

EUROPEAN ACADEMY ON YOUTH WORK - WORKSHOP REPORT

Rethinking Online Communication in Youth Work

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OVERVIEW

The topics discussed during the workshop were the challenges youth workers are facing when communicating to young people on the Web, creative solutions, shared examples from practice, and the recommendations created during a **KA2 project** on online communication in youth work.

The workshop included a practical task for participants, aiming to explore new ways of presenting their thoughts, experiences and reflections on the European Academy on Youth Work using memes and gifs and creating contents for social media.

The contribution was based on the experiences and the key findings of a long term Erasmus+ KA2 project implemented by the Association People's Parliament from Serbia and five partner organisations in the framework of the Western Balkans Youth Window. Partner organisations: United Societies of Balkans, Greece; Zdruzenie na Gragjani Mladite Mozhat Skopje, North Macedonia; Celjski Mladinski Center, Slovenia; Fundacja Edukacji i Rozwoju Społeczeństwa Obywatelskiego, Poland; and Perpetuum Mobile- Institut Za Razvoj Mladih i Zajednice, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

PLANNED OBJECTIVES OF THE SESSION

- to start reflecting on the way we communicate online, especially with young people
- to rethink communication from multiple aspects:
 - as a tool to transfer a message
 - as a tool to start meaningful discussions, re-think values and provide different contexts
- to rethink the language and terminology used when we communicate online with young people, colleagues etc.
- to reflect on the way we present data
- to be inspired to play with contents and make communication fun and meaningful again.



METHODOLOGY AND TOPICS DISCUSSED



The workshop lasted for 60 minutes, and for the purpose of interactivity and having enough time for participants to share their motivation, reflections, challenges and methods from practice, it was originally planned for a maximum of 20 participants. Before the session, 27 participants had signed up and since most of them had checked with the contributor before applying, the decision was made to increase the number of participants. This led to a bit less interactivity, but it was a conscious choice to give opportunity to more people to discuss the topic they found relevant for their work.

During the introductory part, participants shared their names, some information about themselves (their roles: youth workers, trainers, decision makers, program managers...) and their motivation for participating in this workshop.



When stating their **motivation** for participating in the workshop, most of the participants recognised the need to improve their communication with young people online, as they felt they were not reaching young people with their programmes. Some participants shared their motivation to get familiar with current tools for online communication, easy and simple approaches. Participants shared that many times they were reaching only young people who were already active in youth NGOs, but were failing to communicate to a wider audience online and to meaningfully transfer their messages and values.

The discussion went in two ways: how to communicate our messages meaningfully (activities, calls for participants, reports etc.) and how to start meaningful value-oriented discussion with young people on the Web. Many participants' questions focused on which platforms to use, and in the initial discussion, it was suggested that there is no right answer, since platforms, methods and tools are constantly changing, but it is the approach that we can transform and that enables us to be in line with the trends.

The contributor presented the **context of the project results and the key points of the contribution:**

The approach based on a practical example of Klub putnika, a youth-led organisation that runs a travel blog in the languages of the Western Balkans, engaging many young people from the region on the topic on travel, but at the same time raising meaningful discussions on values, working on reconciliation in the region, connecting youth and inspiring youth led activism and non-formal education.

The presentation included main findings on the **approach to communication online**, among other things:

- having in mind why we do what we do – goals and mission
- defining common values and communicating in this framework- ethics

- defining and maintaining a unique voice, being specific and not random in communication – aesthetics
- knowing the tools we use: as tools are constantly changing, getting familiar with the new concepts, adapting them to a unique voice, not chasing online trends for the purpose of chasing trends.

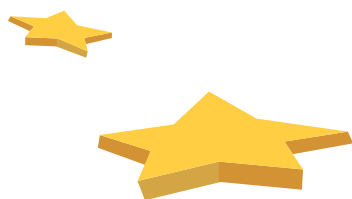
The concept deals with communication in a way which emphasises that being specific and having a voice builds trust and recognition, which with time leads to people feeling emotional about our approach, creating communities and leading to action (which ever action we would like to provoke – activism, support, discussions, raising debates etc.).

A short video on the concept created during the project was presented to the participants: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSg1lyDsmYs>

Participants reflected shortly on the approach. Some of them were sceptical if youth workers should invest so much energy in online communication, and if it was really needed to structurally change the way we communicate. Some participants shared their need to be introduced to some specific practical methods for online communication.

In the continuation of the workshop, **participants were asked to formulate their own messages that they would like to share** with the world, based on their personal experience of participating in the Academy. It was their own choice, on which element they would like to reflect and formulate a message, and they formulated social media posts in the form of memes. The goal of the exercise was to change our perspective and mind-set of how we structure information, to introduce practical and easy-to-use tools and to inspire participants to play with contexts in a way they are not used to.

Participants' posts and reflections were posted in Padlet and presented in real time, and there was a short discussion – reactions on the created posts. Participants enjoyed the activity and shared that it inspired them to further explore new tools and approaches for online communication.



FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

- *"Funny, but we only touched on the important questions, like different discourses, role models, acceptance..."*
- *"Very inspiring. I realised the urgency to change my mind-set for an effective digital communication"*
- *"The workshop was a bit different than I expected but still good! Loved the memes :)"*



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