PBL in their own previous or future projects.

Within this section, it seemed relevant to highlight examples of youth projects. The intent is double: on the one hand, this compendium represents a database of youth projects that can be understood as best practices as they foster youth participation. On the other, they can provide a source of case studies to youth workers in a sharing of good practices perspective.

## 1. Context: Introduction to the youth sector in the participating countries and the LEAP participating organisations

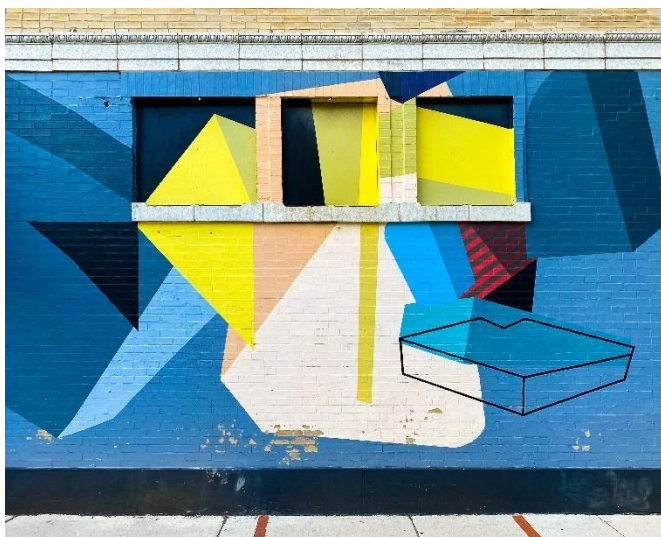


Photo credit <https://unsplash.com/@dotjpg>

The European landscape of the youth sector is relatively complex and diverse, not only amongst European countries but within countries as well. This diversity exists on a policy level, both in terms of public policies and public bodies in charge of youth issues. In addition to this, differences exist in the way in which the youth work sector is organised, both in terms of youth workers training diplomas and qualifications and in terms of organisations that implement youth-related activities.

It is beyond the scope of this Booklet to assess the youth policy frameworks of the countries involved in LEAP. However, a short introduction to existing qualifications for youth workers and a description of their role and status in their countries is key. As reported by the Youth Wiki, an online encyclopaedia in the area of national youth policies for EU countries, youth work is organised in different ways across EU Member States and as well in the countries participating in the project.

Amongst the countries of the project, the status of “youth worker” is not recognised in Croatia, while in Italy is incorporated in the one of “volunteering”. In Austria and Germany, their role is recognised, and variations exist amongst different levels of governance. Acknowledging a youth worker’ statute in their country is key to start planning a training.

Similarly, the scenarios of qualifications and education paths of youth workers vary according to existing policy frameworks and levels of governance.

The qualifications and vocational education paths needed to work with young people vary widely across Europe. This Booklet, and in general the whole project, is rooted in the debate about the statute, recognition, education and further qualification of youth workers. Part of this debate revolves around the issue of the professional development of youth workers and of the need to make resources available to youth workers so that they can best fulfil their role<sup>3</sup>. According to us, similarly to the teaching profession, youth workers training and education can be understood as initial or continuing according to whether an individual is starting the profession or whether they have a certain number of years of experience. The experience on

<sup>3</sup> Council of Europe: [https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-portfolio/key-questions-about-the-portfolio#%229802605%22:\[2\]](https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-portfolio/key-questions-about-the-portfolio#%229802605%22:[2]). Accessed on 31 August 2020.

the field as well as the qualifications that a youth worker has, whichever they might be, create differentiation in terms of (learning) needs that a youth worker might have. This differentiation is key for the design of training strategies and as well for the definition of the target group.

According to us, as for other education professionals such as teachers, several issues should be considered when thinking of the youth workers' professional development. These include their learning needs, support structures, career paths, competence levels and contexts<sup>4</sup>.

In addition to these factors, the differences in terms of types of organisations and young people targeted are also key factors that must be considered when designing training for youth workers.

Lastly, besides these factors and taking them into account, in LEAP we consider one approach, project-based learning (PBL) that can contribute to the professional development of youth workers. In the case of LEAP, PBL is tied to social and political participation.

### Youth work in Austria, Croatia, Italy and Germany

According to the Youth Wiki of the European Union, a platform that gathers information about youth work in Europe<sup>5</sup>, the spectrum of policies that relate to youth work encompasses very different policy areas. We will summarise them below since they provide the framework in which we embed our work.

In Austria, as reported by the Youth Work website<sup>6</sup>, Child and Youth Work "refers to a very wide and varied spectrum of offers and measures in the field of social action fields. According to the Youth Wiki, in Austria, youth workers are professionals or volunteers. The National Qualifications Framework presents all existing qualifications in Austria to work with children and young people. It is about the quality standard of the profession. While the importance and role of youth workers are recognised, there is no statutory training to become a youth worker. Several institutions, including universities, offer training to become "social workers" with a specific path on youth. The content of the courses may vary and include fundamentals of pedagogy or content-related units. In terms of recognition, there is not an accreditation or qualification system.

Differences exist at the local level. As an example, in the city of Vienna, there is a sort of statutory training, which allows youth workers to work in all relevant institutions run by the city of Vienna<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Similar factors are identified for the teaching profession by the European Commission, Education & Training 2020 Working group on Schools Policy (2015), *Shaping career-long perspectives on teaching. A guide on policies to improve Initial Teacher Education*.

<sup>5</sup> Source: <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/en/youthwiki> Accessed on 7 September 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Source: <https://www.jugendarbeitinoesterreich.at/jugendarbeit/> Accessed in November 2019.

<sup>7</sup> More information here: <https://www.wienextra.at/ifp/lehrgaenge/grundkurs/>

In Croatia, on the other hand, there is no official definition of youth work, even though in the last years there are many organisations and individuals that work with young people. Their job is acknowledged and progressively gaining importance. As there is not an official definition, there are no specific educational paths nor qualifications. However, the University of Rijeka is engaged in experimentation for the creation of university courses and programmes.

In Italy, volunteering stems from a long tradition and the development of youth work is rooted and explainable through the socio-economic features of the “third sector” (community and not-for-profit sector). Youth workers and volunteers can have different educational backgrounds and their skills and knowledge can be recognised through regional legislations.

In Germany, youth work is related to a wide variety of activities that are focused on young people. Youth workers can be volunteers or professionals. The training and education of youth workers happen via universities, which offer bachelor’s degrees of social work with a focus on youth or through other forms of non-formal education.

In all of the countries, the presence of the Erasmus+ programme and European mobilities are a way to engage in a recognition of the statute of youth worker. It seems evident that the policy framework that grounds the work of these professionals is highly fragmented. Therefore, the possibilities of continuing education for these professionals offered by the Erasmus+ programme are strongly needed to guarantee quality education and engagement with young people.

As the types of organisations that address young people in EU countries are varied, it seems key to us to share as well the nature and organisation of youth organisations involved in LEAP as this determines as well the framework of our training.

### **Austria / Sapere Aude**

Sapere Aude is a 40 member non-governmental and non-profit organisation for the promotion of civic education from Waidhofen an der Ybbs, Austria, with its head office in Vienna, Austria. We founded Sapere Aude in 2009, related to the lowering of the voting age at the Austrian federal elections in 2008. Our first actions included the at the time only Austrian basic civic education programme for young people without regard to their social or educational background or party affiliation and thematic or methodical constriction. Since then, we have extended our offer to several more specific workshop series and also vocational training for teachers, students and other youth workers.

We design and implement innovative workshop formats that suit any given target group from pupils to teachers, from young to old, no matter their background. Everyone faces the same rich variety of non-formal and interactive methods, only language and topics are occasionally adapted. We are convinced that everyone is able to think critically and independently and to campaign for his or her own interests.



In our projects, we build these capacities to foster independent civic education and skills that are necessary to take part in different participation projects and formats. In our entire project, the different target groups get the opportunity to reflect current social and political developments, express their own opinions and have to deal with other political ideas and opinions, that are different from their own.

As we work together with very diverse groups ranging from apprentices from difficult social and economic backgrounds up to university students, or people with different intellectual and physical disabilities, we try to develop interactive methods, that can create empathy for diverse personal situations, that all should be considered when political decisions are being made.

To get in touch with the youngsters we work together with different youth associations, umbrella organisations, teachers and trainers, such as Zentrum polis – The Austrian Centre For Civic Education in schools or the Austrian National Youth Council.

## Croatia / Mladi u EU

The main idea of our work is to provide young people with a place where they can share ideas and opinions.

Mladi u EU since its beginnings with his work and engagement is trying to develop and promote volunteering among young people, but also among other members of the community in the town of Sibenik and the Sibenik - Knin County.

Our methodological approach is based on the following principles:

1. Informal/non-formal education: quality with clear objectives, precise and consistent structure focused on the personal development of the participants' goals.
2. Personal development: creating new documents, skills and attitudes.
3. Acquiring knowledge through various techniques based on participatory and cooperative learning.

To involve youngsters we have been building relations with schools/universities and other relevant stakeholders in our County. In particular, we try to organise info-stands and info-point, especially in the city/schools/universities, to provide information about European mobility opportunities and our daily activities in our Youth and Volunteering Centre.

In Croatia, only 2.7% of young people participate in non-formal education activities (source: Eurostat). We strongly believe that non-formal/informal education, especially in today's era, is important for the personal development of young people and our community. So, in our Youth and volunteering centre, we organise leisure time and other informal/non-formal activities for youth in our 'Living room' even with the help of our international projects. We organise

Social&intercultural nights, videogames tournaments, creative&arts workshops, focus group, etc...

In our activities, we always try to understand the needs of our young people in the local community and for this reason we collaborate with the Youth Council of Sibenik supporting it in the involvement of young people and the other NGOs, which work in the field of Youth. With them, we organise info-days and several local, national and European projects. Now we are supporting them in the organisation of focus group with youngsters to design a new local youth program of the city of Sibenik, as well as a new youth exchange in the framework of Erasmus+.

In our county we also organise workshop about Erasmus+ projects in collaboration with Croatian National Agency to make more aware the young people and the NGO's, associations etc. about these kind of opportunities.

### Italy / CSC Danilo Dolci

CSC Danilo Dolci involves youth in different activities to foster social inclusion and encourage civic participation. Our main approach – Reciprocal Maieutic Approach – is based on a mutual contribution of all the people involved in the learning process, listening to the needs of everybody and planning together the educational intervention to achieve the personal and collective goals, to make the change real. We prepare, implement and monitor projects addressed to young people and youth workers by using non-formal education strategies & approaches at local, national and international level. The common objectives of these activities are to help them to grow as professionals, people and citizens, thanks to the development and promotion of tools and good practices to strengthen their participation on their communities, especially by promoting creative and bottom-up activities to empower and include young people from different background.

The approach to young people, as well as to our target group in general, is based on an awareness of the existence of one's own life experience. For this reason, what we propose is not the result of a structured and rigid action or activity but it is the beginning of a path mostly pre-structured but ready to be modified, adapting it to the experience of the young person with whom we closely work. This approach is based on the recognition of the importance of transversal and life skills: their development and enhancement will improve both the well-being with whom we relate to the world around us and our own environment. Professional skills will only be able to complete their meaning if they are accompanied by transversal competences. In this vision, in our way of coordinating activities and relating with young people, we try as much as possible to be bi-directional and reciprocal, based on main pillars such as communication, active listening and sharing.

## 2. Project-based learning in the youth non-formal education sector

This section aims to clarify how the previously identified key features of PBL summarised in the image below (Krajcik/Blumenfeld, 2005) are relevant for the practical work of youth organisations in a non-formal education context of youth organisations. In an early stage of the LEAP project, we took a look at some of the LEAP partner organisations' youth projects, aiming to identify how the partners had already incorporated elements of the PBL approach in their previous work.



Source: Own visual, content retrieved from Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2005)

The LEAP youth organisations [CSC Danilo Dolci](#), [Sapere Aude](#) and [Udruga Mladi EU](#) compiled a total of twelve different projects which they had previously implemented with young people in Italy, Austria and Croatia. Experienced youth workers from these organisations provided descriptions of the projects they had implemented, including the key objectives, target group(s), activities and results of their projects. The youth workers were also asked where (if at all) they were able to recognise features of PBL in their own projects.

The result was a compendium of youth projects which can serve as inspiration for future youth projects (see annexe). The analysis of this compendium revealed that the PBL approach had indeed been a vital aspect of the partner organisations' previous work with young people: A vast majority of the projects included one or multiple features of PBL. We conclude from this



that projects are a powerful tool in the context of non-formal education and that PBL can adequately address youth workers' needs when working with young people in a variety of different ways.

The partner organisations' contributions also shed light on the fact that individual interpretations of the different elements of PBL can vary significantly depending on people's backgrounds and previous experiences in the youth work sector. Identifying different elements of the PBL approach proved a valuable learning experience for both the individual youth workers and the LEAP project as a whole. We argue that reflecting on one's own pedagogical practices is highly beneficial for the youth work sector.

In the following chapter, we walk you through the five PBL steps from a more practice-oriented perspective, offering examples of how this was implemented in our partner organisations' previous projects. With this resource, we want to encourage youth workers and education professionals to think about the potential and relevance of the PBL approach with regards to their own projects and practices:

Can you identify any of the elements of PBL in your own previous work with young people?

How could individual elements of PBL or the PBL approach as a whole be useful to your own pedagogical practices in the youth sector?

## 1. Driving question

A wide range of the LEAP partners' previously implemented projects started from a driving question, i.e. a question that is relevant to the participants because it relates to issues they care about. Characteristic of the PBL approach, project participants were actively involved in choosing and defining the questions and topics they wanted to address within a project:

- During the project *Step into the future!*<sup>8</sup>, participants created their own project ideas, starting with an analysis of issues within their own communities. The project involved young unemployed people between 18 and 30 years old, offering them the opportunity to increase their knowledge and skills within the context of non-formal education activities. The ideas developed were later presented during a conference.
- *Start the Change*<sup>9</sup>'s main objective was to make young people from marginalized groups feel heard to counter radicalisation among students. The participants learned to think through a "project perspective" and were then given the space to develop their own

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<sup>8</sup> *Step into the future* was implemented by Udruga Mladi EU in cooperation with other partner organisations in 2017. Further information on the project is available at <http://mladi-eu.hr/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Step-into-the-future-Newsletter-EN.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> *Start the Change* was implemented by CSC Danilo Dolci between 2016 and 2018. Further information on the project is available at <https://en.danilodolci.org/keyword/start-the-change-en/>.

project idea together with their peers. The participating students aged between 11 and 18 years were encouraged to reflect on issues they consider important both in and outside of their schools. From the project leaders' perspective, identifying these issues together ensured that the young participants felt engaged throughout the next steps of then implementing their projects and solving the issues identified.

- Another project that started with a driving question was *READ*, which aimed to promote literacy among young people through creative local activities. The project participants were included in local working groups, which planned the activities based on an analysis of the needs within the community. According to the project leaders, this allowed the participants to develop real and effective ideas as well as a stronger sense of connection to their community. The local activities were then implemented with the involvement of educators, artists, youth centres, schools and libraries and they involved different art forms reaching from photography to theatre.
- Similar to the PBL approach, the methodology of “Design Thinking” applied for the *Fablab Schools EU* project also started with the identification of issues that the participants (high school students between 13 and 16 years old) wanted to address within their projects. The ideas developed were then implemented through different methods for digital fabrication, fostering the participants' creativity, productivity and entrepreneurial spirit.
- In the *BFI Like it or Change it* project, participants – all apprentices at the BFI Wien – were invited to reflect on a specific question very relevant to their situation: They were asked to brainstorm ideas on how to improve their apprenticeships. These ideas were collected and discussed. Some of the suggestions were then picked as a basis for small project ideas which were implemented by the young people together with youth trainers.

The examples outlined above show that the PBL element of a driving question can be implemented within youth projects in different ways and with diverse target groups. This often starts with an analysis of needs or a reflection on issues that matter to the participants of a project at a local level or in a specific context (e.g. the school, the community, an apprenticeship etc.). The approach engages the participants of a project from the beginning and it ensures that they will feel ownership of what they work on throughout a project.

## 2. Situated learning

Situated learning means that a learning activity is situated in an authentic, real-world context. Situated is opposed to “theoretical” learning, where one reads about something on paper without doing or performing a further action or activity concerning what is being learnt. According to Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2005), this enables young people/learners to:

- Understand the value and meaning of the tasks and activities they perform;
- Generalise knowledge and learning to a wider range of situations;
- Relate information they acquire to prior knowledge and experiences, which can improve learning.

Many projects in the youth work sector offer young people the chance to learn in a meaningful context and draw links to their own lives, previous experiences and prior knowledge. The aim is for young people to acquire new knowledge or skills, which they can later apply to a wide range of situations in their own lives.

- A great example of this is the *Junge Politik 2.0* project, where young people conducted interviews with high-level politicians and policymakers following two-weekend training sessions to prepare for these interviews. The opportunity to advocate their interests to politicians and policy-makers ensured that the participants’ learning experience was positioned in a real-world context, conveying to them that their ideas mattered.
- Similarly, the *Jugend. Politik Partizipation* project also created an authentic learning environment by relating the project specifically to the upcoming regional elections in a rural area: Young people from different youth centres were put in touch with political candidates to ask questions and produce video interviews.
- The *Developing Society* project also related young volunteers’ training experience specific to the local context of the city of Šibenik. Young people explored opportunities to spend their free time in the city and to promote their volunteering activities in local information centres.
- Finally, a connection between young people’s learning experience and the “real world” was also established in the *Ideannovaship (Innovate and Ideate for Social Entrepreneurship)* project: Young people participated in a specific training programme to develop skills for social entrepreneurship, which they would later be able to apply in a variety of different contexts in the personal and professional lives.

## 3. Collaborative processes

Almost all of the projects that were analysed included collaborative processes among young participants to some extent. When implementing youth projects in a non-formal education context, collaboration happens at different stages of projects. Collaborative processes can

refer to a whole group of project participants working together or to collaboration within subgroups:

- In the *Startup! Your career* project, participants were divided into smaller groups to analyse the labour market situation in their own countries and collect information about legislation and programs regarding start-ups at a national and European level. The groups continued to work together throughout the project: The participants learned about business and marketing plans, crowd-funding methods and other aspects of establishing a start-up and in the end, each group created their business idea.
- The youth mobility project *It's time to volunteer!* was directed at youth workers who wanted to increase their knowledge, competences and skills. Throughout the project's entire duration, youth workers were invited to study the youth work situation (issues and difficulties to approach young people for volunteering actions) in groups and to exchange practices from their own national contexts. This fostered collaboration and enabled the sharing of best practices.
- Another example of collaborative processes among peers is the project *Verstärkt politisch*, which aimed to set up a sustainable peer-project for civic education. This included different phases: In the peer-selection phase, a short civic education workshop was held to identify students interested in later becoming peer-coaches. After receiving further training, the selected peer-coaches passed on the knowledge they had gained by holding workshops for other students in their own schools.

#### 4. Technology tools

Exchange and dialogue between participants, research on issues that matter to young people and the creation and distribution of content about a project's result are only a few examples of how technology tools can connect young people and enhance learning environments. Making use of technology tools is key to the project-based learning approach. The following examples from the LEAP partner organisations' previous work show that technology tools are not just means or tools – sometimes, they are at the very core of youth projects:

- CSC's *Fablab Schools EU*<sup>10</sup> project experimented with different methods for digital fabrication, aiming to prepare students for the tech-savvy labour market of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Based on the methodology of "Design Thinking" as developed by Aarhus University (Denmark), the project enabled participants to develop their digital competences and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, acquiring new knowledge about information and communications technologies (ICT) as well as new ways to see and think about the world around them.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://fablabproject.eu/>

- Sapere Aude's *Jugend. Politik Partizipation* included the creation of videos featuring interviews with candidates for a regional election, which were later uploaded on YouTube for the distribution among different youth groups.
- The promotion of young people's communication and digital skills was also emphasised in several LEAP partner organisations' youth projects. Examples include the aforementioned projects *Developing Society* and *Ideannovaship - Innovate and Ideate for Social Entrepreneurship*.

## 5. Creation of an artefact

Many projects conclude with the creation of an artefact of some sort. Depending on a project's topic(s) and aim(s), its target group(s) as well as the time and resources available, "artefacts" created within a youth project can take a variety of different forms:

- One example is the organisation of an event to present what young people did and/or learned during a project. This happened, for example, in the *Junge Politik 2.0* project. Participants co-organised a final event, where they talked about their project experiences, giving them the space to decide how the project results would be presented to the audience.
- Similarly, the participants of the *Step into the future* project displayed the ideas they developed during a final conference in a public library after they had returned from their youth exchange mobilities.
- In the aforementioned *Start the Change* project, students came up with different ways to raise awareness and address the issues they had previously identified – the "artefacts" of their work ranged from pieces of art to initiate discussions to concrete strategies to solve problems related to the maintenance of their schools and school environments as well as their daily life as students.
- In the *Startup! Your career* project, the artefacts took the form of business ideas developed by the groups of participants, using the skills they had developed throughout the project.

### III. TRAINING YOUTH WORKERS ON PROJECT-BASED LEARNING



Photo credit <https://unsplash.com/@sharonmccutcheon>

This section of our booklet provides a basis for different formats of youth workers training. Youth workers trainers, facilitators and educators might find in this section some ideas to develop and implement training for youth workers. The central aim of the booklet is to show how youth workers' training focused on project-based learning can be structured and designed in terms of content.

Furthermore, the Booklet demonstrates how experiences of youth workers can be activated for PBL and how their learning practice is key when designing a training programme.

This section aims to provide information about how to organise youth workers training for project-based learning. Besides, existing PBL knowledge in the training courses is to be made more usable in practice. The following topics and sub-topics and the contents can be integrated into youth workers training. Of course, they can be formulated and combined differently. The trainer can adapt the focus at any time.

In this section, we do not provide basic information about how to organise a training such as how to build up an agenda, how to lead a group discussion, how to ensure commitment, how to organise the training space and material. We are aware that there is a wealth of information and resources<sup>11</sup> about these aspects for new trainers. The specificity and added value of this section resides specifically in the provision of knowledge about a specific topic, the one of participation, and a specific approach, project-based learning.

While a separate resources appendix to this Booklet provides top tips and hands-on information, this section of the booklet is based on the evaluation of four youth workers trainings. Three of them were held as meetings or workshops, one as an online seminar. In addition to this, discussions amongst youth workers trainers and youth workers participating in the project provided insights that have been incorporated in the following depiction. Lastly, several bilateral discussions with experts provided numerous valuable tips contributed to this evaluation.

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<sup>11</sup> Please refer to resources as the SALTO-Youth Platform, the Erasmus+ results platform, Council of Europe Manuals and Handbooks.

Three questions guided our work on training youth workers:

1. Why is it important to train the youth workers on the PBL approach and methodology? PBL potential to educate to participation
2. What are the key aspects that should be covered during youth workers training about PBL? What we have done and what we have learnt
3. How can the learning objectives be achieved/how can the key information about PBL be conveyed to youth workers? Our experience

All our information shows that youth workers training need generally some flexibility and adaptability to the needs and interests of the youth workers involved.

In addition to the content and structure of the training, the necessary flexibility must be considered also in terms of the methods and approaches used. The knowledge and experience of the participating youth workers should be taken into account as a factor when planning the training. We advise as well to always keep in mind the possibility of adapting the training to the dynamics of the group if necessary because it leads to more involvement and to meet the needs of the participants.

Before delving into explaining our experience, it seems key for us to acknowledge that a certain set of conditions must exist for a new methodology to be implemented. As any innovation fuels a process of institutional change, in the case of introducing a new educational practice, research (Rockeach, 1968; Levin, 2015) shows that *beliefs* influence whether educational actors, in this case, youth workers, change their practices to incorporate new content, new instructional strategies or start new initiatives. Beliefs might in fact support a certain resistance to change and therefore when developing training for youth workers it is key to acknowledge them and work with them by taking into account subjective dimensions.

### **1. Why is it important to train the youth workers on the PBL approach and methodology? PBL potential to educate to participation**

We start with the question about why youth workers training on the PBL approach and methodology is important. There are normative reasons and reasons of practicability in youth work. The implementation of training conveys learning methods, shows the applicability of PBL in youth work and demonstrates the potential of PBL in non-formal youth education to youth workers. Three main aspects of the importance for youth workers trainings about the method can be distinguished. They relate to the objectives and methods:

- a. The PBL concept is transferable to very different objects and settings
- b. The PBL approach is a self-contained holistic method
- c. The PBL approach supports active and democratic citizenship

During the planning and implementation of a youth workers' training please keep in mind that the three aspects of PBL are interrelated and must be put into context. Each PBL project is designed differently from another; project facilitators are guiding figures that act differently according to each group and context; external influences can also influence the course of projects while they are being implemented.

a. The PBL approach is transferable to different objects and settings

In addition to the pedagogical impact presented in the following two subchapters, the PBL approach has very practical advantages for youth work. The approach can be applied in different contexts in terms of the content, group size and composition. The social composition may differ as well as the cultural or religious background of the participating young people. It can also be adapted to different durations, periods and other changing conditions where necessary. Regarding the formal framework conditions, large variations between different projects are possible: PBL can take place in formal, informal, non-formal settings.

Originally, PBL was developed mainly in for technical and scientific content and school contexts. However, generally, the acquisition of knowledge and competencies does not depend on the content of a project, and the approach is also transferable to social science-related content; not only subject-related skills but also civic and social skills are learned.

b. The PBL approach is a self-contained holistic approach

The PBL approach constitutes a self-contained concept; it starts with a driving question and ends with the creation of an artefact (see above, section II). After the implementation of a PBL project and during the project stage, young people must organise their work and manage their time on their own. Depending on the requirements of the youth groups, a PBL project can be adapted and adjusted in terms of time and content.

Project-based learning is an approach considering individuals as 'whole persons', which means including mental and social factors. PBL strengthens the personal autonomy and civic competences as well as the willingness to participate of the young people involved.

c. The PBL approach supports active and democratic citizenship

Project-based learning is designed to have a positive impact in terms of inclusion, participation and democracy. The objectives of PBL can include an increase in participatory behaviour of young people, encourage them to exercise their democratic rights and strengthen the individual democratic and civic consciousness. Young people can experience, in such projects, that through their actions they can make an impact and produce a result. The autonomy of the individual and their competence to collaborate are, at the same time, strengthened.

While organising a training, it is important to clarify to the youth workers participating, that young people should have a decisive influence on/during the PBL process from the beginning to the results; i.e. PBL has the potential to increase young people's self-confidence and



willingness/ability to participate (reference to the democratic and educational value; see below 2c. and 3.). It is key to underline that it is a young peoples' driven approach and that the youth workers role is the one of a guide, starting from the identification of topics to the creation of an artefact. It is this idea that produces a shift in the potential impacts of the approach: young people are not perceived as recipients of a project but as actors that shape it.

The importance of PBL is therefore not least due to its many positive effects on the civic qualities of young people.

## **2. What are the key aspects that should be covered during youth workers training about PBL? What we have done and what we have learnt**

The key aspects to be considered in youth workers training are not solely related to PBL; the composition of the participants also plays an important role in the implementation and the focus of the training. The experiences and competencies of the participating youth workers can be used as a starting point in the training in a process.

Our analysis of the four youth workers training carried out shows that three important aspects should be considered when preparing the training:

- a) The group composition
- b) The activities
- c) The key terms: participation and democratic citizenship

All three must be adjusted in connection with and in discussion with the participants in an appropriate way for the respective training.

This procedure provides the necessary structure of the training and still maintains the essential flexibility to respond to the needs of the participants and the dynamics of the group.

- a) The group composition

The composition of the group of youth workers participating in the training plays an important role in the implementation and should be acknowledged. In all four training, the (different) background of the participants has been considered during the training process.

The question of whether youth workers are professional or voluntary; whether they tend to work in formal or non-formal settings; whether they have a wealth of experience or are relatively new to the field are all factors that were integrated in different ways. Such differences between the participants can already become apparent during a round of introductions or an icebreaker at the beginning of a youth workers training.

In group work, the knowledge about participants in the training courses was used in different ways. Groups or pairs were formed according to knowledge and experience. In all cases, it became clear that everyone could benefit from each other through the exchange. Even experienced youth trainers can question certain routines and gain new impulses for their work from participating volunteers or newcomers.

b) The activities

An important aspect of the youth training sessions was the exchange of information about the different activities and techniques used by the youth trainers in their work. This can take place in different formats within the training, but the exchange about this has been proved to be successful in all the cases we looked at.

During the different youth workers trainings, it became clear at various points that many activities in the context of youth work can be well used for PBL. Various accompanying discussions have shown that many processes and activities in youth work contain elements of PBL or suggest that project-based application is possible. It is not possible to implement elements of PBL, especially a driving question and the creation of artefacts, without a determined and clear schedule. This is also key information that should be provided during trainings.

Here we have the chance to check activities in conjunction with the object of investigation to see if they are suitable for a driving question and the creation of an artefact. This is another starting point for incorporating the practical experience of the participating youth workers into the training.

The activities do not have to be originally political. Rather, the empowerment towards (political) participation of the young is central. The title of the project can have very different contents; the aim is to strengthen self-confidence and personal autonomy. This can be achieved by acting alone or collaboratively.

c) The key terms: participation and democratic citizenship

A central goal of modern and progressive educational approaches is to enable young people to participate in society and being involved in public life. Especially for socially disadvantaged groups, youth projects are a possible way to eliminate deficits that exist in this respect. Such approaches must be strengthened for the goal of an inclusive, participatory and democratic citizenship.

Youth workers need to reflect on the training that PBL activities can be directed to learn how to participate in the public area to achieve specific goals. It is thus about political and democratic participation. Through their activities, young people shall acquire skills to influence their environment through their own actions. Youth participation can be formalised to different degrees.

The transfer from an individual or collaborative activity to public participation does not have to be immediately clear to the learners – important to them is the process and the experience of their own effectiveness. In connection with one of our goals (the empowerment of youth), the concepts of youth participation and democratic citizenship should be addressed and defined in the training:

Youth *participation* is any activity in which young people shape their environment through their own decisions and commitments. It can take place at any level, classroom, neighbourhood, local, regional, national or global and on any subject. The focus of *democratic citizenship* education is on social charitable activities or activities with political implications and an inclusive direction, strengthening the awareness of having an impact by active participation. Everything that is supporting the participatory concept of democracy. For the sustainability of youth participation, it is important that youngsters recognise that their activity has an effect and a chance to make a difference. Young people's chances to have their say on issues or problems regarding them, directly and indirectly, is a basic component and a requirement for youth participation. The starting point of activities is the ability to recognise what is in their interest.

These definitions illustrate important foundations for democratic citizenship. I.e. the competence for positive engagement (creating, working, sharing, investigating, playing, communicating and learning); participating actively and responsibly (values, attitudes, skills, knowledge) in regional or trans-regional communities (local, national, global) at all levels (social, political, economic, cultural and intercultural).

### 3. How can the learning objectives be achieved/how can the key information about PBL be conveyed to youth workers? Our experience

The youth workers trainings we analysed for this section showed that the knowledge and experience of the youth workers involved can be very helpful to build PBL-knowledge. Besides the individual experiences and the opportunity to reflect on them, the individual knowledge can become common knowledge among participating youth workers. We proceeded with the following three steps to show how to communicate the most important aspects:

- a) Let the youth workers speak
- b) Reflect on background and context
- c) Put decisions into the hands of young people

In the following three steps it is thus not only a matter of conveying new knowledge to the youth workers, but also of activating existing knowledge and showing where their experiences can be connected to PBL.

a) Let the youth workers speak

The four youth workers trainings we examined have shown that interactive behaviour of the participants themselves and with the participants can make a decisive contribution to conveying key information about PBL. It is not only about conveying knowledge, but also about raising awareness of the approach. The existing knowledge and experience can be activated for a successful project, even if the youth worker is only supposed to take on an accompanying function.

A youth workers' training should, of course, contain elements aiming at exchanges, since how discussions and conversation are achieved also depend on the format and composition of the group. They can be summarised as follows: a) choose means that give the training the right amount of vitality; b) collect political and apolitical topics on flipcharts for brainstorming and socialisation of knowledge; c) role-playing with tasks aimed at solving problems within defined communities; d) different formats of group work and discussions.

Many suggestions, a toolkit and a youth worker dedicated manual can be found in the PBL methodology manual produced as a result of the LEAP project. These can be used to animate the seminar and be helpful for youth workers to prepare projects or find impulses for project ideas. However, their focus is about engaging young people, and they complement the information provided in this booklet.

b) Reflection on background and context

Making the participating youth workers aware that they need to keep in mind the background and context of non-formal PBL is a key element to consider. We start from the assumption that youth workers, in their professional practices, consider the background of the living situation of young people, their personal development and the need for democratic education for a democracy to function. When organising a training, a youth worker educator, trainer and facilitator, should equally consider these elements. After all, a meaningful educational experience that reflects on personal beliefs and perspectives is key to learning. The functionality of a democratic system depends on the democratic citizenship of the population.

Youth workers should also consider the situation of young people in the PBL process in relation to their everyday situation. Young people are at the starting point of the balancing act of establishing themselves socially and professionally on the one hand, and the demands made on them from to be prepared to fulfil the expectation or necessity to participate politically. This point can be well suited to carry out a process of reflection in the context of a discussion or group work.

c) Putting decisions into the hands of young people

One of the most important experiences for young people in a corresponding project could be that they learn the possibility of their own effectiveness in the project's process. This cannot happen if youth workers do not hold the belief that young people can take issues that matter to them in their hands.

The young people involved in the project are responsible for the success of the project themselves. It is also about giving young people a measure of autonomy so that they can make decisions and learn to carry out actions even against resistance. These aspects of PBL is an instrument to strengthen the ability to act independently and self-determined. A prerequisite for participatory and democratic citizenship of young people.

The need to let the young people make decisive decisions results from the PBL approach itself but also from advice given during the training. It is important to discuss, with youth workers their ideas about young people and their capabilities. Procedures that are uneasy for the trainers and youth workers should also be part of the discussion.

## SUMMARY of Key Findings

A

Youth workers trainings need generally some flexibility and adaptability to the needs and interests of the participants.

B

The PBL concept is transferable to very different objects and settings.

C

The PBL approach is a self-contained holistic method.

D

The PBL approach supports active and democratic citizenship.

E

When organising a training, please consider:

1. The group composition
2. The activities
3. The key terms: participation and democratic citizenship

F

Furthermore: let the youth workers speak, reflect on their background and context and discuss with them their ideas about young people

## Conclusion

It is clear from the literature about project-based learning that this approach represents a useful way to address youth participation.

As outlined at the beginning of this Booklet, further resources such as the PBL methodology which contains a toolkit as well of some of the tools used with youth workers and the youth Charter on participation can represent comprehensive instruments to promote youth citizenship.

Reviving the roots of this approach through authors as Dewey and Kilpatrick and looking at how the approach evolved in the school context guided us in our quest for translating and systematising PBL in the youth sector.

The reasons why PBL seems appropriate to explore participation can then be retrieved in the fact that it has versatile features that can put the young person at the centre of the debates around this topic.

Based on the summary of the key findings from our experience, it seems important to outline our way forward.

The experimentations conducted within LEAP revealed that training based on PBL can contribute to the professionalisation of youth workers on different levels, such as methodological training but as well content training about topics such as participation, democracy and citizenship. Therefore, reflecting with youth workers about their practices, these topics and PBL is complementary to engaging in working with young people.

It appears clear that youth workers play a vital role in the education and participation landscape.

Our experience was rooted as well in what it means to be a youth worker in Europe and the countries involved in the project. With the EU contributing to strengthening this policy area, different governance levels overlap and complement each other even if education and training policies are under the responsibility of Member States.

Reflecting on youth workers roles, status, qualifications and education practices can offer insights that are worth to be explored further.

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# LEAP – Learning to Participate

is a project about youth empowerment, active citizenship and skills development. It is a strategic partnership project between universities and youth organisations that contributes to foster participation and European mobility for all.

