



INTRODUCING RE-PARTICIPATION

A project by Federation of Children's and Youth Municipal Councils
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1. The organization behind the project

Federation of Children's and Youth Municipal Councils (FCYMC) is a Hungarian national NGO, an umbrella organization of local children's and youth councils. It was created in 1996 with the main goal of representing local youth communities at a national level, creating opportunities for them to meet, and to help them in their development.

Throughout the years our organization has grown a lot, now we carry out national and international projects concerning active citizenship, democracy and empowerment. Providing the existing youth councils and groups of youngsters who wish to create youth councils with professional methodologies, trainings and experiences has become our mission. We wish to promote the importance of being active and ready for action at local level at a very young age. In order to have self-conscious and aware young adults we have to begin to teach and show children the possibilities and power of initiating changes.

In the past few years we had several projects concerning the constructed dialogue between decision-makers of our country and youngsters. We've realized that we have to develop the methodologies existing in order to bring change to the matter. We believe that decision-makers would be open to the opinion of youngsters of Hungary, but nor the place nor the opportunities are not necessarily given. During our past projects we also came to the following conclusion: young people in Hungary are not prepared to have an equal conversation with decision-makers. They need help in expressing their own opinion and development of representing the opinions and interests of their peers. Our national and international projects in the last few years focused mainly to this issues.

We are working with an 8-membered operative group (the chair of the organization – the president, the secretary general and 3 vice-presidents and a trinomial supervising committee), who are volunteers. The decision-making body is the assembly of representatives (from the members youth councils), which meets at least two times a year. One of the specialties of our organization is the voluntary work that every member of FCYMC is doing in order to manage every-day matters. Our management has a system of rotations, which means that during given times one of the presidency is responsible for different daily matters.

Creating and carrying out RE-Participation we followed the same methodology. The main ideas and part-actions are the intellectual products of the members of the chair. When deciding who will deal with the communication of the project, the trainings, the mentoring process and the research we've divided the tasks according to one's interests and volunteering. We believe that this way every field has a leader with responsibility and motivation. The manager of the whole project is also in a rotational system, at every month



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there is one of the project-team who has the responsibility of monitoring the actual tasks of the project, gathering project meetings, and making sure that all of us are doing our best in order to successfully achieving our goals.

2. The project and its innovative intensions

RE-Participation is a long-term project carried out during 1st February 2016 – 31st May 2017. It is a real milestone in the life of our organization since one of its goals is to collect the knowledge, methods and experiences of us and the professionals, decision-makers and the youth surrounding us. This knowledge was gathered throughout the years, and in this very changing environment it is also dynamic, always changing collective knowledge. With the project we also wish to create opportunities for decision-makers and youngsters to meet and exchange ideas, discuss and tackle real problems at local level. The goal is to make sure that youngsters can join the process of structured dialogue at national and European levels, and also to multiple it.

The social need which called our project to born was that the statistics show that in Hungary many settlements (villages and small towns mostly) have the serious problem of aging societies. Many youngsters, who feel like they are not necessarily part of the settlements' communities decide to leave; going to study and work in another towns, bigger cities and even abroad. In the past few years many NGOs decided to deal with the matter, to create possibilities at local levels, improve the employment situation in smaller settlements. Another way to face the problem is to create and strengthen youth communities in villages and towns, in order to make youngsters have the feeling of belonging somewhere, belonging to the bigger community of the settlement. We think that both ways are appropriate and we decided to target this major problem and give youngsters a chance to reconnect with their own settlements.

The other issue addressed by our project is the gap between decision-makers, politicians and the youth of our country. Many people believe that youngsters in general are uninterested in decision-making, they do not wish to participate actively. We think differently. The real problem is the missing place and opportunity for youngsters to meet with decision-makers and share their points of view. For this we think the methodology of constructed dialogue is the ideal.

Also we believe that there is a lack of knowledge in the minds of youngsters about decision-making processes of Hungary, the education system does not cover all the important information about active citizenship and democratic values. It is crucial to the matter to properly inform and empower the youngsters in order to have them really say their needs, address decision-makers with their issues and the ideas for solutions – which they definitely have, since they are very creative and innovative in general.

In the past few years – thanks to our national projects – we have met several unique groups of youth communities (mostly children's and youth councils) who already have common practice in co-operation with the town councils and decision-makers. These experiences gave



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us the idea and necessity of collecting the good practices, helping every actor of the area (decision-makers, youth workers and the youngsters themselves). The institution of youth councils could be a great solution to all three issues defined by us, but since we do not want to make youth councils a strictly structured and regulated form of youth communities, the project does not revolve around them. We merely want to give a possibility to everyone, every actor to decide to create a change, make an example of good governance and democracy involving the future generations in the present.

3. The structure of the project

The project itself has two parts which are conducted parallel, in order to be time-efficient and to reach the desired results in the best possible way.

a. Youth community development

The first part is a **youth community development process**, where we gave the opportunity to 30 youth communities to apply who are seeking change and want to develop. We targeted mostly the center and western parts of Hungary, because we have less knowledge and experiences in these areas, but we know that many youth organizations do significant work here. Although this was not an exclusive factor, any youth community could join the project. After the involvement its clearly shows that youth communities from the eastern and southern part of Hungary was also more interested.

One or two representatives of our applicant youth communities were invited to participate in the empowerment process of the project. We had three trainings built on each other in Center- and three in West-Hungary, in order to provide the necessary knowledge and competence-development as close to the participating settlements. The trainings were carried out with non-formal educational methodology, many exercises and practical sessions because we believe that we need to develop not just the lexical knowledge of participants but give them the opportunity of realizing their strengths and weaknesses concerning attitudes and skills. The non-formal education has the advance of making the experiences more effective than some lectures about given topics. This way, we prepared the representatives to be more self-confident, and give them the sense of entrepreneurship needed for them to the longer part of the project.

The core of the three training courses was making sure our participants know the method called the "Wheel of Egan". Egan is a British industrialist, who believed that sustainable development has to meet the interest of the existing and future residents of a town. He was created the Wheel which divides sustainable communities into 8 sections (equity, economy, social & cultural, housing & the built environment, environmental, services, transport & connectivity, governance). If these 8 sections, parts are working sufficiently, then the community has sustainable development. During the trainings we introduced this approach to our participants, and we also gave the opportunity to them to try out the method in a safe environment. The participants did field work in the trainings location, and discussed the



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results of their work. The experience was so thorough that the knowledge of the method is deeply implanted in every participant.

After the training courses, the multipliers have the task of carrying out 6 future-planning sessions with their local community with the use of Egan's Wheel. Meaning that our goal is to strengthen the youth communities by giving them the chance of researching their own settlements current situation (going around the 8 parts) and finding sustainable solutions to the occurring problems. The 5th and 6th future-planning session has to involve decision-makers and other significant actors of the youth work of the settlement (such as leaders of local NGOs, cultural and youth centres, etc.). This way we gave them the opportunity of experiencing constructed dialogue, and they can show the decision-makers of the settlement that youth are an important, vital part of the local community.

During the future-planning sessions, the project-team does not wish to interfere at local levels. We want to make sure, that the multipliers, who have participated in our trainings have the chance to organize things by themselves, thus improving and developing their skills and competences. Gaining more and more experience, trying out in real life what they have learned will make significant change in their own lives. We wanted to be the empowering force, the ignition to their fire, to show themselves what they are really capable of. However, we will not abandon our multipliers completely. Every youth community has a mentor (a role filled by two members of the project-team), who will help with the uprising questions and make sure that the future-planning sessions are going in the way they are supposed to in administrative means and of course help in any way which is necessary. The mentors will held two supervision meetings, where the participants can give reports on how they are doing so far, and discuss with the mentors and each other the occurring difficulties. We believe these supervising meetings will be a good place to share experiences, solve difficulties (together) and find the inner motivation, which of course can fade during the work of multipliers (since it is a 6-month process). The mentors have a big responsibility since they have to be very careful not to interfere with local processes but give every support which is needed.

The long-term results we wish to achieve with this part of the project are very diverse and will happen in more than one level. The obvious parts are the development and solutions given to the settlement leaders, and the personal progress made by our multipliers (regarding many competences like entrepreneurship, communication, organizational skills, etc). Even this would be quite an achievement, but if we dig deeper, we can see that these processes will help the youth community to strengthen, have a significant role in the settlements community. Participating youngsters will have the experience of sharing problems and needs, finding sustainable solutions and practical tools to carry them out. They will be part of a constructed dialogue, they will possibly alternate the present and the future of their own villages, towns. This kind of empowerment will have long-term effects, regarding active citizenship, participating in democratic processes, learning that they word is important, and they can make their voices heard.

b. Research and booklet



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The second part of the project – which is a bit more dry and more scientific – is a **research**. We will visit 40 settlements in Hungary (big and small ones in the same amount in order to have more representative results), and have a guided interview with the settlements' decision-makers and youth workers. We are looking for good practices, exemplary methods of involving youngsters in matters of settlements. The interview is somewhat casual, our given experiences show (we have already been to 2 bigger towns and 2 small villages) that decision-makers want to deal with youngsters, they are concerned by the matter, and have a lot to say about the topic.

The interviews will give us an overview (a panorama-view) of Hungarian settlements situation regarding youngsters. This overview will be a significant part of the **booklet** written in the beginning of 2017. The booklet will basically be a handbook to decision-makers and youth workers giving examples and practices, advices and suggestions about involving youth in the settlements lives. It will be based on the organizations collective knowledge and experiences but after the first drafts are ready, we wish to have a meeting with the experts of Hungarian youth work where we discuss the materials, and they can reflect on it, and gave us their personal and professional feedback. This way the booklet will be based on many experiences and angles, being very thorough and unique in the field of youth in our country.

The two parts of the project will meet in a very big **Closing Conference** organized at a national level. Here we want to invite every participant of the project (youth communities, interviewed decision-makers and professional youth workers). The Conference will be the opportunity to show what our participants have achieved, to introduce the finalized booklet and the results of the complete project. The place and the chance will be given to learn from each other, to exchange ideas and opinions. We hope that the invited decision-makers will find it inspiring how youngsters did their work all by themselves, and with the help of their settlements' decision-makers what kind of changes they initiated.

4. Summary

For our organization this project will be the next step in creating something lasting, shaping the general opinion of youth of our country. We believe that the challenges and difficulties Hungarian settlements are facing can only be solved with the involvement of Hungarian youngsters, and we want to be the help to start a real change in everybody's mind-set. The project involves 30 young participants as multipliers, affects directly 80 settlements and 320 youngsters, and we wish to make contact (personally and through our multipliers) with 240 decision-makers and other actors of youth field.

We think our project's innovation relies mostly on the fact that we don't just act but make other "stakeholders" of the project want to act, and actively take part in every part of the project.