

ECPD

Youth (e-)Participation in Evidence-Based Decision Making and Advocacy

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Abstract

Citizens, and not only the young ones, need access to information and especially suitable insights into matters that concern them, should be connected with other citizens and receive their feedback, and be involved in discussions with decision makers in order to effectively promote and advocate for their ideas for public good. The YouthMetre (including mobile application GeoCitizen) is a project addressing all these needs and providing solutions to them. By combining online and offline tools it aims at helping all citizens to get their voice heard and make a change.

Objectives of the YouthMetre

The goal of YouthMetre is to provide accessible information to young people living in the EU and to empower them with tools so they are able to interact with policy makers as well as other citizens, and using these connections and information to make a positive change in areas that concern them. Also public authorities shall use the YouthMetre tools to get feedback from citizens and connect with them.

The project team believes that effective advocacy requires access to, simple insight in, and the successful use of open information generated by public authorities. The YouthMetre closes the gap between youngsters and policy implementation, shifting power from the hands of policy makers to those of youth. The approach recognises that training and local meetings bringing together young people and decision makers are needed to make best of the YouthMetre/GeoCitizen tools and help with creating direct dialogue and exchanges between youngsters and policy makers.

The work on the ground is also important to reach project's goals, therefore the YM team organises live trainings and discussions. A series of 15 Study Groups of young people in 15 European countries have contributed to the development of the project. See their diaries (<http://youthmetre.eu/study-groups/>) and their blogs (<http://youthmetre.eu/blog/>).

Target groups

The YouthMetre project is connecting two target groups: 1) young citizens (18-30) interested in taking part in decision making and positive change in their community, region or thematic area that interests or concerns them; and 2) decision-makers at local, national and European level. The project aims at

facilitating contacts and exchange of ideas or best practices among members of these target groups, as well as discussions between both of them.

YouthMetre and GeoCitizen approach

The YouthMetre project promotes a bottom-up approach in political decision-making. It brings together geographers, information technologists, youth workers, advocates, researchers, policy analysts and public authorities (at local, national, European level) to synthesise and present information online in a format that is highly accessible to young people, whilst also working with multiplier organisations on the ground to build capacity for young people to make use of this information, network and create opportunities for change. The development team is also working on creation of networks of both young people and public authorities across the EU to facilitate discussion among them.

Being open to all citizens the YouthMetre promotes non-discrimination in active participation. It also focuses on people from remote areas, as not only people from cities should be able to use tools facilitating active citizenship.

Digital tools and live meetings/actions are complementary to each other within the YouthMetre project. Central to the project is the YouthMetre tool (data-dashboard), which presents open data and information on public policy and its outcomes in a visually accessible manner that enables quick comparisons between different countries and different regions of the European Union. A youth well-being scoreboard, based on 87 indicators selected by youth, provides an assessment of how well each region is performing and a clear comparison of the work of different local and regional authorities.

Having a platform that facilitates young people to network with others on their key policy concerns helps reduce isolation and encourages social action. There is a huge potential here to support young people to engage with and participate in evidence-based public decision-making and thereby to strengthen the accountability of local, regional and national governments. Local meetings bringing young citizens and decision makers are going to be implemented in several EU countries. Already during 2016, YouthMetre study groups' meetings took place in 15 European Union Member States to get feedback on the tool and learn about perception of young people regarding well-being in their countries. Results are available on one of the maps within the YouthMetre dashboard and can be easily compared by data collected by Eurostat.

Mobile application GeoCitizen helps young people to put forward their own ideas for their communities and to connect with other young people and youth groups. It allows the authors of projects/ideas to collect feedback from the general public and later use this information when advocating. Users can also

vote and choose the best idea. At the same time, decision makers can use the application to launch public consultations and thus involve citizens in the decision making. Only people present in the geographical area covered by an idea (typically country, but it can be also city or municipality) are able to comment or vote on it, since the app uses geo-localisation mechanism.

In order to make use of the YouthMetre and GeoCitizen and support the advocacy process, training resources for young people and for multipliers (youth workers, NGOs, and other organisations working with young people) have been developed and tested. The training is designed to support young people to make use of the information in the YouthMetre tool and to help them with creating direct dialogue and evidence-based exchanges with policy makers and general public.

The YouthMetre concept could also be developed (multiplied) to address other issues where data and good practices are available, such as migration, environmental issues and climate change.

Impact and milestones of the YouthMetre

The YouthMetre tool was launched in February 2017 and its technology and visualisation of the data is online available through the Cloud on computer, laptop, tablet and smartphone. The use of mapping and open data technology and the design of the online platforms to provide access to information work really well according to feedback the project partners received so far. Since the beginning of 2017, the YouthMetre has been connected with the GeoCitizen mobile application.

Fifteen Study Groups have been completed to advise the project, test the tools and the project's approach. Feedback from young people involved has been very positive – with the youngsters especially liking the open nature of the data, presentation of the data analysis in a visually accessible manner (including maps), and the networking and advocacy opportunities.

Launch conference where young people met with decision makers and training on advocacy was organised in Brussels in February 2017. A network of municipalities using the tools is currently being set up.

Sustainability

During research, which was conducted at the beginning of the project, the project partners realised that there are many projects around Europe that are not

sustainable. The main reason is insufficient dissemination, due to which their results/tools are not used. Therefore, one of our goals is to disseminate the YouthMetre as widely as possible. Project partners are reaching out to both municipalities and NGO's and encouraging them to become so called pilot projects and use the YM tools. There is already an interest among both target groups. Project partners believe in snowball effect that will help us to make the YM sustainable – especially local municipalities are rather sceptical at the beginning, but they are more inclined to use the tool – share and visualise information, as well as use crowd-maps and discussion fora to connect with citizens – if they see success stories of their colleagues.

In terms of influencing policy development, it is recognised that leveraging influence takes time and advocacy and policy impact are long-term processes. The project team identifies and works with public authorities dealing with youth issues interested in becoming members of the YouthMetre network that shall ensure sustainable cooperation usage of YM tools in long-term.

One representative from each of 15 local Study Groups attended training in Brussels and are acting as multipliers in their municipality or country, guaranteeing sustainability and transfer of YouthMetre outputs to more youth organisations and young Europeans.

The YouthMetre will be sustainable also through ongoing innovations. Project partners don't want the project to freeze, but develop new components. Innovations and effective dissemination are drivers of the YouthMetre's long-term sustainability.

Although the project is focused on the EU mainly, its developers are seeking new funding opportunities to implement it beyond the Union as well. First contact in this regard has been already established in the Balkans (Member Organisations of the EYP in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro can be local partners) and in the EuroMed region, with connections in Morocco and Egypt. Interest has also been expressed from Canada and South Korea, countries where open data is becoming more widely available.

The YouthMetre approach could be applied to other issues that young people care about, for instance in monitoring the UN Sustainable Development Goals or environmental issues.

Team structure

The YouthMetre is run by consortium of six organisations from different European countries: EUROGEO (Belgium), ARS4Pro (Belgium), ALDA

(France), CESIE (Italy), Universidad de Zaragoza (Spain), and EYP (Germany). Each organisation is responsible for certain parts of the project: EUROGEO: overall coordination and finances; ARS4Pro – research and development; Universidad de Zaragoza – development; EYP – communication and advocacy support; CESIE – development of training course; ALDA – communication with public authorities. All partners are contributing to other parts as well depending on their competences. Each organisation is therefore represented by 1 – 3 people.

The YouthMetre is a project for young people run by young people. Although they got invaluable support and guidance by older colleagues, the YouthMetre team responsible for development and implementation of the project is under the age of 33.