Study on Innovation in Youth Work - Survey Analysis Report

Table of Contents

Methodology

The survey was the third step in the research process, following the desk review and focus groups. It was conducted online from 26 February to 7April 2021. Like the focus groups, the survey targeted practitioners in youth work with some experience with innovation. The survey was sent to the focus group participants, who were asked to share it with 2 - 3 more persons, ideally 1 – 2 colleagues from their organisation and 1 person from another organisation from their network. Additionally, the survey was sent to participants who had presented a project, tool or practice during the 1st edition of the European Academy on Youth Work in 2019 in Slovenia.

The survey consisted of three types of questions:
- Questions regarding the profile of the organisations
- Questions regarding the importance of the factors that support/hinder innovation
- Questions regarding the relevance of the theoretical model describing innovation in youth work

The first group of questions was aimed at classifying the respondent organisations into a few categories that could influence the results. These categories include the following: size of the working community, type of organisation, type of organisational structure, and type and level of financial sustainability. In the survey analysis, all the responses were disaggregated according to these criteria and different profiles of organisations were compared in terms of their responses. While the organisations were also asked about the country where they are based, this criterion was not taken into consideration when analysing the survey due to the small size of the sample.

In the second group of questions, the respondents were asked to assess possible factors that support innovation in youth work, grading them on a scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). The proposed factors were identified based on the desk review and the focus groups. They were divided in groups according to their role in the innovation process as seen by this study (triggers and conditions) and according to the level on which they operate (individual, organisational and contextual). A brief description of what was meant by "triggers" and "conditions" preceded the questions.

The analysis of the results gives us an overview both of the absolute importance of the factors and of their relative importance when compared to one another. In addition, using the categories explained above, we could identify any significant differences in how different organisations value factors that support/hinder innovation.

In the third group of questions, we first provided the respondents with a brief description of the theoretical models developed as part of this study, and then we asked them to assess their relevance. The responses were also analysed using the same criteria as described above.

When responding to the survey, the respondents were asked to think about a concrete experience with innovation that they had had. We received a total of 77 responses. The detailed analysis of the results is provided below.

1. Profiles of the respondents

This part of the report provides information about the categories of respondents according to the criteria covered by the first group of questions. The categories created on the basis of those criteria were used to compare the results in accordance with the organisations' profiles, except for the geographic distribution, which was not taken into consideration.

Some of the categories established under the different criteria had only a few respondents. For example, this is the case with public institutions, listed under type of organisation, and a few different categories of financial sustainability. Because of the very small sample size for those categories, it was impossible to draw any conclusions, so any differences in their responses were not taken into consideration when comparing them with the responses of the organisations from the other categories.

1.1. Geographic distribution of the respondent organisations

Since the survey was predominantly distributed to and through the focus group participants, most responses came from the countries whose National Agencies for Erasmus+, youth field, are partners in the European Academy on Youth Work. However, responses also came from countries that were not originally involved in the study, such as Bulgaria. The "other" category includes countries where 1 or 2 respondents came from.

Figure 1: Distribution of organisations according to the country where they are based
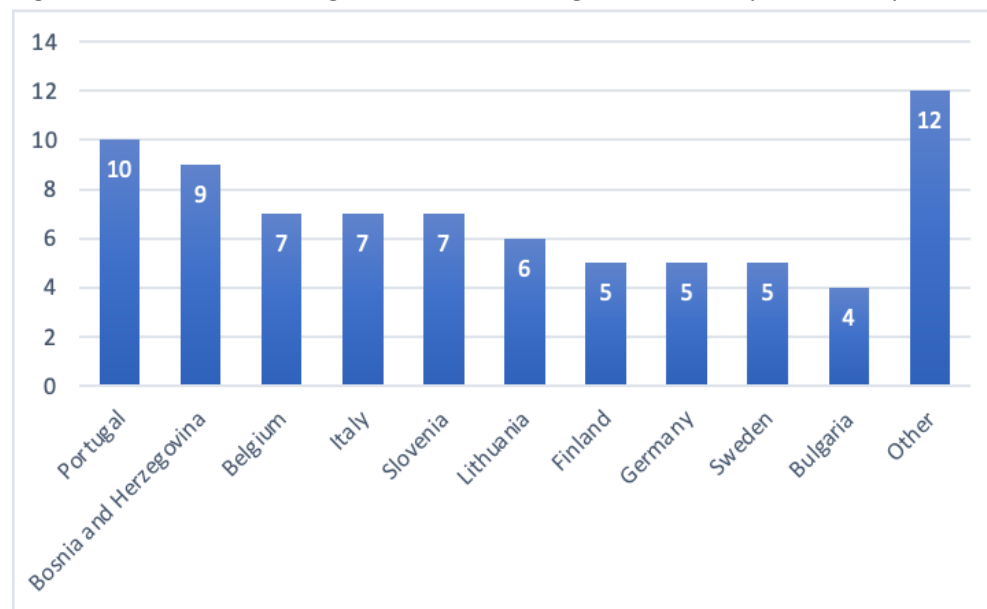

1.2. Size of working community

For this criterion, organisations were asked to classify their working community in one of the following categories:
● Capital city

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- Big city
- Medium city
- Small town
- Rural area

There was no guidance provided regarding the number of citizens or any other criteria that could be used for classifying the communities under each of the categories, so it was up to organisations' discretion.

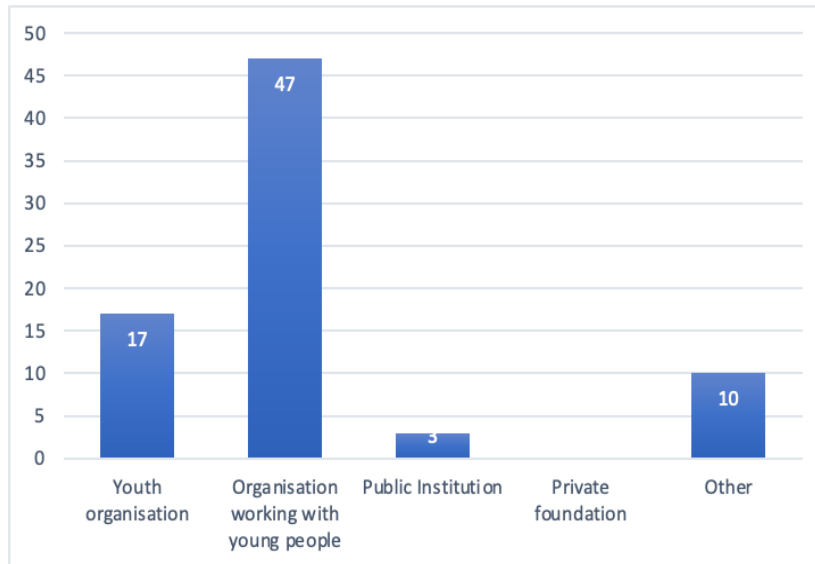Figure 2: Distribution of organisations according to the size of their working community
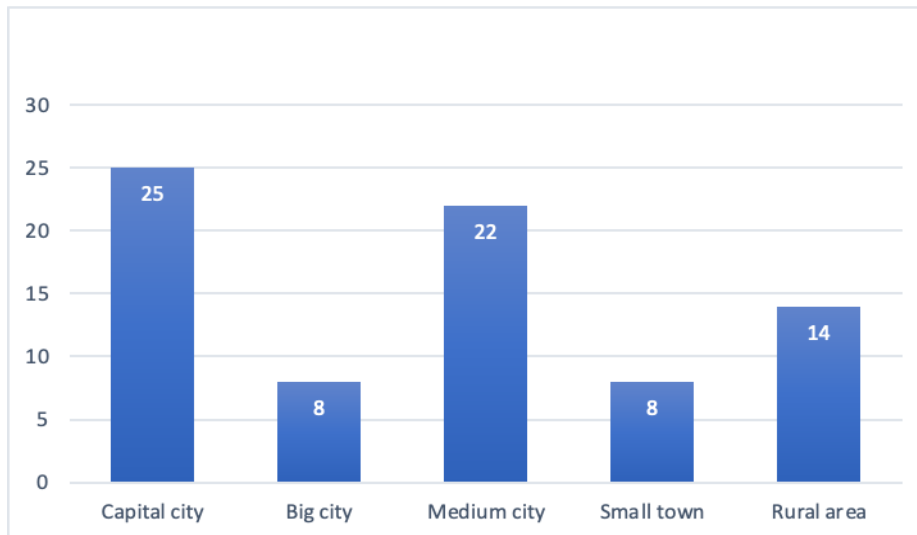
1.3. Type of organisation

For this criterion, organisations were asked to choose a term that best describes their profile. According to the responses, the organisations were divided into the following categories:

- Youth organisations
- Organisations working with young people
- Public institutions
- Private foundations
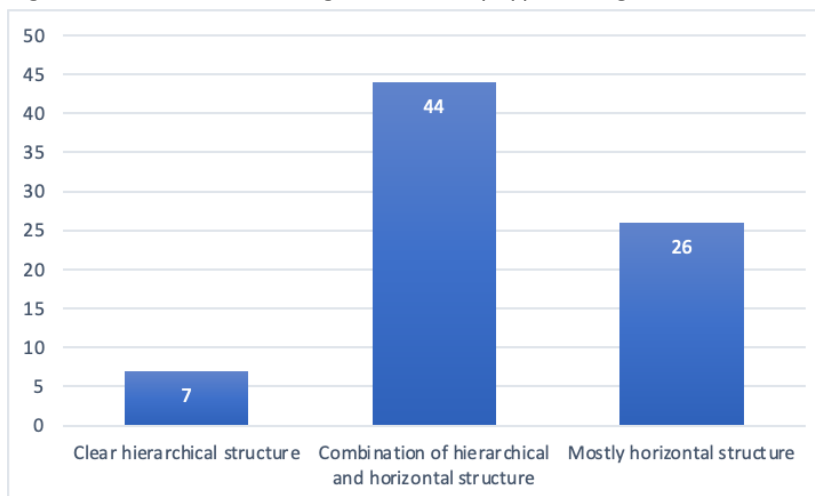- Other

Figure 3: Distribution of organisations by type

1.4. Type of organisational structure

For this criterion, organisations were asked to choose a term that best describes their organisational structure according to its hierarchy and type of leadership. According to the responses, the organisations were divided into the following categories:

- Organisations with a clear hierarchical structure with strong leadership
- Organisations with a combination of hierarchical and horizontal structure (e.g. hierarchical structure with shared leadership)
- Organisations with a mostly horizontal structure with shared leadership

Figure 4: Distribution of organisations by type of organisational structure

1.5. Type and level of financial sustainability

For this criterion, organisations were asked to choose a sentence that best describes their financial sustainability. According to the responses, the organisations were divided into the following categories:

- Organisations having guaranteed multi-annual funding mainly from public sources
- Organisations having guaranteed multi-annual funding mainly from private sources
- Organisations having guaranteed annual funding
- Organisations depending on different projects
- Organisations depending on fundraising/ self-sustainable activities

Figure 5: Distribution of organisations by type and level of financial sustainability
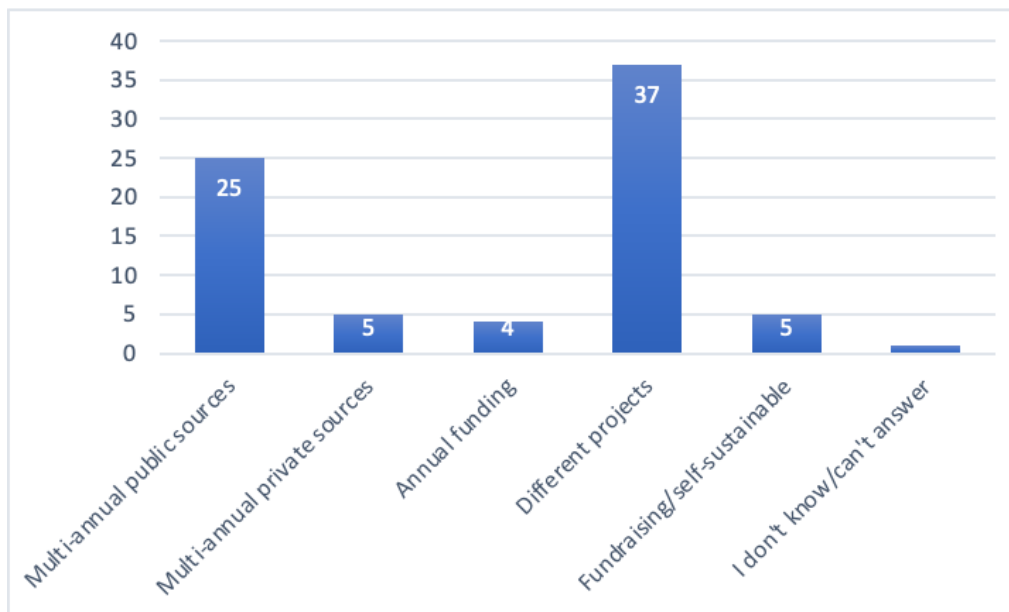

2. Importance of factors for supporting innovation

2.1. Importance of triggers on individual level

In this question, the respondents were presented with three triggers that could play a role in initiating the process of innovation. They could grade each of the factors on a scale between 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). The results are presented in the following chart.

Figure 6: Importance of triggers on individual level
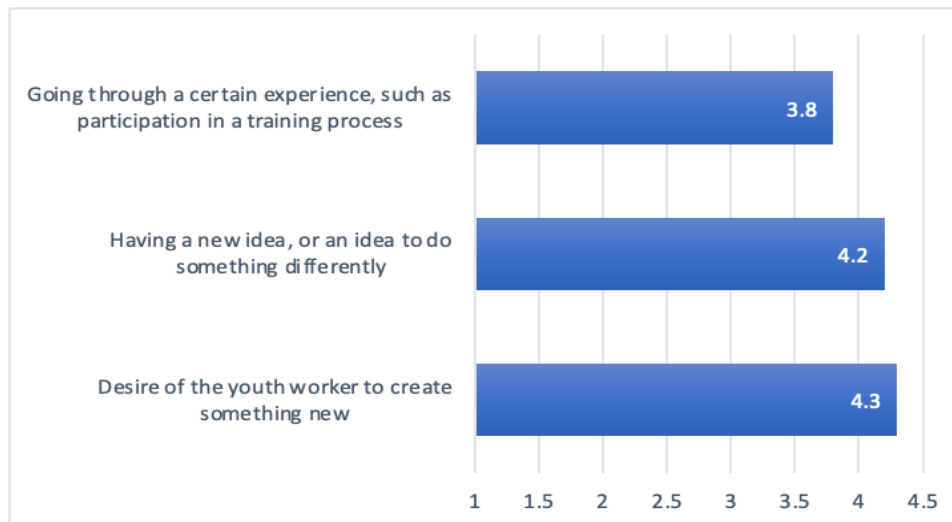
When comparing the results according to the **working community of the organisations**, minor differences can be observed between responses given by organisations from the capital city and big cities compared to organisations from medium and small towns. More specifically:

- organisations from the capital city and big cities on average rated the importance of individual factors higher compared to organisations from medium and small towns (4.17 and 4.33 compared to 4 and 3.97).
- organisations from capital and big cities gave the highest score to "Having a new idea, or an idea to do something differently", while organisations from medium and small towns and rural areas gave the highest score to "Desire of the youth worker to create something new".

The analysis of the results according to **types of organisations** shows a very similar trend for all types, both in the average score and in the importance given to different triggers.

When analysing the results according to the **type of organisational structure**, it could be observed that organisations with a clear hierarchical structure and strong leadership on average rated the importance of individual level triggers higher than other organisations (4.37 compared to 4.13 for organisations with combined structure and 4.03 for organisations with a horizontal structure).

The analysis of the results according to the **type and level of financial sustainability** shows that organisations with multi-annual funding value "Desire of the youth worker to create something new" higher than the other categories of organisations.

All three individual level factors that can trigger the process of innovation were rated considerably high by all categories of organisations.

Organisations from the capital city and big cities value individual level triggers higher than organisations from smaller working communities. The same trend can be observed in organisations with a clear hierarchical structure, compared to others. This could mean that the individual responsibility towards the process of innovation is more present in those profiles of organisations.

2.2. Importance of triggers on an organisational level

Under this question the respondents were presented with four triggers that could play a role in initiating the process of innovation. They could assess each of the provided factors, grading it on a scale between 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). The results are presented in the following chart.

Figure 7: Importance of triggers on organisational level

When comparing the results according to the **working community of the organisations**, a minor difference can be observed in the responses of organisations from small towns, which graded the importance of this group of triggers lower than organisations from all other community sizes (3.33 compared to 3.60-3.78 for other organisations).

The analysis of the responses according to the **type of organisational structure** shows that organisations with more horizontal structure assess the organisational level factors as less important compared to organisations with more hierarchical structure. The average grade given to all organisational level factors is 3.85 for organisations with clear hierarchical structure, 3.68 for organisations with combined structure, and 3.46 for organisations with mostly horizontal structure. A similar downward trend can be identified for the triggers "crisis in the organisation that requires innovation to be overcome" and "receiving a grant that demands innovation from the organisation", which are also losing importance as the organisations' structure is becoming less hierarchical.

No significant differences can be found when analysing the responses according to the type of organisation and financial sustainability.

> The responses to this question show a significantly higher importance of "an organisational need to change practices or come up with new approaches" than the three other organisational level factors.
>
> Organisational level factors lose importance as organisational structure becomes more horizontal, with shared leadership.

2.3. Importance of triggers on a contextual level

In this question, the respondents were presented with seven triggers that could play a role in initiating the process of innovation. They could grade each of the provided factors on a scale between 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). The results are presented in the following chart.

Figure 8: Importance of triggers on contextual level
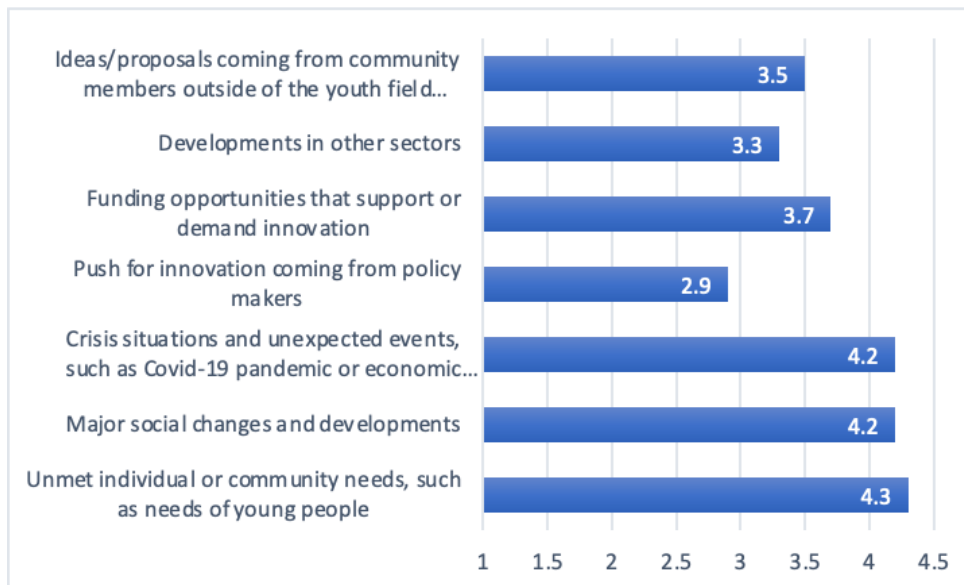
The analysis of the results according to the organisation's **working community** reveals that "developments in other sectors" are significantly more important to organisations coming from big cities than for the others (4 compared to 2.9 - 3.3 for other organisations).

The comparison of the results according to the **type of organisation** shows that "unmet individual or community needs, such as needs of young people" is graded higher by youth organisations and organisations working with young people than by others (4.4 and 4.5 compared to 3.7 and 4.2).

The analysis of responses according to **type of organisational structure** shows that organisations with more horizontal structure assess the organisational level factors as less important compared to organisations with more hierarchical structure. The average grade given to all organisational level factors is 3.90 for organisations with clear hierarchical structure, 3.74 for organisations with combined structure, and 3.63 for organisations with mostly horizontal structure. However, the opposite trend can be observed for two of the factors, which were assessed as more important by more horizontal organisations:

- Unmet individual or community needs, such as the needs of young people
- Ideas/proposals coming from community members outside of the youth field (teachers/parents)

No significant differences can be identified when analysing the responses according to the organisations' financial sustainability.

The responses to this question outlined three of the proposed triggers as more important to organisations in general, regardless of their profile:
- Unmet individual or community needs, such as needs of young people
- Major social changes and developments
- Crisis situations and unexpected events, such as Covid-19 pandemic or economic crisis

Meanwhile, a "push for innovation coming from policy makers" was rated consistently lower by all.

Contextual level factors lose importance as the organisational structure becomes more horizontal, with shared leadership, except for the factors "unmet individual or community needs" and "ideas/proposals coming from community members outside of the youth field", where the trend is opposite. This could mean that such organisations have a stronger focus on the needs of the community members.

The factor "developments in other sectors" significantly more important to organisations from big cities than for the others, which could mean that there is a greater cross-sectorial cooperation and influence in bigger communities.


2.4. Comparison between different types of triggers

The comparison between the three types of triggers (individual, organisational and contextual) shows that on average organisations of all profiles attach the most importance to individual triggers and the least to organisational ones. This trend is the same for all the criteria applied in this study - working community, type of organisations, organisational structure, and type and level of financial sustainability.

When comparing all the triggers regardless of type, according to the respondents in his survey, in order for innovation in youth work to be initiated, it is the most important that:

- The youth worker has a desire to create something new (4.3)
- There are unmet individual or community needs, such as needs of young people (4.3)
- The youth worker has a new idea or an idea to do something differently (4.2)
- There are major social changes and developments (4.2) and
- There are crisis situations and unexpected events, such as Covid-19 pandemic or economic crisis (4.2)

Figure 9: Comparison of the average grade for the different types of triggers
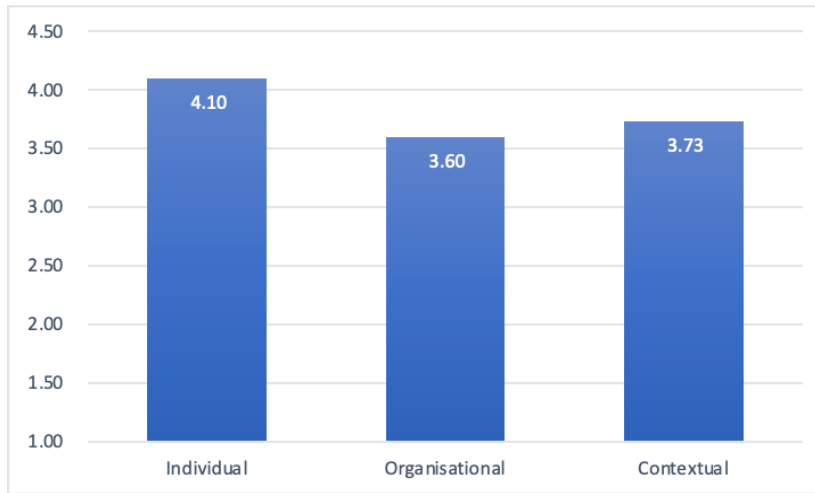
2.5. Importance of conditions on an individual level

In this question, the respondents were presented with three conditions that could play a role in enabling and sustaining the process of innovation. They could grade each of the factors on a scale between 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). The results are presented in the following chart.

Figure 10: Importance of conditions on individual level
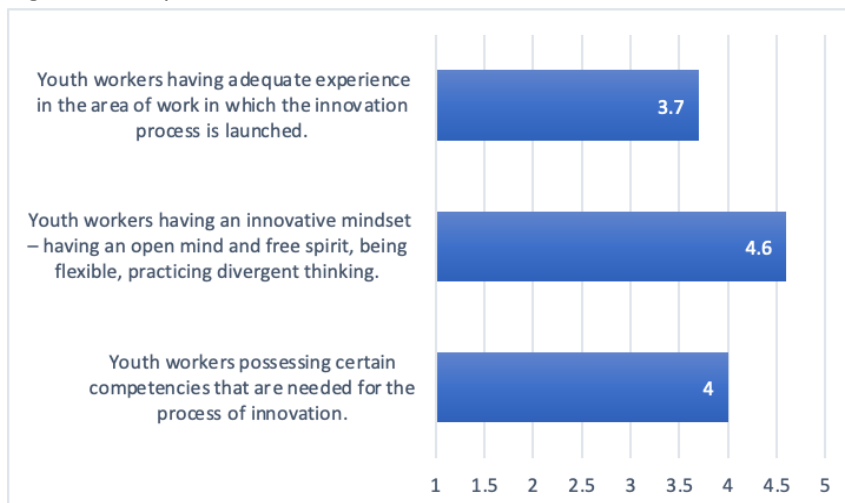
The analysis of responses according to the organisations' **working community** shows that the same factor is assessed as the most important by all: "Youth workers having an innovative mind-set – having an open mind and free spirit, being flexible, practicing divergent thinking." Only organisations from rural areas attach the same level of importance also to the factor "Youth workers possessing certain competencies that are needed for the process of innovation" (4.5 compared to 4.6).

When analysing the results according to the **type of organisational structure**, it can be observed that organisations with a clear hierarchical structure and strong leadership on average graded the importance of individual level triggers higher than other organisations (4.47 compared to 4.13 for organisations with a combined structure and 3.97 for organisations with a horizontal structure).

No major differences can be identified when analysing the responses according to the type of organisation and level of financial sustainability.


Among the three individual level factors that can enable and sustain the process of innovation, the following was assessed as the most important according to organisations from all profiles: "Youth workers having an innovative mind-set – having an open mind and free spirit, being flexible, practicing divergent thinking."

Individual level factors lose importance as the organisational structure becomes more horizontal, with shared leadership.

2.6. Importance of conditions on organisational level

In this question, the respondents were presented with six conditions that could play a role in enabling and sustaining the process of innovation. They could grade each of the factors on a scale between 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). The results are presented in the following chart.

Figure 11: Importance of conditions on organisational level
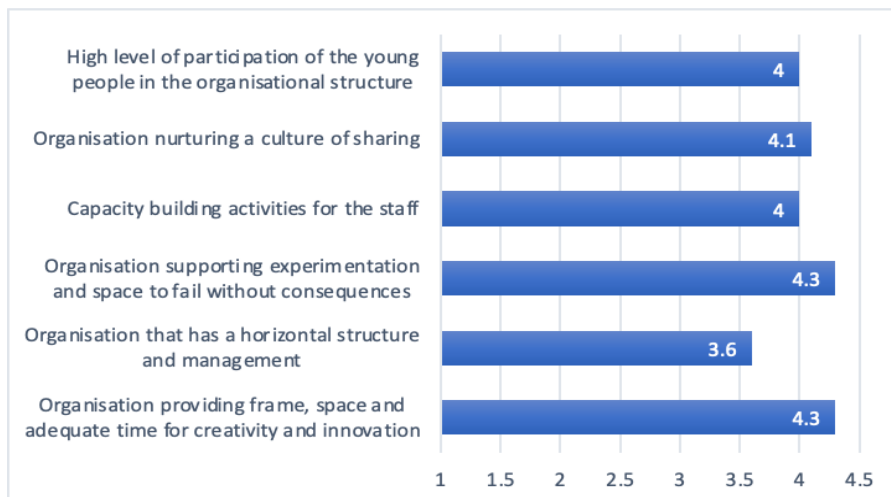
When comparing the results according to the **working community of the organisations**, a minor difference can be observed in the responses of organisations from small towns, which graded the importance of this group of conditions lower than organisations from all other community sizes (3.58 compared to 4.07 - 4.33 for other organisations).

When analysing the responses according to **organisational structure**, two opposing trends can be identified:
- The factor "Organisation providing frame, space and adequate time for creativity and innovation" is gaining importance as the organisational structure is becoming more hierarchical, with clearer leadership.
- The factor "Organisation that has a horizontal structure and management" is gaining importance as the organisational structure is becoming more horizontal, with shared leadership.

No major differences can be identified when analysing the responses according to the type of organisation and its level of financial sustainability.

The responses to this question identified two of the proposed conditions as more important to organisations in general, regardless of their profile:

- Organisation providing frame, space and adequate time for creativity and innovation
- Organisation supporting experimentation and space to fail without consequences

2.7. Importance of conditions on contextual level

In this question, the respondents were presented with nine conditions that could play a role in enabling and sustaining the process of innovation. They could grade each of the factors on a scale between 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). The results are presented in the following chart.

Figure 12: Importance of conditions on contextual level
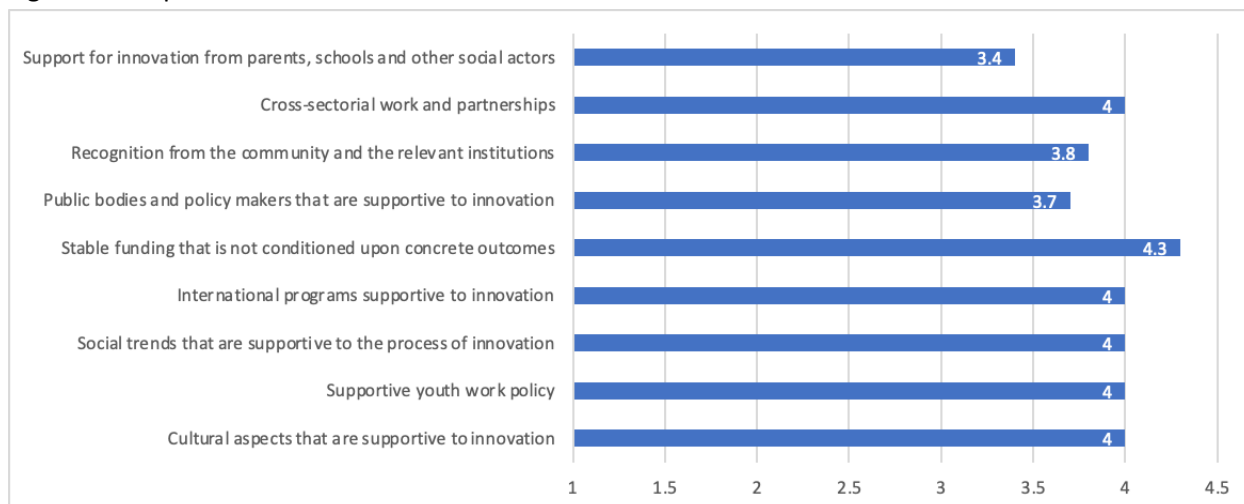
The analysis of the responses according to the **working community of the organisations** shows that a few of the conditions are assessed as significantly more important to organisations working in bigger communities than for those working in smaller ones. This trend is visible in the case of:

- Stable funding that is not conditioned upon concrete outcomes
- Social trends that are supportive to the process of innovation
- Cultural aspects that are supportive to innovation

In the meantime, "Support for innovation from parents, schools and other social actors" is more important to organisations from small communities.

When analysing the results according to the **type of organisational structure**, it can be observed that organisations with a clear hierarchical structure and strong leadership on average grade the importance of contextual level conditions higher than other organisations (4.03 compared to 3.93 for organisations with combined structure and 3.74 for organisations with a horizontal structure).

The analysis of responses according to the organisations' **type and level of financial sustainability** shows that organisations dependent on fundraising and self-sustainability value this group of factors less than the other organisations.

> The responses to this question show that the most important condition from this group is "Stable funding that is not conditioned upon concrete outcomes".
>
> The contextual factors are more important to more hierarchical organisations, and slightly more important as well for those that come from bigger working communities.

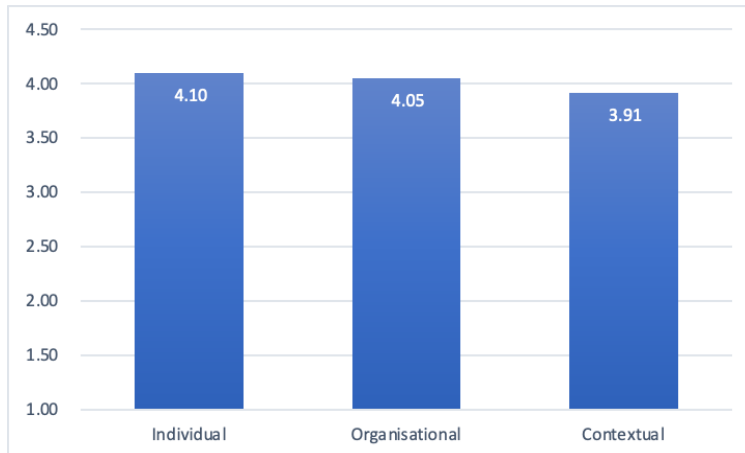## 2.8. Comparison between different types of conditions

The comparison between the three types of conditions (individual, organisational and contextual) shows that on average, organisations give the most importance to individual conditions, and the least to contextual ones.

There are some exceptions when responses are analysed according to the different criteria, for example: for organisations from small towns organisational factors are the least important, while for youth organisations they are the most important. The importance of individual conditions is emphasised most strongly by organisations with a clear hierarchical structure and strong leadership. When analysing the responses according to the organisational structure, a trend can be observed of individual and contextual factors becoming less important as the organisational structure becomes more horizontal.

When comparing all the conditions regardless of type, the respondents in this survey believe that, in order for innovation in youth work to be enabled and sustained, it is the most important that:

- Youth workers have an innovative mind-set – having an open mind and free spirit, being flexible, practicing divergent thinking (4.6)
- The organisation provides frame, space and adequate time for creativity and innovation (4.3)
- The organisation supports experimentation and space to fail without consequences (4.3) and
- There is stable funding that does not depend on concrete outcomes (4.3)
- The organisation nurtures a culture of sharing (4.2)

Figure 13: Comparison of the average grade for the different types of conditions

2.9. Comparison between triggers and conditions

The comparison between the different types of factors (triggers and conditions) shows that conditions are considered as more important by all organisations, regardless of their profile. This could mean that organisations believe that factors that can enable and sustain innovation are more important than factors that can just initiate the innovation process.

Figure 14: Comparison between triggers and conditions according to the organisations' working community
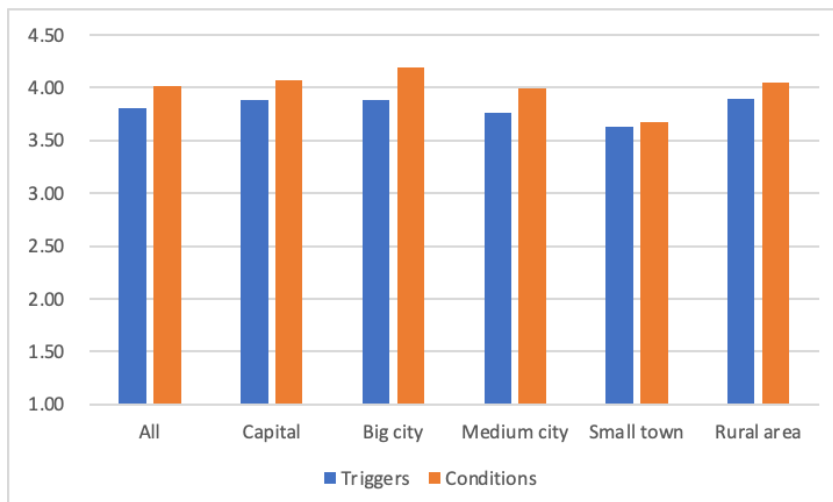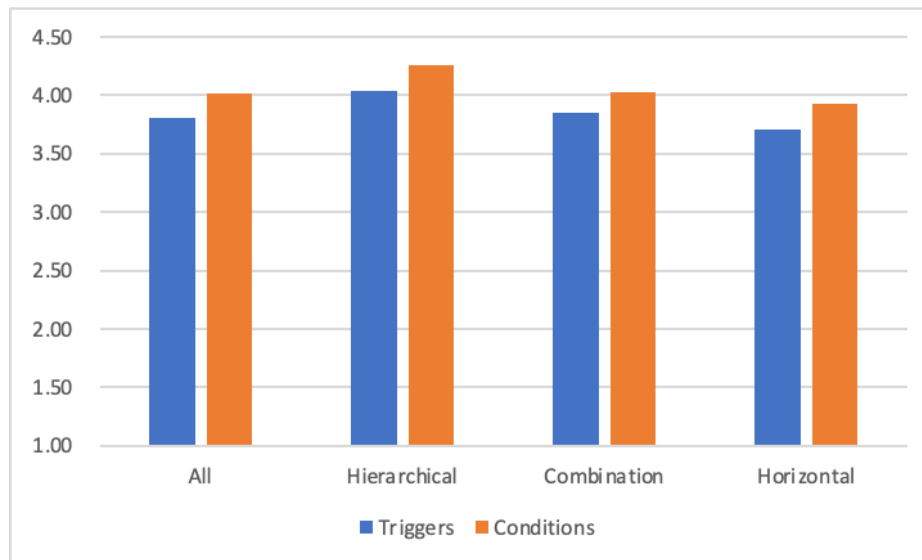
Figure 15: Comparison between triggers and conditions according to the organisational structure

2.10. Importance of factors that hinder innovation

In this question, the respondents were presented with eight conditions that could hinder innovation (make innovation more difficult to implement). They could grade each of the factors on a scale between 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). The results are presented in the following chart.

Figure 16: Importance of factors that hinder innovation
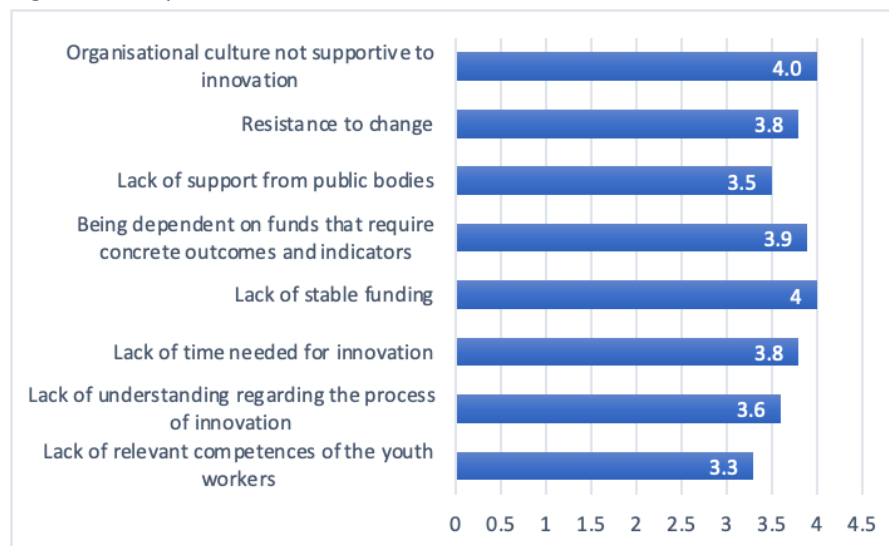
The analysis of the responses according to the **working community of the organisations** shows that there are opposing trends for different factors: some appear to be more important to organisations based in bigger communities and others for organisations in smaller communities. The following factors are assessed as significantly more important for organisations working in smaller communities than for those working in bigger ones:
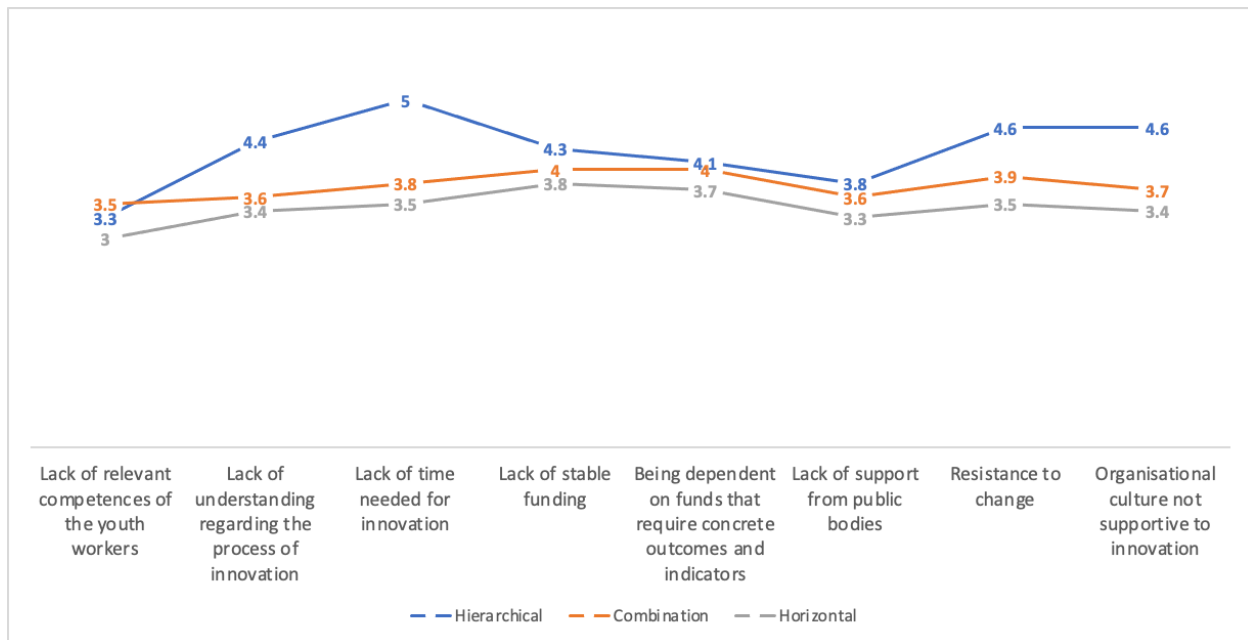
- Lack of relevant competences of youth workers
- Lack of stable funding

An opposite trend can be identified for "Lack of time needed for innovation", which appeared more important to organisations based in bigger communities.

When analysing the responses according to the **organisational structure**, it is evident that the more horizontal structure the organisation has, the less important the challenges for innovation are. Clearly hierarchical organisations gave an average grade of 4.26, organisations with a combined structure 3.76, and organisations with a horizontal structure 3.45. This trend is particularly strong for:

- Lack of understanding regarding the process of innovation
- Lack of time needed for innovation
- Resistance to change

Figure 16: Importance of factors according to the organisational structure

No major differences can be identified when analysing the responses according to organisation's type and level of financial sustainability.

The responses to this question identified four of the proposed factors as the most important to organisations in general, regardless of their profile:

- Lack of stable funding (4)

- Being dependent on funds that require concrete outcomes and indicators (3.9)
- Lack of time needed for innovation (3.8)
- Resistance to change (3.8)

"Lack of relevant competences of the youth workers" and "Lack of stable funding" are more important to organisations working in smaller communities, while "Lack of time needed for innovation" is more important to organisations based in bigger communities.

The factors hindering innovation were assessed as more important by organisations that were more hierarchical and with more strong leadership.

3. Relevance of the theoretical models

3.1. Ecosystem favourable to innovation

In this question, the respondents were first presented with the idea of an **ecosystem** that can create a climate favourable to the development of innovation in youth work. Then they were asked to assess how favourable to innovation the youth work ecosystem that they are part of is. They could respond to the question by giving a grade between 1 (not favourable) to 5 (very favourable). The average grade given by all organisations is 3.4.

When analysing the responses according to the organisations' **working community**, it appears evident that the ecosystem is becoming more favourable as the community is getting smaller.

Figure 17: Extent to which the ecosystem is favourable to innovation, according to the organisations' working community
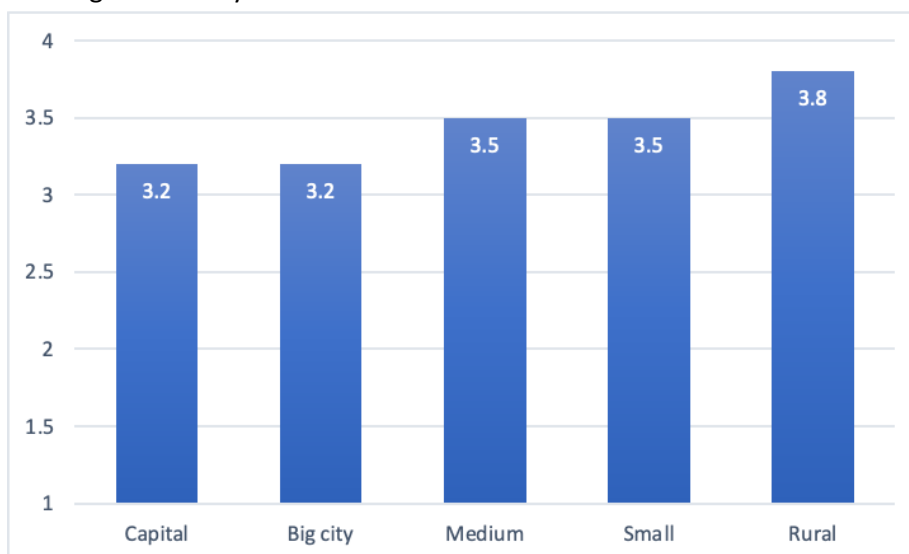
When analysing the responses according to the **organisational structure**, the ecosystem appears to be assessed as much more favourable to innovation by organisations with clear hierarchical structure (4) compared with organisations with combined (3.3) and horizontal structure (3.4).

The analysis according to organisations' **financial sustainability** shows that the ecosystem is considered much more favourable by organisations which are depending on fundraising and self-sustainable activities than by all other profiles of organisations (4.6 compared to 3.2-3.5 for all other categories).

The average grade given by organisations regarding the level to which their ecosystem is favourable to innovation is 3.4.

The analysis of the responses according to the established criteria shows that:
- the ecosystem becomes more favourable as organisation's working community is getting smaller
- the ecosystem is seen as much more favourable by organisations with a clear hierarchical structure
- the ecosystem is seen as much more favourable by organisations that depend on fundraising and self-sustainable activities

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3.2. Innovation as a function between triggers and conditions

In this question, the respondents were first presented with the theoretical model developed as part of this study, which shows innovation in youth work as a function between the different groups of factors - triggers and conditions. Then they were asked to assess to what extent that is true for their concrete experience with innovation in youth work. They could respond to the question with a grade between 1 (not at all) to 5 (fully true).

The average grade given by all organisations is 4. The analysis of the data according to the established criteria does not show any trends or major differences between different profiles of organisations. Organisations from all groups evaluated the model positively, with average grades ranging between 3.5 and 4.2.