



GROUPUP

Booklet 1

How to create and motivate
a youth group for Active Citizenship

Imprint

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*“Youngsters are craving for new things, but it is hard to understand what they are craving for... **The journey is not to find the perfect sweet, but to bake together.**”*

(Inês Vasquez, YouthCoop, Portugal)



INTRODUCTION

Who are we?

We are the Competence Group Methods, a group of professionals working in the field of international youth work and part of the network of Generation Europe – The Academy (GenE-A).

We share the principles of non-formal education and the common values we have raised through our network: democracy, equality, human rights and respect. Our primary target group is disadvantaged youth in different European countries, youth with fewer opportunities due to physical and psychological special needs, social, geographical, religious, gender and other specific backgrounds. Do they need special educational environments, special treatment and pedagogical tools?

Our experience in the network suggests not.

We are diverse but we have one common goal. We are very diverse in our areas of work – sustainability, theatre, art, humanitarian work with ethnic minorities, refugees and disabled people. However, our common goal is to

empower youngsters in European countries to be active citizens. What does that mean? The members of our network from 14 countries will certainly give different answers to this question, either caused by the different national working conditions for youth workers, or because of their individual experiences in collaborating with local stakeholders. Active citizens vote, protest, advocate, protect the rights of disadvantaged groups or raise awareness in their neighbourhood about a local park. All in all, active citizens are those who wish to make changes for the better. And that is also what we do through our projects with youngsters.

How do we do it? Our pedagogical approach

The long experience of our network partners leads us to the conclusion that youth encounters that take place once a year, enrich the intercultural competencies of the young people, but bring little sustainability to youth work. Therefore, we developed a pedagogical concept that allows youngsters from different countries to exchange regularly with their peers and to continue the project work both on a local and international level.

During a five-year project phase, each partnership of three European organisations has three years to conduct one youth exchange per year, giving young people from that partnership the opportunity to meet face-to-face three times. In between youth encounters, youngsters are involved in local project activities which they brainstorm and design themselves. The youth leaders support the young people's initiatives and facilitate their activities, so that by the second or third youth encounter, the young people share their project experiences and their first attempts at advocacy and lobbying.

This booklet is about the first steps in youth empowerment. How to build a group? How to overcome the first challenges in a new group and move further as a team? How to motivate youngsters for active participation? We have collected some pedagogical ideas and concepts on this topic, but also the insights, tips and best practices from our network. The voices from the network present a variety of educational environments and strategies related to specific youth target groups, in addition to being a source of inspiration. However, we would like to share with you the most important insight that we all agree on in our network: **Regardless of the specific background or needs of your youngsters, everyone can be empowered and become an active citizen.**

1. WHAT IS A GROUP?

Cycle of a group (Group phases)

We all exist within groups: in our daily lives, in our professional lives, and so on. Therefore, it is important to know what a group is and why people organise themselves in groups.

A group may be defined as "a collection of three or more individuals who interact about some common problem or interdependent goal and can exert mutual influence over one another" (Wilson, Gerald, & Hanna, 1990). There is no limit concerning a group's size, but typically a group is thought to include a number of people from 3 to 12.

There are three reasons why people form groups:

- ▶ The first reason may be to pursue a common interest or goal.
- ▶ A second reason, known as drive reduction, is the benefit of belonging to a group, as the work expected of one person is effectively reduced and instead transferred to a larger number of people.
- ▶ The third reason, also called reinforcement, is the necessity for positive reinforcement and other social phenomena within a group.

Group development

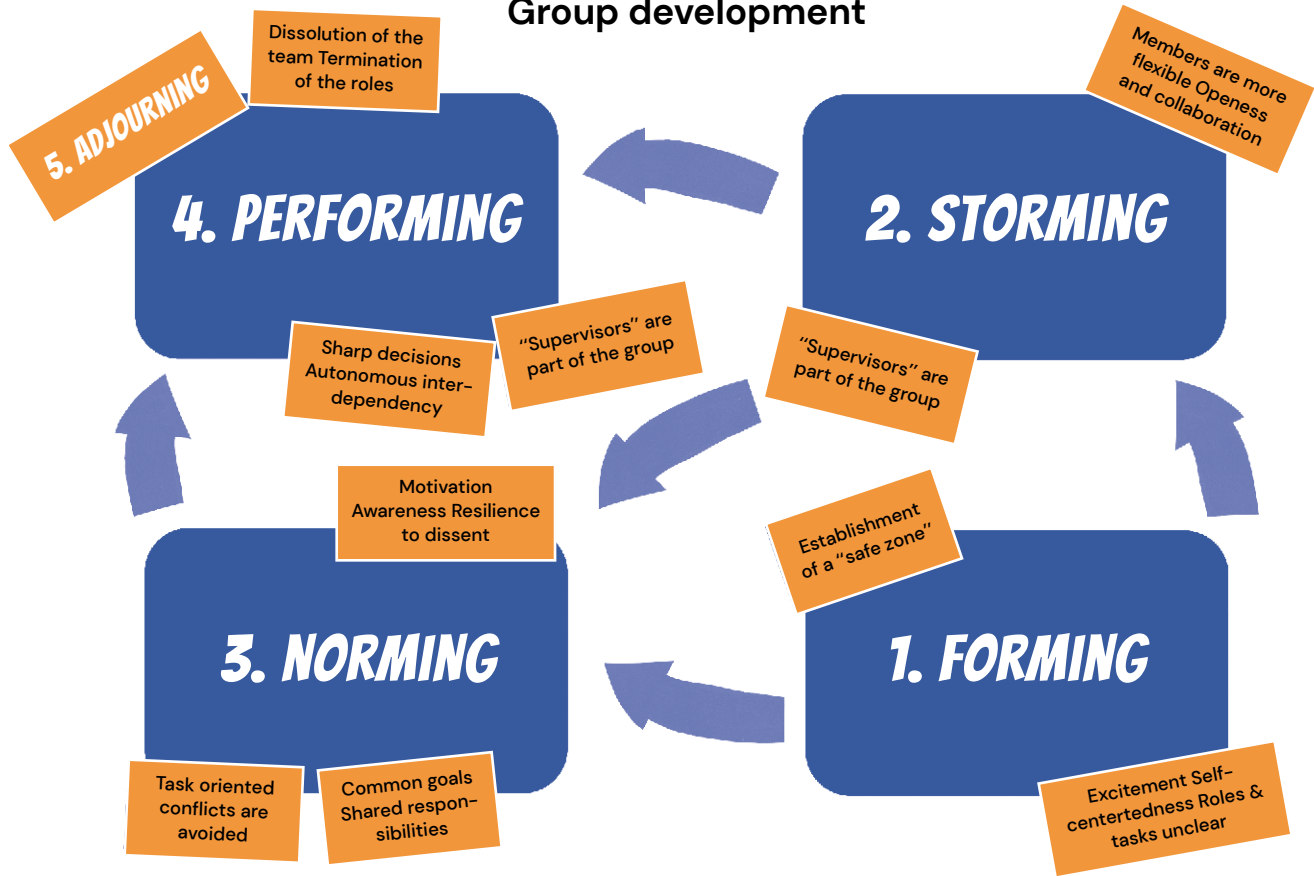


Figure 1: Stages of group development, described by Bruce Tuckman

Tuckman's model

Now we know why groups form, but what needs to follow is a look at the process that groups go through as they form and grow. In his paper, psychologist Bruce Tuckman proposed the division into phases of a group's formation and development, as well as the names for each phase. We will take a closer look at Tuckman's model (Tuckman, 1965).

1. FORMING

The first stage consists in moulding and shaping the group's basic structure. This stage is characterised by a slight uncertainty, which manifests in excessive politeness, the formation of cliques, the seeking of approval by group members and an avoidance of controversy. However, in spite of the anxiety, this phase is also characterised by a marked optimism, which fosters the feedback and communication that is necessary to set goals and continue on to the next stage.

2. STORMING

As the group solidifies, conflicts start to emerge, and it is this restlessness that characterises the second phase: arguing abounds and leadership is brought into question. In order to progress to the next stage, conflict resolution takes on a fundamental role and interpersonal, as well as intrapersonal relationships must take centre stage. As a result of closer bonding between members, the group might start shifting towards shared leadership and problem-solving, which allows the group to progress to the next stage.

3. NORMING

In the third stage, the group becomes even more cohesive, shared leadership supplants traditional leadership and team members work together. Relationships become comfortable, and the group develops a routine.

Because the group starts settling into a comfortable routine, group members may, from this point on, start resisting any change, which might bring about more conflict in the future. However, in spite of that, the group is generally productive and creative, and collaboration truly starts to emerge during the norming stage.

4. PERFORMING

The most productive phase of all, as at this point group members have learned how to work together and the group has reached its peak in terms of productivity and creativity. Roles are clearly distributed, the team is organised and leadership is fully shared as members communicate effectively with each other. It is, however, worth noting that not all groups reach stage four.

5. ADJOURNING

Adjourning, or Mourning, is the final celebration of the team's achievements; it is a moment to share all the positive experiences that the group has had, as members get ready to give up on the group and its structures.

Every group has its own path; some go further than others, some finish earlier, and others make it all the way through all five phases. Nonetheless, what is important to remember is that **COMMUNICATION IS KEY**, and no matter how or why a group came together – communication will always be the only thing that can move the group forward as it grows and changes.

Garland, Jones & Kolodny model

Many other theorists on group dynamics in social work have presented their views of the stages in a group's life, to mention a few: Kindelsperger (1957), Garland, Jones & Kolodny (1965), Sarri & Gallinsky (1967).

Another interesting theory to consider in the context of group youth work is the one developed by Garland, Jones and Kolodny (1965). Five clear stages are described in detail in their publication, focusing on the evolution of relationships among group members, thus, making it important for youth leaders to take it into consideration. A brief description of this model's five stages has been offered by James Whittaker (1970).

1. PRE-AFFILIATION

In this stage the key point is the "closeness" of the group members, who struggle with "approach-avoidance". Doubts and ambivalence toward involvement is reflected in the members' vacillating responses to group meetings and activities. Relationships are usually non-intimate, and members often act stereotypically in order to get acquainted.

2. POWER AND CONTROL

After making the decision to stay in the group, members move to a stage during which issues of power, control, status, skill and decision-making are the focal points. Some "testing" may come from the group leader/worker as well as the members; there is also an attempt to define relationships and some sort of status hierarchy. Power-struggle phenomena develop around three main issues: rebellion and autonomy, permission and the normative crisis, as well as protection and support.

3. INTIMACY

The characteristic of this stage is the intensification of personal involvement, more willingness to bring in feelings about members and group leaders, and a striving for satisfaction of dependency needs. Rivalry tends to appear here, as well as comparison of the group to family life. The ability to plan things and implement group projects grows. What is also growing is the awareness and mutual recognition of the significance of the group experience in terms of personality growth and change.

4. DIFFERENTIATION

Members begin to accept one another as distinct individuals. Relationships and needs are more reality based, communication is good and there is strong cohesion. The clarification of power relationships gives freedom for autonomy and intimacy; it brings freedom and ability to differentiate and to evaluate relationships and events in the group on a reality basis. The group experience becomes functionally autonomous in this stage. Gradually, the group becomes, in a sense, its own frame of reference.

5. SEPARATION

The group experience has been completed; members may begin to move apart and find new resources for meeting their needs. Often observed reactions of groups in the process of termination: denial, regression, recapitulation of past group experiences, evaluation, flight, and pleas to sustain the group.

2. STRATEGY ON FORMING A GROUP

Stages	Tuckman	Garland, Jones & Kolodny
	(characteristics of the process/ function)	(characteristics of the in-group relations and dynamics)
1st	Forming	Pre-affiliation
2nd	Storming	Power & control
3rd	Norming	Intimacy
4th	Performing	Differentiation
5th	Adjourning	Separation

Figure 2: Table of comparative stages/phases in group development

Forming a local group of young people with the aim to work on active citizenship is a challenging – if not intimidating and chaotic – task at first, especially for non-experienced youth workers/aspiring youth leaders. Where to start? Where to look for interested and interesting participants? Who could be my ally in this process? These and many more questions can come to your mind and of course there can be many possible answers.

Networks have many positive aspects, with one of the most valuable being the accumulation and differentiation of experience in the people comprising these networks. Thus, we decided to provide in this booklet a handy overview of strategies and ideas on how to form a local youth group. We opened our eyes and ears to our partners and interviewed project managers and youth leaders of nine organisations from five European countries. Here comes a concise summary of the findings of these interviews.

Input from GenE-A network's experience

Diversity is our strength. This is one of the mottos of Generation Europe – The Academy, and it is reflected in the different strategies that the participating organisations follow when they have to deal with the formation of their local youth group. However, organisations with different audiences, different collaborations, different perspectives and fields of work highlighted common concerns and ideas, as well as some unique characteristics that have proven helpful in creating a “successful” local youth group to date.

Ideas on how to address (and recruit/collect/select) possible participants

Think of your target group

This will help you define a strategy to find participants. It is crucial to have an answer to questions such as:

- ▶ **What is the age range I wish to involve in the group?** Where/how can I reach them? If, for example, my group will include minors, schools can be a good starting point.

- ▶ **What specific communities do I wish to involve in the group?** Where/how can I reach them? If I have a particular interest in working with social groups at risk of exclusion, maybe I should contact associations and other groups that these communities have access to.
- ▶ **What is my organisation's field and objective?** Do I want to keep the group inside of this frame or do I wish to expand it?
- ▶ **What is the local community's main problem identified by and interesting to youth?** This answer will not only help to make a real impact in a local context, but also inspire young people to get involved and keep motivated. It can also help to identify and approach possible partners/stakeholders.

“Our main target group is young people living on the island of Corfu, mostly university students, interested or already organised in other environmental activist groups, such as the Friends of Animals Association, waste watching and recycling groups. Environment and sustainability is a huge problem on this heavily touristic island”, says Kelly Manoudi from EUphoria Youth Lab, Greece, whose group focuses on environmental protection actions, and she goes on: “The local activist group called Fridays for Future Corfu, active in the field of environment protection and climate change, has been our main stakeholder and supporter in finding participants.”

Consider your personal networks and your organisation’s networks

Most of the project leaders interviewed found it useful or even necessary to start from their personal circles of informal and formal networks in which they (and their organisation) are involved. Not only is this a matter of simplicity and accessibility, but it also means that people who are already networking are more likely to be interested and to develop a better understanding of your goals. This does not mean that the same people will participate in (and benefit from) your activities over and over again; personal and professional acquaintances and networks can also act like an avalanche to spread your call and reach unexpected participants.

“We mostly do it by word of mouth among artists. Open calls are usually not so easy to understand. Former participants help us spread the information. They have the experience and they can give the proper feel to new candidates”, says Marina Bistolfi from CCC, an artistic organisation based in Florence, Italy.



To use Social Media or not to use Social Media?

Some partners use Social Media channels to broadcast the fact that they are looking for new participants to reach a wider audience, while others prefer to maintain direct communication with potential participants.

Nevertheless, even organisations who have not used Social Media so far, mentioned that they will consider this channel next time. After all, it is a channel that should not be simply overlooked in youth work, as it is an effective means of information and exchange between younger generations.

Content Strategy Plan				
Date	Type of Media	Type of Post	Topic	Person in charge
08.08.22	Instagram	Text Post	About our current plans and activities	Cleo
10.08.22	Tik Tok	Short video	About a current activity	Candela
15.08.22	Facebook	Longread	What is our project about	Aloma
17.08.22	Instagram	Carousel	Things we do during an activity	Cleo
20.08.22	Facebook	Text Post	Why our projects rock	Aloma
22.08.22	Instagram	Story	Testimony of a participant	Cleo
25.08.22	Facebook	Video	Who we are, the team	Aloma

Figure 3: Strategy example

Concerns and challenges to have in mind

Open-ended or closed-ended group?

Do you intend to add new members later and also accept the fact that some others may leave the group? Or will you lead a group that is closed to new members and have specific start and end dates for the group's commitment? So far in the network, we have seen that both ways work. Some partners work with a fixed core of participants, some keep the group and participation more flexible, while others follow a combination of both ways: They keep a group core with participants with clear commitments, obligations, and benefits (for example participating in the youth exchanges), and they surround that core with others who want to participate in some activities without committing to a long time or travelling.

The decision of an open-ended or closed-ended group is critical. For a "healthy" open-ended group, you probably do not need to select participants; some of our partners put their efforts in attracting participants and welcome everybody who is interested. If you prefer to have a closed, stable group, you might need to go through some selection process:

- ▶ Motivation – this is the top priority (and the biggest challenge)
- ▶ Prior participation (some experience helps, but it is also important to give opportunities to new people or people who are usually excluded)
- ▶ Awareness about the topics of the project (active citizenship but also locally defined topics)
- ▶ Competence in English
- ▶ Gender balance
- ▶ Depending on the field of your organisation, you may want to check also their competences in it. For example, an artistic organisation may be interested also in the artistic qualities and aesthetics of a participant.

Interviews with applicants/interested persons are what our partners suggest here, and they highlight the importance of some points to review during the process: The interviews are not only to get answers from potential participants, but also to answer some of their questions and concerns and help them build confidence in their competencies – it could also be a mutual selection process, as Gianni Orsini of IRENIA, Barcelona, explains:

“They – and we – should accept that their participation is never for sure. We have an interview with each one of the interested young people, we explain everything about the project, the commitment, the workload... And then, it’s never a yes or no from our side. They have to think about it and they are those to decide on yes or no for their participation.”

Balancing commitment and voluntary participation

The idea of voluntary participation is a principle we all embrace and encourage, but does this mean that participants have no obligations and no tasks to turn in? Where might the participants’ right to self-determination conflict with the smooth functioning and progress of the group or make an unfair/unbalanced contribution?

“We don’t want to mislead or force anybody, it is important that young people are motivated and find an interest of their own”, as Gianni Orsini explicitly says. (More about the importance of motivation in the next chapter of this booklet.)

Attractive presentation, short term vs. realistic long term engagement

Consider portraying both, the heavenly opportunities and the down-to-earth workload required. Some partners pointed out that if you portray the group as closely tied to only interesting experiences, such as youth meetings and trips abroad, you run the risk of losing people who do not want to participate, or even losing an entire group if you no longer have such attractions. Other partners are concerned and challenged in terms of finding long term participants who could become long term collaborators in a wider range of projects.

From personal to social – and from local to national and to European/international

“One of our main challenges has been to be able to move from the personal perspective and problems of each participant to the social ones”, says Gianni Orsini, and this might be the situation in many contexts when working with youth. Participants should be aware their personal concerns can always find place in group processes, as long they touch the concerns of the group and the local community. And this local community is also part of the wider European and international community. So, what might be significant on a personal level, could also be significant in creating an impact on a European society.

“We need to make the European perspective visible to the participants from the very beginning, so that they know they are not working only locally and isolated”, says Marthe Behr of KREA Jugendclub, Bergisch Gladbach. In some countries, the political situation makes it more difficult than in others to even name the dimension of active European citizenship; partners affected by these limits can focus on providing a safe space for participants to express their opinions openly – and this is already a success in the journey from a local to a European mindset.

Time

A three year time frame may seem too long to easily secure the group’s commitment, but at the same time it is too short to make a real impact in your community. Just keep it in mind from the stage of formation of the group and every time you engage in discussions about time or plan activities.

Pre-pandemic and post-pandemic challenges

Marina Bistolfi from CCC puts it like this: *“Before Covid-19, there were so many projects offered to young people; people with the characteristics important to our project had not enough time to invest. After Covid-19, so many young people seem lost or depressed; how can we reach them, or even help them?”* What comes next may give some possible answers to this critical question.



A helping hand

Here comes a list of potential allies and resources in your effort to disseminate a call for participants:

- ▶ Youth work associations, youth centres, youth clubs, local youth councils
- ▶ Former participants and peers in similar activities (youth exchanges or previous local groups)
- ▶ Collaborators and associations of your sector
- ▶ GenE-A Ambassadors¹ and peer educators
- ▶ Activist groups
- ▶ Local authorities, youth or social policy departments, municipalities
- ▶ Online dissemination channels, websites and social media
- ▶ Educational institutions: schools, vocational schools, colleges, universities, non-formal education groups, teachers, trainers, school administrations. People in these facilities can help personally, though sometimes not institutionally
- ▶ National and international youth networks
- ▶ Events organised specifically to inform about the project

¹ Ambassadors in the network of Generation Europe – The Academy are former participants who have already participated in an international youth encounter and are very active and interested. They are trained to take responsibilities on all levels of the programme. They become mentors in their local groups, a link between the youth leaders and the local youth, and also important advocates for the needs of young people in Europe.

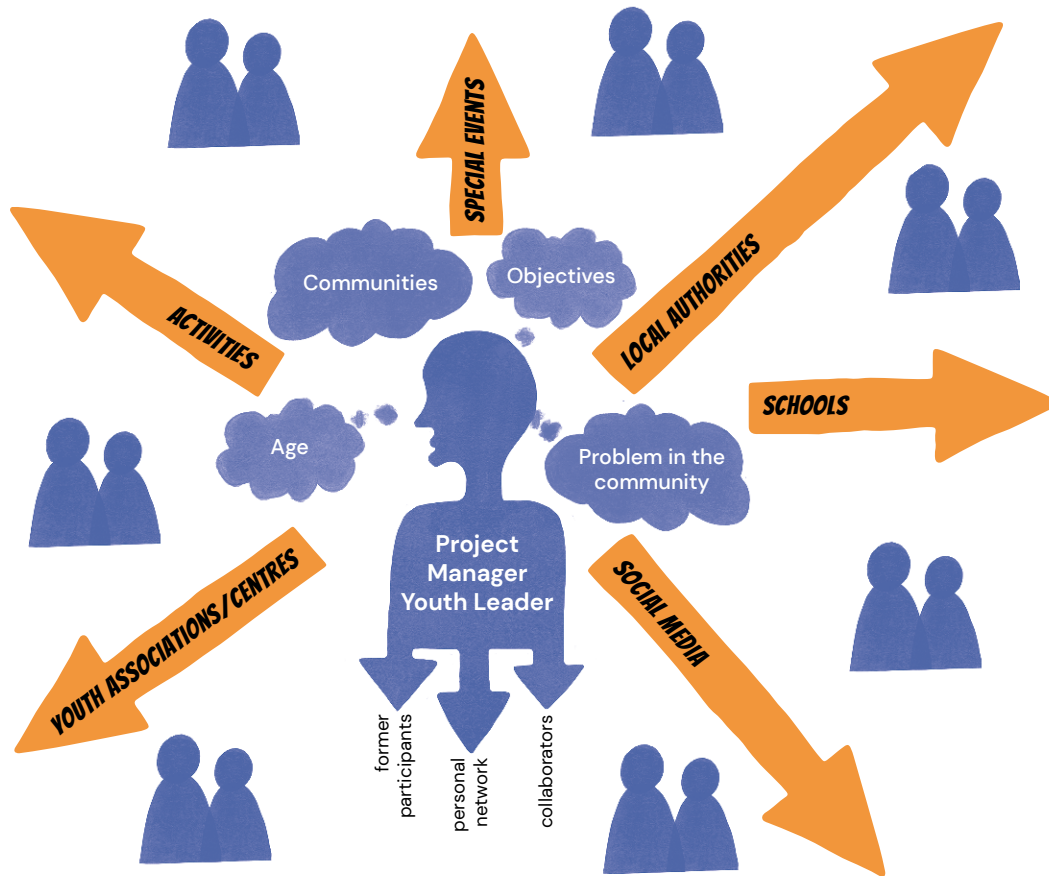


Figure 4: To form a group, you have to do more than just bring people together.

What matters in group formation

In the initial phase of group formation, the phase in which the group is organising to get started, according to Lee-Medzoza (1999), the group should discuss and agree on the following points in one way or another:

- ▶ Common concerns and problems of the group
- ▶ Norms and rules
- ▶ Schedule and venue of group sessions
- ▶ Group goals, integrating:
 - The members' perspective (members' understanding of the purpose, their individual needs, motivation and the group "common ground" purpose)
 - The youth leader's perspective (the organisation's societal purpose, the workers' goals for the individual needs of the participants and for the group as a whole)
 - The group system perspective (the common ground of the group and the youth leader)

SMART goals

SMART is a commonly used and practical framework for setting goals – and a helpful tool if you are forming a group that is tied to a large umbrella goal such as empowering active youth citizenship or smaller goals of the group's planned activities. It is an acronym composed of five qualities that a goal should have and was briefly presented by Olbes:

Specific: What exactly do you want to achieve? To make your goal specific, try to answer "who", "what", "when", and "where" of your goal.

Masurable: What are the tangible measures for your goal? Or, what will you see, hear, and feel when your goal is achieved?

Attainable: Is it possible for you to achieve your goal? The answer should be "yes", after weighing your effort, time, and any other cost.

Realistic: Is your goal reachable? Does it represent an objective toward which you and other people involved are both willing and able to work?

Time-Bound: Is your goal grounded within a time-frame? "By when do I want to have achieved my goal?" A timeframe will help you keep focused.

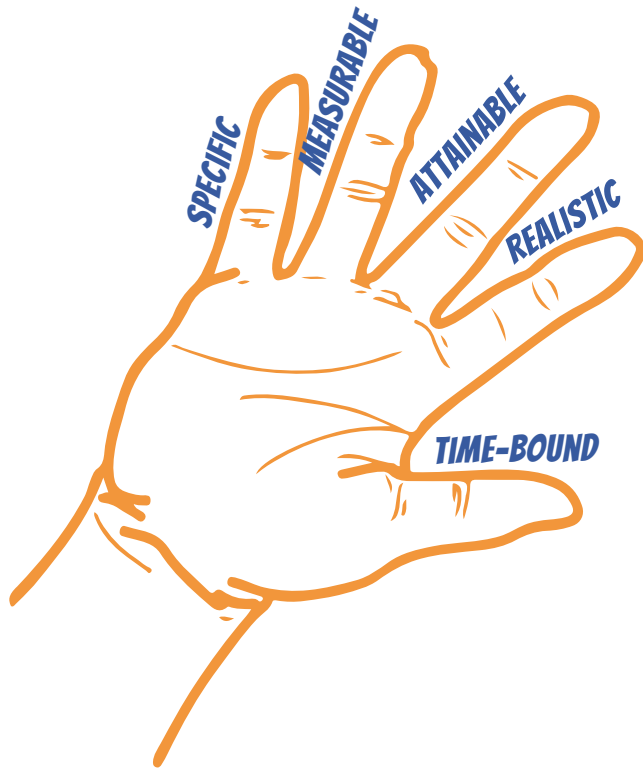


Figure 5: SMART hand

Team Building activities

Team building methods and activities are very important and, why not, fun elements for the formation and cohesion of any group, ideal for creating a spirit of cooperation. Some ideas, also connected to active citizenship, are already provided by GenE network in the published Generation Europe Methodbox.²



² It can be downloaded on the website generationeurope.org. For some examples of team building methods see methods 1 (p. 37), 2 (p. 39), 4 (p. 42) and 5 (p. 52).

3. GUIDELINES ON GROUP MOTIVATION

There are many psychological theories about motivation. These theories suggest to us their answers to the questions what influences human behaviour and how to manage the drivers for action. According to the Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology, motivation is the force that initiates, manages, and maintains our goal-oriented behaviours (Sichler, 2014). What we as youth leaders have to do is an adaptation of these theories to our needs. In the context of youth work, we often deal with the question of how to shape the action-oriented behaviour of youth groups on topics they are not confronted with in their everyday lives: Sustainability, democracy, human rights; in other words, how to motivate young people to act in an active and goal-oriented way.

Some of you may have heard about Maslow's pyramid of needs (or hierarchy of needs), which suggests that only "when the lower order needs of physical and emotional well-being are satisfied are we concerned with the higher order needs of influence and personal development" (Maslow, 1943). This theory was devel-

oped in the mid 1940s, and it brought the understanding that all people possess the inner resources for development and growth. The later theories were focused on the needs to motivate employees to their tasks. Nevertheless, they also bring us some food for thought, like McClelland's theory of three types of motivation: achievement-, authority- and affiliation-driven motivation (McClelland, 1987). It means, that, in general there are people who prefer to master a task or situation, those who tend to influence, teach or encourage others and those who just enjoy being part of the group, be accepted and appreciated.

The further theories have described many other motivational drivers, but for you as youth leaders, it is important to remember that each person in your group can gain motivation. By identifying your youngsters' drivers – are they driven by the results of their work, by relationships with others or their needs; do they need a stable environment to work in or a challenging environment – you will move closer to your goal to motivate youth to be active participants on the local level.

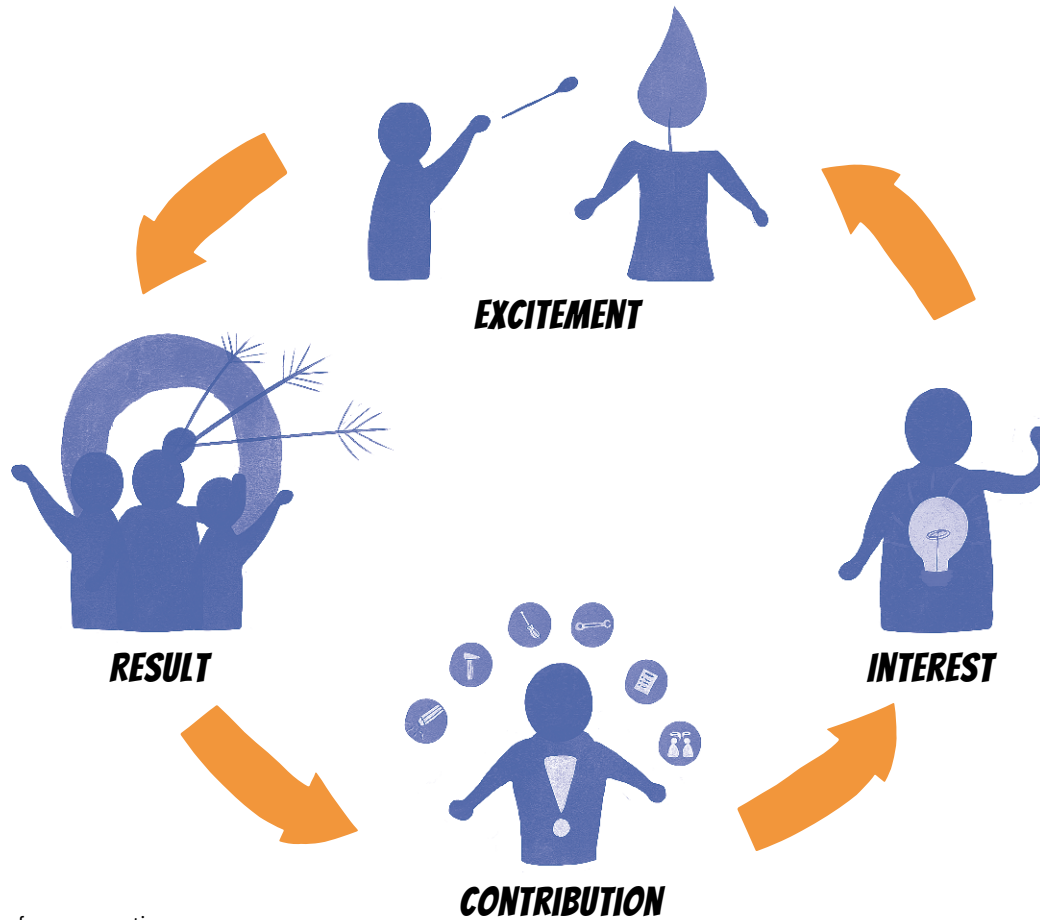


Figure 6: Circle of group creation

Further we want to introduce you to some ideas on creating and maintaining motivation in the group, which emerged from the field experience of our network.

1. How to create motivation in a group?

To keep group motivation at a high level, we should observe a cycle of enthusiasm, interest, contribution, result and so on in a feedback loop.

- ▶ Make them excited about a topic
- ▶ Raise the interest about a topic
- ▶ Let them contribute on every level of the process like doing research, planning/creating, proofing and implementing an action
- ▶ Together, come to a result

2. Self-motivation

To get and keep a group of young people active and inspired, not only in the short term, but also over a longer period of time, the most important thing is that you as youth leaders are and stay motivated. In short, be a role model who gives orientation. Easier said than done, but doable! Remember to be mindful of yourself and get ideas for this in the booklet "Sharing 4 Caring" with our coping strategies from the network named there. (Chapter: Youth leaders also need to feel safe).

3. Know your target group!

Find out about important events in their lives that may not necessarily have an impact on your own, for example religious celebrations, Ramadan, Easter (Christian and Orthodox), exam times at different types of schools and universities. It makes sense to draw up a common timetable at the beginning of the project phase, in which everyone can enter their time availability. Maintain this calendar together and for everyone to see. In order to keep the motivation in the group high, we would like to give you the following suggestions, that we already experienced and that seem to work out very well.

4. Cosy!

4.a. Be a “climate expert” and design the atmosphere in the room in a conscious and appealing way:

- ▶ well-ventilated room
- ▶ warm light
- ▶ materials prepared and ready to hand out
- ▶ have music ready for the arrival, warm-ups, energizers and personal reflection phases
- ▶ provide enough water and small snacks.

This does not mean that you always have to organise everything alone, the participants can also take over parts of it themselves and train their responsibility.

Create a room atmosphere in which everyone can feel comfortable and safe.

4.b. Communicate transparently, honestly and at eye level. Hand over responsibilities, give recognition and give everyone the feeling of being an important, equal part of the group, no matter how big or small their contribution may be.

4.c. They should have the feeling that only through their contribution can the set goal actually be achieved. It is important that everyone clearly sees and feels that they are free to choose their tasks, but that they are then also really responsible for them.

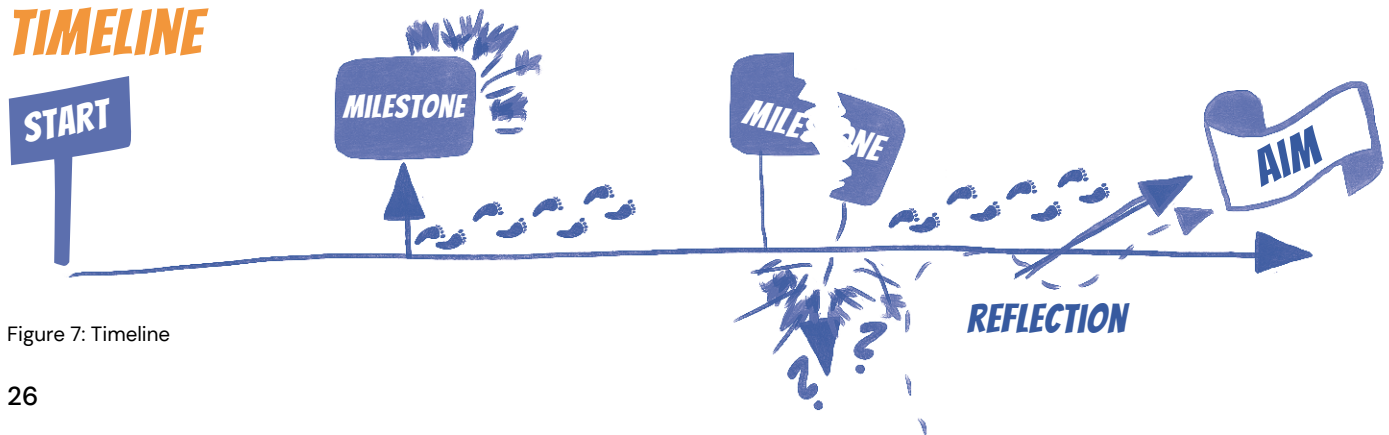


Figure 7: Timeline

5. Create milestones and celebrate them!

AIM

- ▶ What do we want to reach?
- ▶ Be concrete
- ▶ Make sure that everybody is understanding the aim and agrees

CONTENT

- ▶ Why is our aim so important
- ▶ What is our starting point
- ▶ Who will benefit in the end


METHOD

Do this for every milestone create and choose the best fitting method for each milestone

Hand over responsibilities

Task dividing

Give recognition



**WHAT ARE YOU
PERSONALLY ABLE AND WILLING TO DO?
BE HONEST - BE REALISTIC**

Figure 8: Milestone

6. Keep the motivation up!

To be able to keep as many participants as possible highly motivated and in their personal time slot in the project, you should consider digital options. We have very good experience with online meetings, between the regular group meetings. They give us the opportunity for exchange and consultation to keep the flow going even between meetings with longer intervals. We come from a time of pandemic when face-to-face meetings were almost impossible. By using the online meetings, we have managed to keep the groups going, to see them through a difficult time, not to lose contact and to continue working on our issues. For the implementation of online meetings, the suggestions mentioned above for the face-to-face meetings apply equally. With a little courage, creativity and adaptation, online meetings can also be designed in an active and motivating way. Tools such as Miro, Whitboard, Jamboard, the use of break-out rooms for small groups, etc. provide excellent support for this task.

4. **BEST PRACTICES AND FAILURES IN GROUP BUILDING: VOICES FROM THE NETWORK**

While working on this booklet, we wondered, how far (or maybe not) are the theoretical guidelines from the everyday work of youth leaders? We approached the members of our network and asked them what they consider as success or failure, while building a group of youngsters and motivating them for engagement with local issues.

We received many answers, full of good hopes, but also doubts and uncertainty. We found out that there are many good reasons for the youth workers to talk about success or challenges to overcome. However, they all consider leaving participants to be a failure.

Gianni Orsini (IRENIA, Spain): *“Two very active and engaged young girls from Nepal suddenly announced that they will leave the group, to focus more on their studies. They thought that the workload would be too much for them. It was a pity.”*

Kelly Manoudi (Euphoria, Greece): *“Almost the whole previous group disappeared after finishing school.”*

Kevin Ewe (Werkstatt Berufskolleg Unna, Germany): *“All participants who could not come to Italy to the youth encounter have left the local group.”*

The youth workers are aware of the pedagogical and organisational efforts they made to keep the group together, and yet feel that it was not enough. They look for shortcomings in their professional work, in the organisation of the project process and think about what they could do differently next time.

Gianni Orsini (IRENIA, Spain): *“It seems like a failure if we can’t keep such ‘good’ participants, but we respect their priorities.”*

Kevin Ewe (Werkstatt Berufskolleg Unna, Germany): *“We could have communicated that differently, but then we might not have gotten any participants who would get involved. It would be much easier for us to start with a youth exchange and then build the local group from the youth team formed and consolidated during the youth exchange.”*

However, sometimes the so-called failures, which are rather challenges to be faced in a project flow, turn out to be successes or deliver insights for better project work in the future.

Kelly Manoudi (Euphoria, Greece): *“However, one girl of the previous group is now our Ambassador.”*

Marthe Behr (Krea, Germany): *“I realised we have to make the European perspective more visible to youngsters, so that they know they are not working only locally and isolated.”*

As a success, some youth workers mention the resilience of their groups during Corona-time.

Marion Gronstedt (Pedagogical Institute Munich, Germany): *“It was hard to build a local group for the first project phase due to time pressure, specific circumstances in our partnership... but we finally managed to keep them in the program until the end (last year with corona, a digital youth encounter and a digital European event).”*

The others consider that a positive emotional attitude to the local project is a key for the successful group building process and long-term relationships in the group.

Gianni Orsini (IRENIA, Spain): *“The process of making the video with our new participants has been a success for the formation and the consistency of the group. It allowed us to move from the personal perspective and problems of each participant to the social ones, and to develop awareness to the group about that.”*



Another interesting point was the consideration of the personal needs and human rights of the participants in the initial phase of the project.

Voices from non-EU countries: *“Even if nowadays we are not capable of big changes in society... at least within our small project we can organise an environment, where freedom of speech and collaborative decision-making are fostered and appreciated”.*

These testimonials make clear that building a local youth group and keeping it together for engagement at local level requires a lot of efforts and competences from project managers and youth leaders. Sometimes, this process is accompanied with frustration, a need to deal with interpersonal conflicts or some external situations, like a pandemic. Nevertheless, the ability, acquired through the years of youth work, to remain resilient, respectful and responsive to the needs of the youngsters, enables us to always move forward, to be active and create possibilities for youngsters to be active citizens.

Summarising these voices, we would like to give the floor to Claudia Gerbaud, one of the project advisors of Generation Europe – The Academy. Through the last challenging year of Corona, she was in touch with many youth workers, listened to their doubts and fears, followed the ways they struggled with challenges that arose and shared their feelings when the project aims were achieved.

Claudia Gerbaud (IBB e.V., Germany): *“We as a network are a success story. I do not consider that there are any failures. There are challenges, yes, but not failures. Everyone is pushing toward the same goal, with the strength available at the moment. But as a network, we all keep fighting and pushing for the values and goals we defined for ourselves within the project. Even when sometimes we feel like taking baby steps, we are still going forward, and this is what is important.”*

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USEFUL LINKS

We have collected links to useful resources on group communication, group development and related topics. Go to <https://generationeurope.org/booklets> or scan the following QR code:



ABOUT GENERATION EUROPE – THE ACADEMY

Generation Europe – The Academy is an international network of youth work organisations and a funding programme for European cooperation. We want social participation for all. Young people raise their voices and take action: in their local communities and across all boundaries. Together, we are contributing to an active and inclusive European citizenship.

The young people of our network form local groups and connect at international youth encounters. Together, we create opportunities for participation on local and European level, regardless of origin, parents' income and previous success in the formal education system. In each of our project partnerships, youth from three countries work together. They identify local problems and support each other to address them.

Abbreviations

IBB e.V.

Internationales Bildungs- und Begegnungswerk e.V. / International Association for Education and Exchange. IBB e.V. is the coordinating association of Generation Europe – The Academy.

GenE-A

Generation Europe – The Academy

GLOSSARY

Local Group: A group of young people organised at a local partner organisation in the network of Generation Europe – The Academy.

Partnership: International group consisting of three local partner organisations, that signed a partnership agreement, and their local groups.

Project manager: A person who is responsible for the general management of the matters concerning Generation Europe – The Academy at the local partner organisation: planning, implementation, accounting and reporting. He*she has decision making competences in his*her organisation.

Youth leader: A professional working in the field of non-formal education, that takes responsibility for the local group and/or the youth encounter.

Ambassadors: Former participants of international youth encounters, that are very active and interested. They are trained to take responsibilities on all levels of Generation Europe – The Academy. They become

mentors in their local groups, a link between the youth leaders and the local youth, and also important advocates for the needs of young people in Europe.

Participants: Young people who are taking part in the local group and/or in the youth encounter. (In some cases the local group is really big and only parts of the local group will also join the youth encounter.)

Activity: Umbrella term for workshops, excursions, games, informal moments, free time activities and so on.

Method: Pedagogical concept of an activity, that also defines its aim. It also has different parts like introduction, implementation, reflection.

Facilitator: A person that has different roles/tasks at an event or activity, like moderating, presenting, visualising. A facilitator can also be a project manager, youth leader, ambassador, participant or an invited expert.

HOW TO USE THE WORDS SKILLS AND COMPETENCES



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