HANDBOOK

PARTICIPATORY METHODS FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION FOR IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES (M&E)

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ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

We created this handbook in order to support the exchange of information and know-how, provide examples on why and how learning activities need to be monitored and evaluated, ensure dissemination of experiences and tools among other NGOs and motivate their youth workers to put them into practice.

This handbook is designed for youth workers interested in improving the quality of youth work within NGOs working with and for youth through the effective use of creative and participatory monitoring and evaluation techniques for impact assessment of learning activities (M&E).

It cannot substitute for the relevant background and experience of those who will read it. It is intended to build on their knowledge and experience and supplement them with knowledge gained through this project: "Tool M&E Up! – Tools for monitoring and evaluation of learning activities in youth projects under the Erasmus+ Programme".
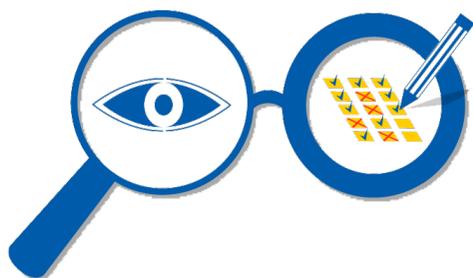
PROJECT CO-ORDINATOR

The **"Alaturi de Voi" Romania Foundation (ADV)** is a non-governmental organization, established in February 2002 by Holt International Children's Service USA, whose mission is *the insertion of HIV-positive people and from other groups at risk*.

For over 15 years, *ADV Romania* developed over 70 projects/programs through the financings offered by international organisms, local authorities and own funds. The programs are developed at local, regional, national and transnational level and are mainly in the social field and in the field of social economy. In time, we developed innovative services oriented towards the inclusion and employment of groups at risk, especially of young people. In parallel, we developed the component of lobby and advocacy for supporting the NGO sector, for promoting and defending the rights of our direct beneficiaries. Furthermore, we developed the component of assistance for development – so far; we have worked with NGOs from the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and Nigeria.

LET'S START WITH THE BEAUTIFUL END...

"During many years as a Community Education Officer in the youth service, I was always of the opinion that the frequent evaluation forms that came from local government were a waste of my time and an interruption to my real work. In May 2017 I attended an Erasmus project on M&E that not only completely changed my views and attitude towards monitoring and evaluation but actually shaped the way that I now work.

Initially, we were asked to conduct individual pilot evaluations with groups of 15 or more young people. I carried out 4 different types of these appropriate to the groups that I was working with and based on the information that I wanted, but it was far more important to me to learn M&E skills for a long term project as I had started a new job that was a 3 year project that was externally funded and where monitoring and evaluation would be paramount to our funding for the 3 years.

During the 3 months between the training in Romania and the Seminar in Bulgaria, I developed a wide range of M&E techniques for developing our work, our reporting and our success and improvement. I was very proud of what I had developed and excited to present the results to the rest of the group as well as seeing how the others had done in their respective countries.

This has been a wonderful learning experience for me and made such a positive and excellent development to my working practice and will make HDA a stronger and more successful organisation."

BILLY HILLMAN, WALES

"The Tool M&E Up! Project allowed us, for the first time, to apply qualitative evaluation techniques to our work. The results demonstrated that our work is indeed effective and valued, and that we do indeed achieve the qualitative standards we set as an NGO. We are very glad to be able to submit the results of our participatory evaluation to the institutions that commission and fund our project (When the World Becomes a Home), namely, the EC's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia.

Overall, we found significant value in the monitoring and evaluation techniques acquired at the Erasmus+ Programme in Romania and applied them successfully to the recreational and psychosocial activities we carry out with young asylum seekers at the Asylum Centre in Ljubljana. "

NICHI NG'INJA, on behalf of team SLOVENIA

"Monitoring and Evaluation is found in every project penned yet it is implemented frugally. The wealth of information and energy M & E garners is vital not merrily for the organisation implementing the tool but it enhances the quality of Youth Work being delivered. This, in turn, will get the young people involved to think critically. The non-formal approach embraced in the M & E as tool makes it a unique medium for active social change."

MARISA DEBONO, on behalf of team MALTA

"Tool M&E Up! Project helped me change my approach to monitoring and evaluation process in youth works. Although I have emphasized the importance of youth friendly tools and methodologies in youth works, it was the first time I have realized that M&E could be both youth friendly with participatory activities and valid/reliable at the same time. Thank you for all as trainers and participants to help me change my perspective. Now, I know the learning process in any activities start with questioning to your stand point."

SİMGE SÖNMEZ ALAKAŞ, TURKEY

"I was able to observe the effect of M&E methods in measuring and assessing the quality of the work that I did. However, I learned to listen the experiences of other organizations around the world that enable me to improve my work in the process. Also, when I shared my works from Turkey and got special feedback from other participants and trainers which bring my work to another level of. Thank you for everyone for making me realize what I can do and what I need to do for my journey in youth works."

NİLAY BODUR, TURKEY

"I was nervous at the beginning of the process but gained more confidence as the process developed. My Students have been through the process with me and we have learned together new skills around M&E. We have worked together to develop new processes through group work so we can have better systems to make our M&E more successful and reflective. The students have given positive feedback on their new learning styles."

ALİ YÜKSEL, TURKEY

"As a volunteer I tried to communicate with donors and raise funds, and off course struggle a lot while raising money and communicate with people and develop projects. We did not give up and always tried more and did not have any methodology to use to evaluate. Now regarding M&E lessons may use lots of evaluation tips.
The experiences we shared in the class teach me that, we could see that things may not work well all time, there may be failures but to avoid failures we should monitor and evaluate in certain time periods. M&E importance of reflection groups and games we played helped me to see the importance of team work, to find the right balance and insist to find my way. Cultural differences, be aware of cultural differences. Kids and adults evaluation style can be different than each other. A smiley sticker because it had a great impact on children 🙂"

LORA SUCUYAN, TURKEY

"This was my first international training experience. I was not very confident at the beginning as I thought my language skills might not be at the standards required but I got the support of my new friends and colleagues. They helped me through some difficult discussions and conversations. I started self-reflection on my own needs around M&E. In Turkey I am involved in quality management and needed to develop better tools to manage M&E. Now I feel more confident as I discovered new set of skills. Some of the new skills I've learned I use in EU projects. I also learned English and improved communication skills and finally I've learned new non-formal teaching style for class."

MEHMET TEZCAN, TURKEY

"It was my first participation in an Erasmus plus project. It was been a very enriching experience and a great opportunity to learn, to use new tools and grow. I loved the great spirit of participation. Thanks to this project, I learned to delight in the evaluation and monitoring process."

CORINA SIMIONOV, ROMANIA

"This was my first international experience. I was very happy and excited to be a part of this wonderful project. I felt that I can make a big contribution to the group as throughout my professional life I have helped others to learn as well. After M&E process I feel more confident because I have learned not only from the trainers but also from the group. They helped me understand the M&E process and I've used it in Romania. The feedback from my group of young people has been very positive and they are also happy that they are learning new learning methods. The energy in this group also helped my learning process as the individuals were very easy going. I love the idea of doing a future job shadow with an organisation, and I will use the monitoring techniques. Thank you Erasmus +."

LILIANA TUDOR, ROMANIA

"The M&E training and seminar in Erasmus+ context were the most beautiful and meaningful learning and intercultural experiences in all my life. As a personal confession, it never happened to me to be so sad when this kind of experiences come to an end. I'm very grateful for this opportunity!"

RAMONA MARIAN, ROMANIA

"I used tools and skills I learned in the TC in Romania during a youth exchange in Poland in June 2017. I used different participatory evaluation methods to improve level of participation, engagement and knowledge acquisition. This approach supported the group process and contributed to overall satisfaction of participants and stakeholders."

ARKADIUSZ KALINOWSKI, POLAND

"What I have learned personally: how to organize a project, what should I know and to consider what is important. Before we start a project we should know the topic, our target group, objectives, methods and activities, timeline, also we need to have a lot of data information about the topic."

EDIN ISLAMI, MACEDONIA

"During my youth work career I have used different M&E methods. Then I went to a training course in Romania and a seminar in Bulgaria in 2017. My whole thinking on M&E has changed during this period. The methods I have learned more to use are the reflective methods and group + individual evaluations. This is a method which I have enhanced and developed through my new projects. This has helped with group inclusively and individual input. This course has reminded me the importance of monitoring and evaluation as a process that will help enable more success in existing and new future projects."

NAZ ALİ, UNITED KINGDOM
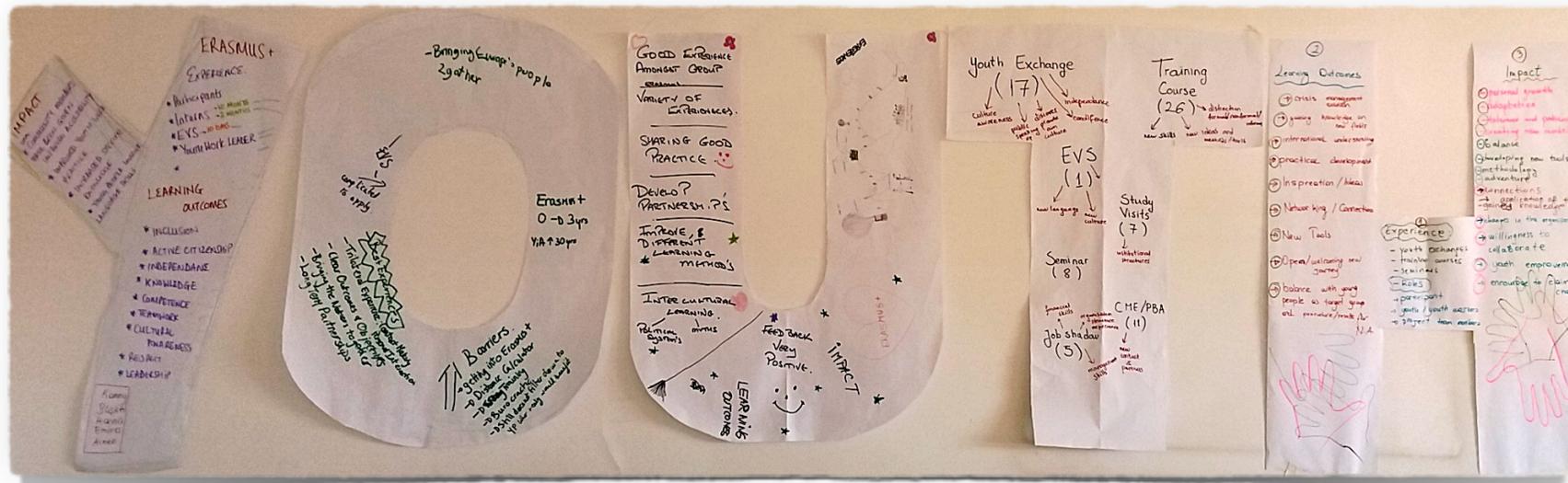
THE LEARNING PROCESS AND OUTCOMES

Traditional methods of monitoring and evaluation of impact are not fully appropriate to be implemented on the ground, due to lack of knowledge or **understanding of M&E** among non-specialist implementers, not entirely capable of reflecting both intended and unintended outcomes of the intervention, not participatory or inclusive enough.

Built on the identified common needs among 9 partners from Romania, 2 from UK, Malta, Macedonia, Slovenia, Turkey, Poland, and Bulgaria, the project raised the quality of designing and implementing of learning activities for young people **in order to reach sustainable impact** especially in the fields of active citizenship, intercultural dialogue, social inclusion and solidarity and integration on the labour market, all priority directions for the youth sector within the Erasmus+.

For that we went through a flow of 4 major steps (2 mobility activities), each contributing to the achievement of a certain project objective, over a period of 11 months:

1. **Mobility 1 – Training for youth workers** on participatory methods for monitoring and evaluation for impact assessment of learning activities: this activity (8 days mobility in *Romania, 21 – 28 May 2017*).

2. **Piloting of minimum 9 methods back home** in the period of 3 months prior to the transnational seminar (at least one of the methods acquired during the training in one of their learning activities / NGO).

3. **Mobility 2 – Transnational seminar** for identifying and exploiting of enabling and capacity-building factors as instruments for future participatory monitoring and evaluation for impact assessment (7 days mobility in *Bulgaria, 4 – 10 September 2017*).

4. **Elaboration of a short handbook** on participatory methods for monitoring and evaluation for impact assessment that comprises the following components: description of methodology for participatory monitoring and evaluation for impact assessment piloted through the training program and follow-up activities led by participants in their organisations; description of learning process and outcomes; outcomes of the transnational seminar; project proposals and share learned lessons done *with the contribution of all partners*.
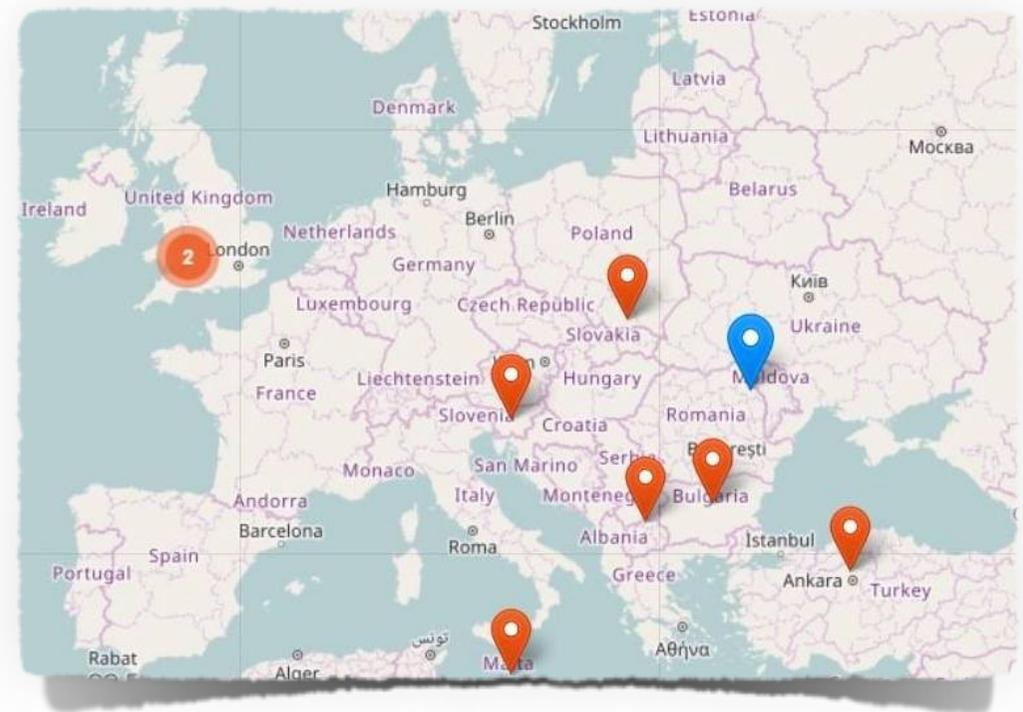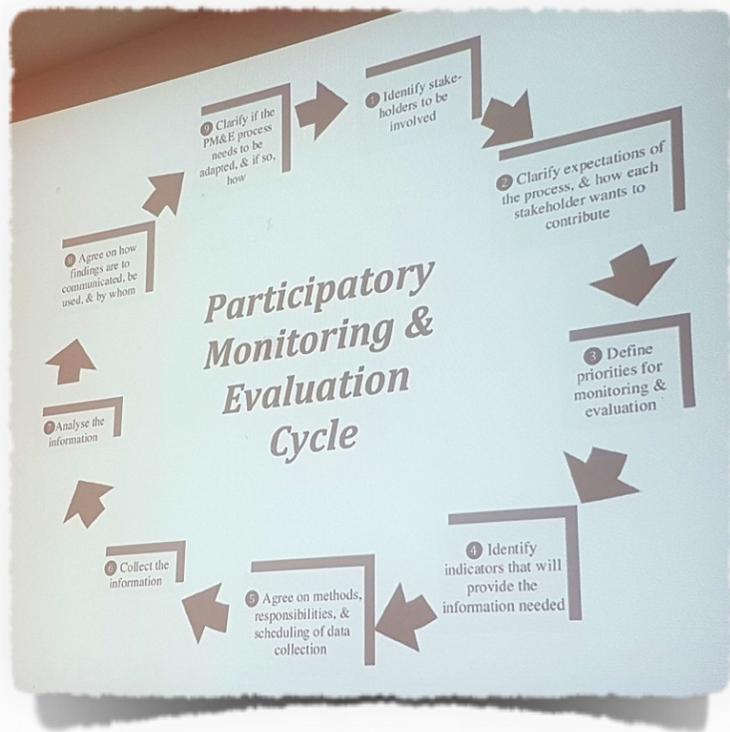
LEARNING OUTCOMES: TRAINING COURSE

We expected several specific improved competences to be developed on the participating youth workers. **Thus, after the TC we expected:**

- More knowledge regarding youth work activities; traditional vs participatory M&E methods; M&E for impact assessment within the Erasmus Plus; principles of participation-learning-negotiation-power, conflict resolution, and inclusion in M&E;

- Better skills regarding establishing objectives and indicators and their role in effective design and implementation of learning activities; gathering and analysing data; documentation, reporting and sharing;

- Increased skills regarding the use of participatory and creative methods for monitoring and evaluation for impact assessment, such as: semi-structured interviewing, focus group, participatory mapping, diaries; the role of the facilitator;

- New knowledge and skills gained through simulations and role play regarding participatory and creative methods for monitoring and evaluation for impact assessment such as: Storytelling, Most Significant Change Method, Photo Voice, Participatory Video;

- Better knowledge and skills regarding the elaboration of an action plan;

- As attitude, being more open to integrate participatory methods for M&E; becoming more flexible in thinking and acting for adapting M&E tools to the specific profile of their youth, especially the disadvantaged young people (e.g. migrants, youth from rural areas, etc.), bigger responsiveness to social, linguistic and cultural diversity.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: SEMINAR

After the Transnational seminar we expected:

• Improved competences described above but linked specifically to their roles as youth workers that are now using participatory monitoring and evaluation techniques and tools in their activities or projects;

• Improved skills for sharing of good practices; identifying constraints and solutions in implementation of participatory M&E methods; project development;

• A broader understanding of an innovative and less classic approach in applying M&E tools and techniques for measuring the impact of learning activities in youth projects;

• Increased capacity to create new international partnerships and exchange good-practices within their NGOs in the field of M&E;

• Better quality of their work and activities in favour of the young people they have as target group, due to implementing innovative M&E tools;

• A large number of new ideas, tools and, most importantly, motivation and energy to engage in using participatory M&E tools and be able to measure for real the impact they have on youth when implementing learning activities.

PARTICIPATORY MONITORING AND EVALUATION:
A LEARNING AND PARTICIPATION PROCESS

Monitoring and evaluation are not events that take place after the fact, but instead an on-going process that helps to improve the alliance between program partners (communities etc.) and NGO staff and inform involved stakeholders (funders, partner organizations, etc.) about the impact of project activities. PM&E can be used as a process to learn as an institution and improve practice in the field. For communities, this is not only a learning activity but part of the process of conscientization for all stakeholders. Through participatory monitoring and evaluation approach, individuals and communities (beneficiaries of projects, of learning activities) critically analyse the world around them and identify practical actions to create the world they wish to see. Critical to this approach is regular open dialog and honest reflection at each stage to determine if the underlying assumptions, strategies and actions are moving the community towards their vision.

PM&E requires open dialogue between all stakeholders. If M&E reports are tied to job security and future funding—honest and genuine learning are lost as reports are fabricated to meet expectations and not based on genuine reflection and learning. PM&E has to be a two-way exchange relationship based on mutual trust which, in turn, allows for flexibility. It also requires an analysis of whether the actions are moving the community toward their vision. The involvement of beneficiaries is like a step in the empowerment process toward self-determination and liberation, or total empowerment. Therefore, PM&E is a tool in that process of empowerment.

Because empowerment is not a tangible outcome and the process of conscientization is difficult to see - many traditional PM&E tools are not usable to measure the results of this process.

An organization that undertakes participatory monitoring is an organization that undertakes the status of a "learning organization", being open and conscientiously accepting that the main factors of further development are:

- encouraging experimentation

- communicating success and failure

- facilitating learning from the surrounding environment (i.e. from communities and beneficiaries)

- facilitating learning from staff through training and group learning

- rewarding learning

- promoting a sense of caring

- thriving on change

PM&E tools can be used to gather baseline data with which beneficiaries can better analyse their reality and with which communities can address local needs, concerns, and their hope for the future. In PM&E, local perception is more important than precision and scientific objectivity. After communities have come together to analyse that reality, create their shared vision for the future, identified obstacles, and come up with strategic directions to move them toward their vision, monitoring and evaluation activities are then built into the action planning phase.

PRINCIPLES OF PARTICIPATION, NEGOTIATION, POWER, CONFLICT RESOLUTION, AND INCLUSION IN M&E

PM&E is not just a matter of using participatory techniques within a conventional M&E setting. It is about radically rethinking who undertakes and carries out the process, and who learns or benefits from the findings; but there is no single way to define this.

Assessing how much participation is desirable and from which groups, depends largely on the purpose of PM&E. If the purpose is setting up locally sustainable processes of monitoring, for example, participation of youth in decision making, then local youth workers, youth, teachers, members of local authorities will need to be involved possibly in the entire process: methodology design, information collection, information collation/calculation, analysis of findings, and dissemination of findings. If the purpose is internal project learning, participants can be limited initially to project staff but youth's assessments of local indicators will be essential. If the issue is about improving accountability, then perhaps conventional M&E using participatory methods is required to find the information.

Viewing PM&E as "systematic communication" focuses attention on its fundamental social nature. Social issues arise when stakeholders come together to determine what they want to understand and communicate, and particularly with M&E, the norms of success against which they compare reality. Each stakeholder group has different information needs, priorities and expectations of being involved in M&E. Some have more or less power to speak, greater or less interest.

Assessing the need for participation by the possible stakeholder groups (community members, community organization leaders, NGO staff, others) can be guided by asking the following for each indicator:

- What is the relevance for each group of participating in methodology design, or is it the process of collating/calculating the information that is important, or only the final information?

- Who is going to use the final information? Those who are to use it should understand on what it is based, how it was calculated, etc.

ROGER HART'S LADDER OF PARTICIPATION

RUNG 8 - **Youth initiated shared decisions with adults**: Youth-led activities, in which decision making is shared between youth and adults working as equal partners.

RUNG 7 - **Youth initiated and directed**: Youth-led activities with little input from adults.

RUNG 6 - **Adult initiated shared decisions with youth**: Adult-led activities, in which **decision** making is shared with youth.

RUNG 5 - **Consulted and informed**: Adult-led activities, in which youth are consulted and informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of adult decisions.

RUNG 4 - **Assigned, but informed**: Adult-led activities, in which youth understand purpose, decision-making process, and have a role.

RUNG 3 - **Tokenism**: Adult-led activities, in which youth may be consulted with minimal opportunities for feedback.

RUNG 2 - **Decoration**: Adult-led activities, in which youth understand purpose, but have no input in how they are planned.

RUNG 1 - **Manipulation**: Adult-led activities, in which youth do as directed without understanding of the purpose for the activities.

Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, as cited in www.freechild.org/ladder.htm

METHODS USED FOR PARTICIPATORY MONITORING AND EVALUATION FOR IMPACT ASSESSMENT PILOTED THROUGH THE TRAINING PROGRAM

- **Storytelling**
- **PhotoVoice**
- **Participatory Video**
- **Most Significant Change**

There are many other methods and techniques that can be used in the Monitoring & Evaluation process. Most commonly known that can be used and adapted in youth work are:

- **Core M&E techniques**: Stakeholder analysis, Documentation review, Biophysical measurements, Direct Observation, Questionnaires and surveys, Semi-structured interviews, Case studies, Diaries, etc.

- **Techniques for groups**: Brainstorming, Focus groups, Open Space, Storytelling, Simple ranking, Strengthens, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT), Visioning or Dreams realised, Drama and Role plays, Round Table, Assembly, Most Significant Change, Participatory video and Photography, Community journals and stories (facilitated community discussion and learning), Participatory mapping, etc.

METHODS USED FOR PARTICIPATORY MONITORING AND EVALUATION FOR IMPACT ASSESSMENT PILOTED THROUGH THE FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES LED BY PARTICIPANTS IN THEIR ORGANIZATIONS

- reflective meetings with voluntary organisations, the police, local authorities, university, schools, faith groups and youth groups

- participatory video in a mid-term evaluation

- measuring a level of a given dimension with coloured post-it notes, audience clapping barometer, evaluation of products – what works perfect, what could be done better, personal significant story

- questionnaires, daily evaluations using formal, non-formal, written and verbal, individual and group methods

- interviews, direct feedback, questions & short answers

- display of the 3 months targets and evaluate firstly at monthly meetings, then quarterly every 3 months

- flipchart on the wall evaluation method where the participants can place post it note answers at a time that suits them

- documented interviews and storytelling to showcase the transformations taken place

- interviews by video-filming for self-evaluation

- yes/no/maybe, smiley evaluation, anonymous questionnaire

- storytelling, questionnaires for impact assessment, most significant change method

STORYTELLING

1. Monomyth

The monomyth (also called the hero's journey), is a story structure that is found in many folk tales, myths and religious writings from around the world. In a monomyth, the hero is called to leave their home and sets out on a difficult journey. They move from somewhere they know into a threatening unknown place.

After overcoming a great trial, they return home with a reward or newfound wisdom – something which will help their community. Lots of modern stories still follow this structure, from the Lion King to Star Wars. Using the monomyth to shape your presentation can help you to explain what has brought you to the wisdom you want to share. It can bring your message alive for your audience.

Good for:

- Taking the audience on a journey
- Showing the benefit of taking risks
- Demonstrating how you learned some newfound wisdom

2. The Mountain

The mountain structure is a way of mapping the tension and drama in a story. It's similar to the monomyth because it helps us to plot when certain events occur in a story. It's different because it doesn't necessarily have a happy ending. The first part of the story is given to setting the scene, and is followed by just a series of small challenges and rising action before a climactic conclusion.

It's a bit like a TV series – each episode has its ups and downs, all building up to a big finale at the end of the season.

Good for:

- Showing how you overcame a series of challenges
- Slowly building tension
- Delivering a satisfying conclusion

3. Nested Loops

"Nested loops" is a storytelling technique where you layer three or more narratives within each other. You place your most important story – the core of your message – in the center, and use the stories around it to elaborate or explain that central principle. The first story you begin is the last story you finish, the second story you start is second to last, etc.

Nested loops works a bit like a friend telling you about a wise person in their life, someone who taught them an important lesson. The first loops are your friend's story; the second loops are the wise person's story. At the center is the important lesson.

Good for:

- Explaining the process of how you were inspired/ came to a conclusion
- Using analogies to explain a central concept
- Showing how a piece of wisdom was passed along to you

4. Petal Structure

The petal structure is a way of organising multiple speakers or stories around one central concept. It's useful if you have several unconnected stories you want to tell or things you want to reveal – that all relate back to a single message.

You tell your stories one by one before returning back to the centre. The petals can overlap as one story introduces the next but each should be a complete narrative in itself. By showing your audience how all these key stories are related to one another, you leave them feeling the true importance and weight of your message.

Good for:

*   Demonstrating how strands of a story or process are interconnected
*   Showing how several scenarios relate back to one idea
*   Letting multiple speakers talk around a central theme

5. False Start

A 'false start' story is when you begin to tell a seemingly predictable story, before unexpectedly disrupting it and beginning it over again. You lure your audience into a false sense of security, and then shock them by turning the tables.

It's ideal for talking about the things that you learnt from that experience or the innovative way that you solved your problem. But best of all, it's a quick attention hack which will disrupt your audience's expectations and surprise them into paying closer attention to your message.

Good for:

*   Disrupting audience expectations
*   Showing the benefits of a flexible approach
*   Keeping the audience engaged

PHOTOVOICE

Photo voice is a participatory action research methodology that was coined by Caroline Wang in the 1990s. Photo voice is a methodology that enables people to identify, represent and enhance their community and life circumstances through photography. It is a process that "entrusts cameras to the hands of people" to enable them to act as recorders, and potential analysts for social action and change, in their own communities.

Research suggests that Photo voice can contribute to the self-development of participants through fostering recognition of the need for change, improved self-awareness of local circumstances, personal worthiness and confidence, as well as awareness of social resources and problem-solving abilities.

At the **evaluation stage**, Photo voice can be used to provide young persons with the opportunity to depict and describe stories of change.

These stories can refer to both positive and negative changes as well as those more or less significant.

If any of your participants have inadequate literacy and writing skills, you can ask them to narrate their answers verbally and write the stories down for them. You can also facilitate group discussions or individual interviews, guided by the **SHOWeD method**:

- What do you **See here**?
- What's really **Happening here**?
- How does this relate to **Our lives**?
- **Why does this situation, concern, strength exist**?
- What can we **Do about it**?

PARTICIPATORY VIDEO

Participatory video (PV) involves a range of video production and screening activities, which drive an evolving process of exploration and dialogue on shared issues. It can be empowering because it provides an accessible way for a group to take action on their own concerns, through deepening their understanding, engaging and motivating their wider community, and also shaping and creating their own films, in order to communicate their messages and perspectives to decision-makers and the public.

PV is an interactive group process, generally facilitated by a practitioner, which builds participants capacity to communicate to others. Group members record themselves and the world around them, and communicate their own stories creatively.

Practitioners use filming and playback activities to mediate group discussion inclusively, establish collaborative relationships and catalyse group action. Video production provides a powerful way for participants to explore their situation, and reflect on experiences together, in order to deepen understanding about reality and forge ways forward based on the knowledge that emerges.

Stages of a PV process:

- PV processes starts by opening up spaces for the group to engage in a 'safe' environment, followed by group building exercises and video work to establish a shared purpose and collaboration amongst the group. This internal process provides time for group exploration and reflection on the issues in confidence, before communicating to external audiences.

- Next, groups produce video material to stimulate dialogue with peers, outside of the immediate group. Storyboarding helps to develop a strong collective story.

- Editing the film is a key stage in the process. Paper edits are used to minimise the complexity of digital editing and allow for a more participatory process. An editing workshop also includes learning the basics of digital video editing and producing final versions of films.

- Groups share the films with each other and also plan how to use their films to generate debate and communicate with external audiences. The development of a communication strategy for the films is an important component of the process as it requires considering what can be communicated, to who and when—and the risks that might be involved.

MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE TECHNIQUE

The most significant change (MSC) technique is a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation:

- **It is participatory** because many project stakeholders are involved both in deciding the sorts of change to be recorded and in analyzing the data.

- **It is a form of monitoring** because it occurs throughout the program cycle and provides information to help people manage the program. It contributes to evaluation because it provides data on impact and outcomes that can be used to help assess the performance of the project as a whole.

Essentially, the process involves the **collection of significant change (SC) stories** emanating from the field level, and the systematic selection of the most significant of these stories by panels of designated stakeholders or staff. The designated staff and stakeholders are initially involved by 'searching' for project impact.

Once changes have been captured, various people sit down together, read the stories aloud and have regular and often in-depth discussions about the value of these reported changes. When the technique is implemented successfully, whole teams of people begin to focus their attention on program impact and outcome.

This technique is useful when you want to capture the perception about unexpected results or outcomes and when you want to crosscheck results from other techniques like group interviews, observations, etc.

There are several **reasons why** a wide range of organizations have found MSC monitoring very useful and these include the following:

1. It is a good mean of identifying unexpected changes.

2. It is a good way to clearly identify the values that prevail in an organization and to have practical discussions about which of those values are the most important. This happens when people think through and discuss which of the SCs is the most significant. This can happen at any level of the organization.

3. It is a participatory form of monitoring that requires no special professional skills. Compared to other monitoring approaches, it is easy to communicate across cultures. There is no need to explain what an indicator is. Everyone can tell stories about events they think were important.

4. It encourages analysis as well as data collection because people have to explain why they believe one change is more important than another.

5. It can build staff capacity in analysing data and conceptualizing impact.

6. It can deliver a rich picture of what is happening, rather than an overly simplified picture where organizational, social and economic developments are reduced to a single number.

7. It can be used to monitor and evaluate bottom-up initiatives that do not have predefined outcomes against which to evaluate..

OUTCOMES OF THE TRANSNATIONAL SEMINAR
*Let's meet the players & what they worked on*

ROMANIA

BULGARIA
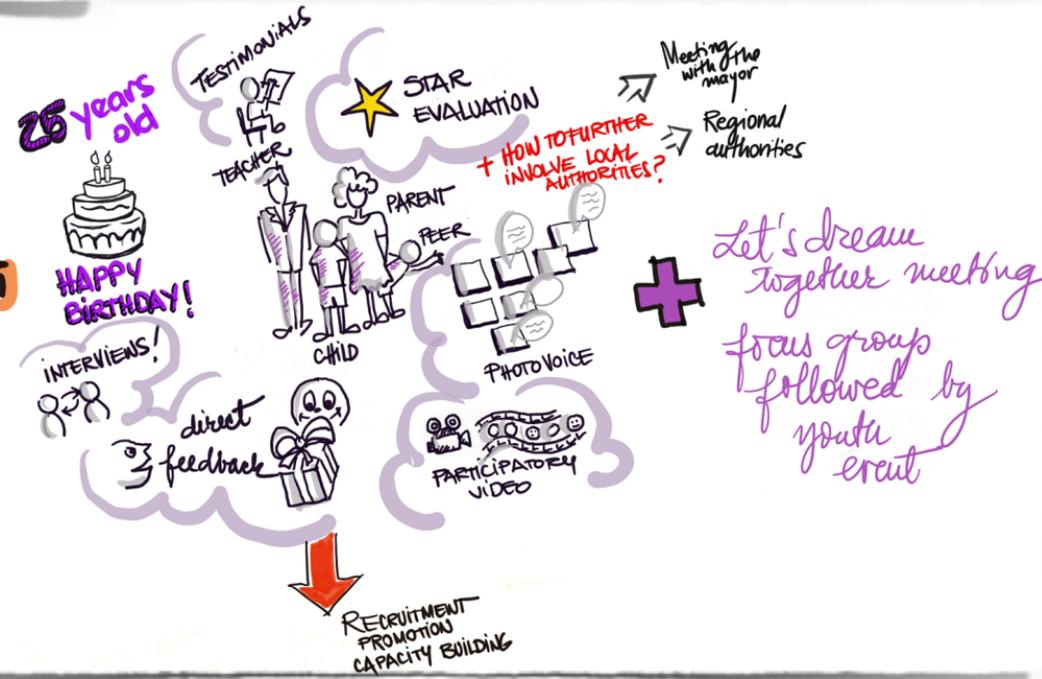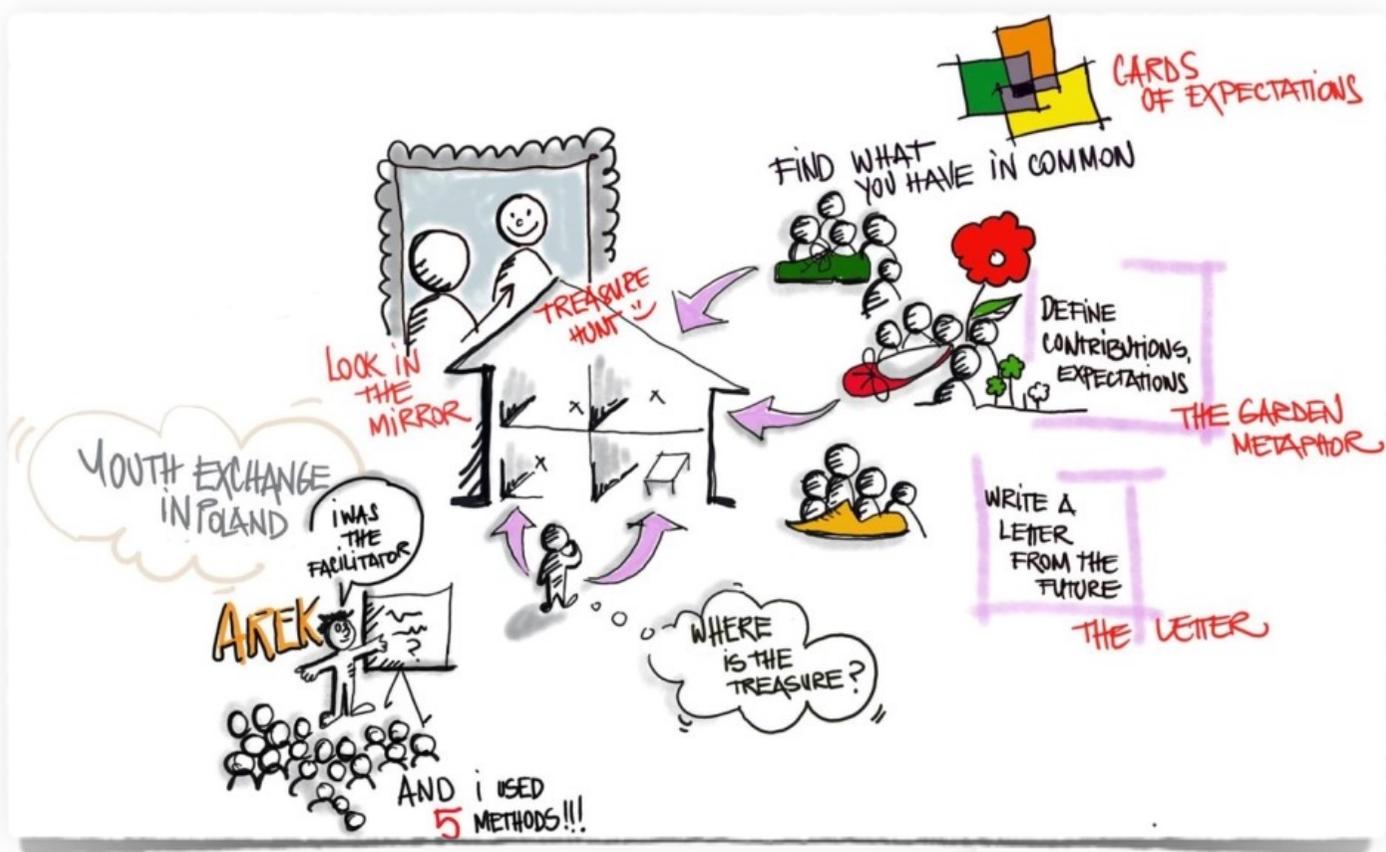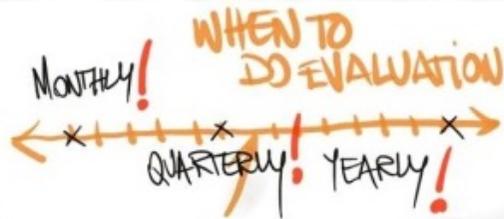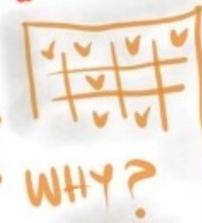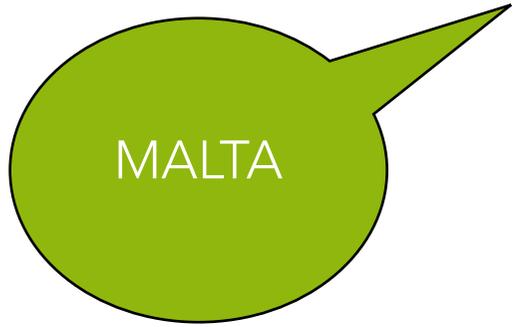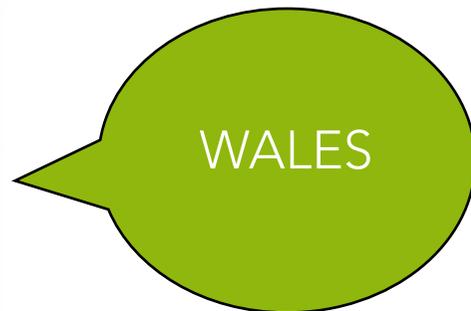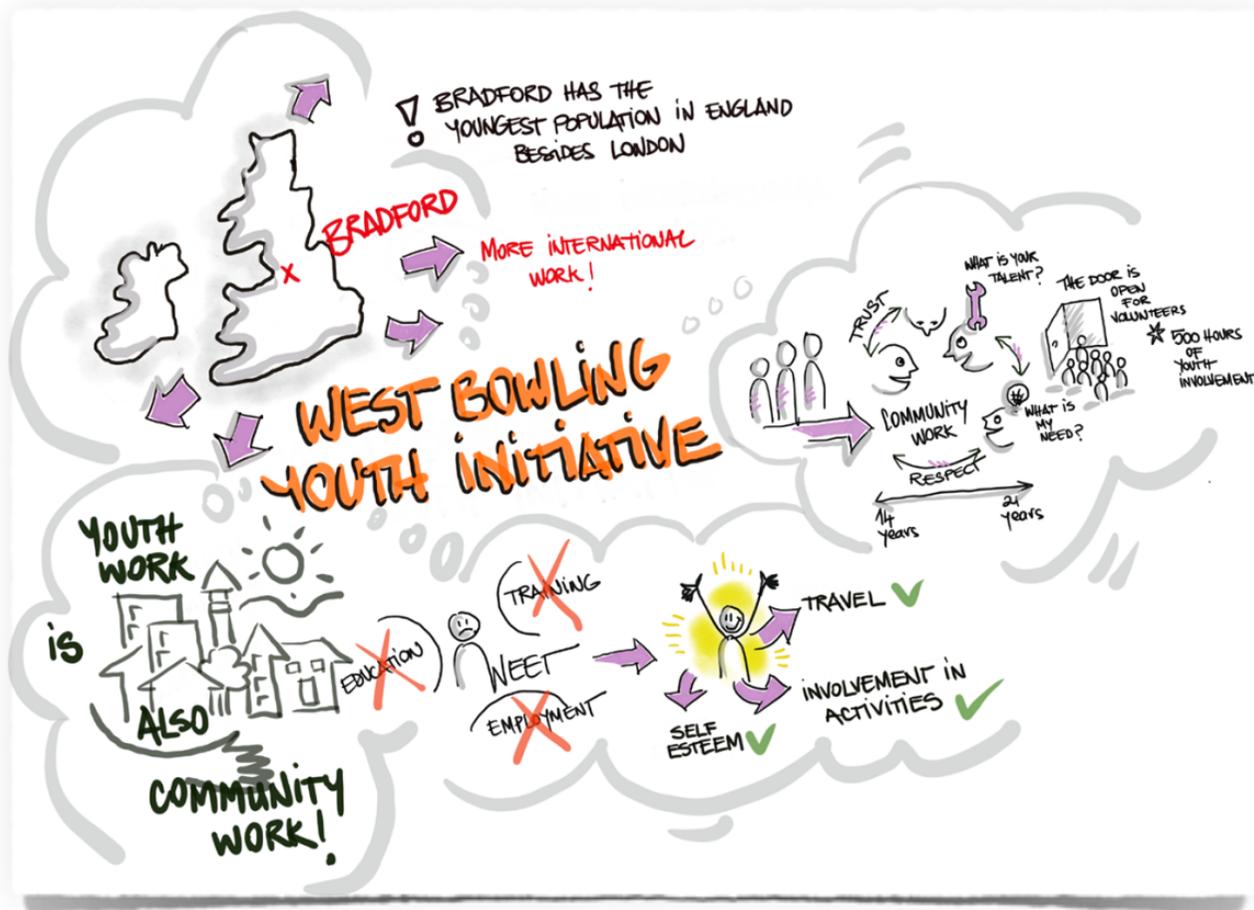
ENGLAND

TURKEY

TURKEY

SLOVENIA

PROJECT PROPOSALS

During the seminar held in September 2017 in Gabrovo, Bulgaria several project proposals were developed in partnership among the 9 partner organisations and other sending organisations as well. Each team developed a draft project including the following elements: project topic, objectives, target group, activities, timeline, and potential donors with focus on Erasmus+ as main funding programme.

The project ideas came as a result of **identified common needs** and interests among the participating organisations and targeted both young people and youth workers. In order to preserve the confidentiality of their work we will only present the main ideas.

- youth exchange focused on youth empowerment, youth participation, and human rights
- developing employability soft skills on NEET young people
- job shadowing for youth workers working with NEET
- using sports tournaments for braking cultural barriers among young people and communities
- Erasmus student community – empowerment for social change
- training for youth workers on youth activism and youth friendly methods
- sharing of experiences, study visit and training on improving the quality of work with refugees and asylum seekers workers
- youth exchange on volunteering
- youth exchange on entrepreneurship.

SHARED LEARNED LESSONS ON USE OF M&E TECHNIQUES

TANJA LESKOVAR, HANA ALHADI, JANJA TOMAŽIČ & NICHI NG'INJA representing the Institute for African Studies, SLOVENIA

"The Asylum Centre in Ljubljana is a state-run facility that serves as Slovenia's first instance reception centre for asylum seekers. It currently accommodates about 200 asylum seekers, however, numbers and individuals fluctuate constantly as some asylum seekers leave and others arrive. Because of this, the Institute plans its psychosocial assistance and recreational activities for the short term. They are intended to alleviate the asylum seeker's immediate situation.

The residents of the Asylum Centre cannot be compelled to participate in any particular recreational or other activity, or to provide the kind of feedback we require for a project such as this. In addition, the identities of the asylum seekers are protected by law.

Due to the specific nature of the subject population, there are a number of caveats which concern the quality of the evaluation results:

the participation of asylum seekers in the evaluation is strictly voluntary — many are apprehensive, suspicious and therefore unwilling to participate,

the duration of our recreational activities and therefore their evaluation is limited, in most cases to a single day.

The characteristics of the population under evaluation required us to apply a combination of different techniques. Also, we had to modify some of the classical methods of participatory evaluation in order to ensure the reliability of the results. If a particular technique failed, we would still be able to rely on others. The evaluation methods we used for the project were Impact Assessment, Storytelling and Most Significant Change. Direct observation was used for monitoring in all three cases. It was our intention to test the PhotoVoice technique as well, but time constraints prevented us from doing so.

Impact Assessment yielded useful statistical data on the effects of our recreational and psychosocial activities. An anonymous, closed-format questionnaire was used to evaluate the activity and the results were very encouraging. A drawback of applying this technique on the target group we were working with was that we could not be entirely certain about the sincerity of the participants. Due to the unique circumstances asylum seekers find themselves in, we suspect that some may have exaggerated their assessment of the activity out of concern that a poor rating would affect the outcome of their applications for international protection, even though their anonymity was guaranteed.

Storytelling is the second evaluation technique we used as it was felt that allowing the participants to express themselves in their own words and in their own language would invoke a more genuine and reliable account and overcome the limitations of a questionnaire. We found that this was an ambitious technique considering the target population. A number of the participants — particularly those that had to flee their homes at an early age — had limited access to schooling and were therefore unable to express themselves satisfactorily even in their own languages.

Most Significant Change yielded powerful narratives which were the testimonials of the Institute's staff rather than those of the participants themselves, again because of the characteristics of the subject population.

From an operational standpoint, we found that it is more advantageous to the evaluation if the monitor is not directly involved in the activity. They must, however, be familiar with the subject of observation. As project coordinators, we also found it very useful to hold a reflection group after the completion of the evaluation.

Results

The results of the activities themselves were largely favourable, namely, a significant improvement in the general mood and disposition of the participants.

Likewise, despite the peculiarities and constraints resulting from the specific nature of the target population in question, we consider the application of the monitoring and evaluation techniques acquired at the Tool M&E Up! training course in Romania to have been successful.

With this, the Institute for African Studies has been able to validate the qualitative functionality and effectiveness of its recreational methods and techniques, beyond the quantitative feedback we have had to rely on thus far."

SIMGE SÖNMEZ ALAKAŞ and NILAY BODUR representing Association of Renaissance Institute and Youth Approaches to Health Association (YAHA), TURKEY

"For M&E activities based on **video voice**:

- Remember you need a consent form to use images of participants
- Try to find more than one camera with the same quality
- Be sure you have enough battery for outside activities
- It is better to use microphone for high quality voices
- During interviews, it is better to have a stable décor which includes tripods, roll-up of partner organizations etc.
- Encourage your participants to involve and also have fun!"

BILLY HILLMAN, representing Youth Pioneers and HDA Cardiff – Horn Development Association, WALES

"Single Activity Evaluations

- To start you have to decide what kind of information you want to obtain from the activity. Next you need to decide which type of evaluation is most appropriate for the type of group you are evaluating and take into consideration constraints that may affect the evaluation *i.e. age of participants, time constraints, language barriers, levels of experience etc.*

- Have a clear plan on what you need to do with the evaluation e.g. *do you need to make a new target as a result of the evaluation? Did things go as planned, what could have been done differently?*

Long term projects, monitor and evaluation process

- Start with a detail of all targets and requirements from all parties and stakeholders. Set out a frequent monitoring timescale (annual, quarterly, monthly, and weekly) depending on the length of the project.

- Set clear and concise targets for each period (*i.e. each month/week*) and have a strict review each period on each individual target set for that period. Evaluate performance, if a set target is exceeded, evaluate why and determine if it is sustainable before setting the target for the next period.

- If a target is not achieved, evaluate why and what factors caused this, and then set target for the following period with plans in place to recover the situation before the next review. If additional support is required to achieve this, make sure that it will not be to the detriment of one of the other individual targets.

- Repeat this process at set stages throughout the lifetime of the project and if their seems to be a problem achieving any target that won't be resolved by the end of the project, you should inform all stakeholders immediately of this situation that a particular target will not be achievable and state the reasons why.

- You should decide on the most appropriate and advantageous form of feedback relevant to each stakeholder and look for opportunities to promote success.

NOTE: Prior to project implementation, carry out a pre assessment of what you think could be possible and what barrier to success you may face during the project lifetime. Only state what you really believe you can achieve."

MARISA DEBONO, on behalf of her team representing Kopin (Koperazzjoni Internazzjonali) and Aġenzija Żgħażagħ, MALTA

"Having witnessed first-hand the pilot projects being implemented, I can safely say that **it was a challenge** to get the other team members to take on board the M & E philosophy. Yet as the young people sat down to be interviewed for the Video Voice recording the wealth of information and the honesty with which they responded was highly enriching. During a youth exchange the young people shot a short film on bullying and the consequences of such as violence as a tool for evaluating their comprehension of the subject.

The young people tested and evaluated the videos content amongst other youth organisations in the area- hence the final product produced was fine tuned to the young people's likening. The whole process through which all this occurred was in turn evaluated **via a Video Voice**, again produced by the same set of young people.

Video Voice took time to plan and execute. They kicked off the process by brain storming the questions that would be asked. They moved on to draw the story board along with the location and the drafting of the necessary lights that were needed. It requires the tools- a camera- to be shot. The young people made use of their mobile phone cameras, whilst one of them managed to get hold of a **HD drone** which they made use of very effectively. Collectively they edited the final videos to their likening.

Here one can see, at face value not just merrily the importance of youth exchanges but also the true bare faced value of Monitoring and Evaluation. **The practice of Monitoring and Evaluation helps touch the lives of youth.**"

COME ON BOARD the PARTICIPATORY M&E EXPERIENCE

If you want to find out more about the learning experiences of the participants in this project we invite to contact any of the partner organisations:

www.alaturidevoi.ro

www.ymca-gabrovo.org

www.african-studies.org

www.consiliumdt.co.uk

www.ronesans.org.tr

www.hdacardiff.org

www.mms.org.pl

www.kopin.org

www.cid.mk

THANK YOU ALL FOR PARTICIPATING, READING, APPLYING, AND SHARING!

"You don't have to be great to start, but you have to start to be great!"

Zig Ziglar