MIND-CHANGING PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S STORYTELLING-BASED INTERVIEWS

Monica TILEA, Alina REȘCEANU, Ion REȘCEANU
University of Craiova

Abstract: *This article is based on the results obtained in our research activity carried out in the framework of the project Mindchangers: Regions and Youth for Planet and People, funded through the European Commission's Development Education and Awareness Raising Programme (DEAR). The overall aim of the article is linked to the project's main objective: to increase young people's engagement in actions for change with regard to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at regional level. Taking into consideration that youth active participation and youth empowerment have become much-debated topics nowadays, it is important to identify the elements that could stimulate or hinder it in community activities at regional level. To this aim, we conducted an interview-based kind of research with young people from Dolj County, based on their high level of active engagement. The participants were identified with the help of the representatives of regional civil society organisations (CSOs) they work or collaborate with. The text corpus of the interviews resulted after transcription and translation into English was analysed using open coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 69; Creswell, 2015: 429; Cohen et al. 2018: 671) and content analysis to delimit elements that could later be used in educating young mindchangers. We grouped the codes under different categories and only discussed the category related to 'education' in this article, with the aim to find out how education could encourage and contribute to youth engagement.*

Keywords: *storytelling, interview, content-based analysis, active engagement, transversal competences*

Introduction

Motivating young people to 'make the shift' from awareness to taking action in addressing issues of global concern has been a topic investigated from multiple perspectives (theoretical, practical or experimental) and by numerous fields of inquiry (educational, political, psychological, economic, etc.). Awareness is by no means necessary to make this shift, but it is not enough to lead to action, for which it acts as an "incipient" phase that can subsequently lead to active engagement. Identifying the elements that could contribute to making the shift from awareness to engagement is one of main objectives of the European project *Mindchangers: Regions and Youth for Planet and People,* funded through the European Commission's Development Education and Awareness Raising Programme (DEAR) and implemented during 2020-2024,

within which this research was carried out. More specifically, this project aims at empowering the young people, giving them a 'voice', in order to make them actors of change at the regional level. As key promoters of awareness messages, changes of behaviour and active engagement by means of tools that overcome any barriers (e.g. social media, audio-video technologies, communication devices), young people are considered to have the ability to innovate, communicate and influence their peers. That is why the EU Consensus recognised young people as "agents of development and change and, as such, as essential contributors to the 2030 Agenda" (Council of Europe, 2019). They can be considered as potential *"Mindchangers"* of our society and are part of the target group of this project and of our research.

Recent events and surveys showcase that Europe has an active young generation eager to shape its future. For example, the high turnout in the 2019 European elections was driven by "a surge in participation by young people (mostly under 25 years old) across the EU who turned out in greater numbers than before" (European Parliament, 2019). Additionally, the 2021 European Youth Event[1] pointed out that it is more important than ever to collect, shape and voice the visions of those who are or will become actors of change: young people.

In this context, the objective of this exploratory study is to identify which elements could contribute to bridging the gap between awareness and concrete action addressing global issues. Starting from the premise that education is an important factor in stimulating the engagement of young people, we selected only the elements referring to education that young people themselves regard as stimuli or barriers of their active participation in community activities at regional level. To this aim, we conducted an interview-based investigation with young people from Dolj County. We chose them based on their high level of active engagement, with the help of the representatives of regional civil society organisations (CSOs) with which they work or collaborate. These unstructured interviews took the form of storytelling and provided a broad perspective on the issue of regional youth engagement. At the same time, due to their informal approach, they offered the young people the opportunity to open their minds to global concerns and make their voice heard on the current global challenges. By telling their stories about personal engagement, the young mindchangers helped us to identify what may

---

[1] The European Youth Event (EYE) is a biennial event in Strasbourg, which is the European Parliament's flagship event for youth, undertaken with several partners and thousands of participants. The aim is to encourage youth to participate actively in the European democratic life and thus the organising team provides off-line and online platforms where young people can become change makers. Its core values are democracy, inclusiveness, co-creation and commitment to giving a voice to young people. (https://european-youth-event.europarl.europa.eu/en/)

encourage or hinder their active participation. The corpus of texts, which resulted from the transcription and translation of the interviews, was analysed using qualitative data approaches based on coding and content analysis in order to put forward a concept map centred around different basic themes. For the purpose of this article, we selected and discussed the theme of *education* and the elements that make reference to its role in encouraging and promoting youth engagement.

Thus, the structure of this article is as follows. In the first part, we discuss storytelling-based interviews as data-collection tools in qualitative research. The second part includes the description of the methodology, data collection and analysis, research findings and the conclusions reached. This research complements our recent studies targeted at defining, developing and assessing transversal competences in educating young people at higher education level, and integrating digital resources in the creation of transferable content and materials (Tilea et al. 2015; Tilea et al., 2017; Tilea et al. 2019; Tilea et al. 2020, Tilea and Resceanu, 2020, Tilea et al. 2021).

1. Storytelling-based interviews - a data-collection tool to get insights on youth engagement

According to Seidman (2006), interviewing is "a basic mode of inquiry" if one is interested in other people's stories, since stories are "a way of knowing" and telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process (Seidman, 2006: 6-7). "When people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness" (Seidman, 2006: 7) and recount narratives of experience. Thus, the research interview is not merely a data-collection exercise, but a social, interpersonal encounter. It is "a conversation between two people which is designed to obtain research data to meet objectives of research" (Cohen et al. 2018: 508).

Kvale (1996) identifies two different approaches to interviews: the 'miner' who thinks that the interviewee has the information and who is concerned to extract the nuggets of precious material from the interviewee, and the 'traveller' who is concerned to travel with the interviewee as a partner into an unknown country. Whilst the former extracts information, the latter co-constructs knowledge, and this latter more clearly echoes Kvale's view of an interview as an inter-view. Kvale further remarks that an interview, as "the interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasizes the social situatedness of research data." (Kvale, 1996: 506)

Moreover, Hochschild (2021) notes that the interview "can do what surveys cannot, which is to explore issues in depth, to see how and why people frame their ideas in the ways that they do, how and why they make connections between ideas, values, events, opinions, behaviours, etc".

Regarding our preference for storytelling-based interviews, as pointed out by Sole and Wilson (2002):

Stories are used to provide insights into programme processes, to show impact, to demonstrate innovation and to support numerical data. They have been used to identify issues, support project development, and facilitate reflection on experiences. More recently, software programmes facilitate categorisation of story fragments, which allows for analysis of patterns that can lead to quantitative information. (Sole and Wilson, 2002:4).

According to McClintock (2004:3), personal stories are useful for evaluation because of their following attributes:

1.   Storytelling lends itself to participatory change processes because it relies on people to make sense of their own experiences and environments.
2.   Stories can be used to focus on particular interventions while also reflecting on the array of contextual factors that influence outcomes.
3.   Stories can be systematically gathered and claims verified from independent sources or options.
4.   Narrative data can be analysed using existing conceptual frameworks or assessed for emergent themes.
5.   Narrative options can be integrated into on-going organisational processes to aid in programme planning, decision making, and strategic management.

By using one of Seidman's (2006) principles "Listen more, talk less", we managed to limit our interaction and to allow the participants to talk freely and openly. As a result, we obtained qualitative data which is more descriptive in nature and reflects more the participants' views (Cresswell, 2015:16).

2. Methodology
2.1 Research questions
Our research is aimed at answering the following questions: (1) What encourages or inhibits young people to participate in volunteer-based activities at community/local level? and (2) What is the role of education in triggering young people's engagement? The interview setting allowed us to select only the elements that our research is focused on and that are important for the analysis.
2.2 Data collection

The purpose of the interviews conducted with the young people from Dolj County for this research was not solely to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses or to assess their level of active engagement. It was mainly to identify elements that could stimulate or deter their engagement by listening to the stories about their actions, their behaviour, their lived experience and the meaning they make of that experience. In our particular case, interviewing provided access to understanding what motivated them to get involved and what discouraged them. To this aim, we organised individual unstructured interviews, in informal settings, during which any formality or tension (of answering multiple questions, fear of giving the wrong answer) was avoided. This allowed us to really connect with each participant in order to better understand their experience.

Therefore, we used a limited number of open-ended questions and prompt questions during the interviews, so as to build upon and explore the participants' responses to these questions. More specifically, the interviews were organised in a narrative form with the goal to have the young people freely reconstruct their experience within the topic under study. We started by asking them to tell us as much as possible about themselves and their engagement up to the present time, and to reconstruct their previous and current experiences, their actions and roles in the activities in which they have been involved.

Following the suggestions in Clark (2010), we tried to avoid using 'why' questions and asked instead 'how' they came to be actively participating in volunteer activities. The 'how' questions made them more open to reconstructing and narrating experiences from their past engagement and from their professional and/or personal development. As a result, the interviews were carried out more like entering into a dialogue or an extended conversation, or like listening to a personal story rather than a question-answer format.

These non-directive interviews took the form of storytelling, thus stimulating young people's reflections, since storytelling is "a powerful mode of human expression that helps make sense of the past and to understand possible futures" (Salm 2021), as well as our fellow human beings (Fontana and Frey, 2000:645).

2.3 Participants

In order to organise the interviews, we selected 10 young people from Dolj County with a high level of engagement (cf. Rosenblatt's pyramid of engagement[2]) in extracurricular volunteer-based activities and projects. The 10

---

[2] Gideon Rosenblatt's engagement pyramid has six levels: Level 0: Consumer - Consumes/is exposed to information about the action; Level 1: Spectator/Aware - Is aware of the action and

young mindchangers – 6 women and 4 men – were contacted via email or social media during June-August 2021. Aged between 18 and 27 years old, they are mostly students or higher education graduates (BA or MA studies), some of them being previously or currently involved in the board of youth associations at the local and district level, but with extensive experience of working in international teams. One of the participants is, for instance, an activist at international level, with an MA degree in gender studies and interest in non-discrimination, slavery and inclusion.

Throughout this article, we will use the term participants to refer to the people we interviewed, and not *interviewees* or *respondents*, because we agree with Seidman (2006:14) that this word seems to capture "both the sense of active involvement that occurs in an in-depth interview and the sense of equity that we try to build in our interviewing relationships".

The interviews were organised both in person and online and ranged in length from 60 to 120 minutes. Each interview was either audio or video recorded, transcribed and translated into English, so as to facilitate subsequent data analysis. The final corpus consists of ten texts, each having between 2500-6500 words.

Regarding the protection of personal data, we asked participants for permission before recording their stories, and for their approval to share with others the stories they told us, their opinions and ideas, and also fragments of transcribed and translated quotes that are to be used in this article.

2.4 Data analysis

The text database resulted from the recorded and transcribed verbatim passages of the participants' stories was hand-analysed using a qualitative approach. This was possible because the database was not large and it was not statistically relevant. We follow Creswell's view that "there is no single, accepted approach to analysing qualitative data […]. It is an eclectic process" (Creswell, 2015: 237) and that qualitative research is "interpretive" research, in which the researcher(s) makes "a personal assessment as to a description that fits the situation or themes that capture the major categories of information" (Creswell, 2015:237). The interpretation that one researcher makes of a transcript, for example, may differ from the interpretation that someone else makes. This does not mean that his/her interpretation is better or more accurate; it simply

---

the issue it is concerned with; Level 2: Follower/is interested in the action/the issue and keeps, or agrees to be kept, up to date, without further Commitment; Level 3: Supporter - Agrees with and expresses support for (parts of) the action; Level 4: Activist/is committed to (parts of) the action; Level 5: Multiplier/is committed to the action and promotes it to others; Level 6: Innovator/is committed to the action/the issues and develops and implements (new) ideas for its promotion (http://groundwire.org/blog/groundwire-engagement-pyramid/).

means that each brings her/his own perspective to the interpretation (Creswell, 2015: 237).

The content-analysis applied to the corpus was based on open coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:69-82, Cohen et al. 2018:668). An open code is simply a new label that the researcher attaches to a piece of text to describe and categorize that piece of text. Open coding generates categories and defines their properties (the characteristics or attributes of a category or phenomenon) and dimensions (the location of a property along a given continuum) (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:69). Open coding is usually the earliest, initial form of coding undertaken by the researcher (Cohen et al., 2018:671). In our case, the analysis consisted in dividing each text into segments and identifying inductively the main themes or categories. The categories were derived in two ways, as described in Cohen et al. (2018:668): in advance of the analysis, based on the theoretical constructs and our research interests (pre-ordinate categorization) and developed from the material itself (responsive categorization).

Then followed a comparative analysis of all the ten interviews, which helped us to identify broader common themes and patterns based on which a concept map was drawn up. The map reflects the findings of this study and leads to answering research questions. (Creswell, 2015:46)

2.5 Research findings

In this section, we present a discussion on the main findings of this research, organised according to the categorization process. We started from the fact that education is one of the leading sustainable development goals on the Agenda 2030 (SDG 4)[3], a factor of change in one's life and "a means to reform the minds of the youth" (Jahan, 2014). Thus, we consider it a pre-ordinate category, and thus we investigated the participants' points of view to see if and how they refer to education.

While sorting out their comments, opinions and suggestions, we observed not only that education is an ubiquitous topic, but also that participants frequently used words related to education (school, teachers, subjects, 'educational system', 'teacher assessment', 'school principals', training courses, etc.). As a result, we organised the coding around this topic and identified the main elements that gravitate around education and its three

---

[3] According to the *Education 2030 Framework for Action* (https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark/ 48223/pf0000245656_eng) and to the Sustainable Development Goals in the *Agenda 2030* (SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all), education is "a human right and a force for sustainable development and peace […] and every goal in the 2030 Agenda requires education to empower people with the knowledge, skills and values to live in dignity, build their lives and contribute to their societies" (https://en.unesco.org/themes/education2030-sdg4).

forms: formal, informal and non-formal. Additionally, within each of these primary categories, subcategories were developed that further delineated the elements pointed out by the participants.

The results of our analysis can be presented as a concept map which includes only those elements selected from the interviews which are relevant for the purpose of our research. This map is illustrated in Figure 1 below.
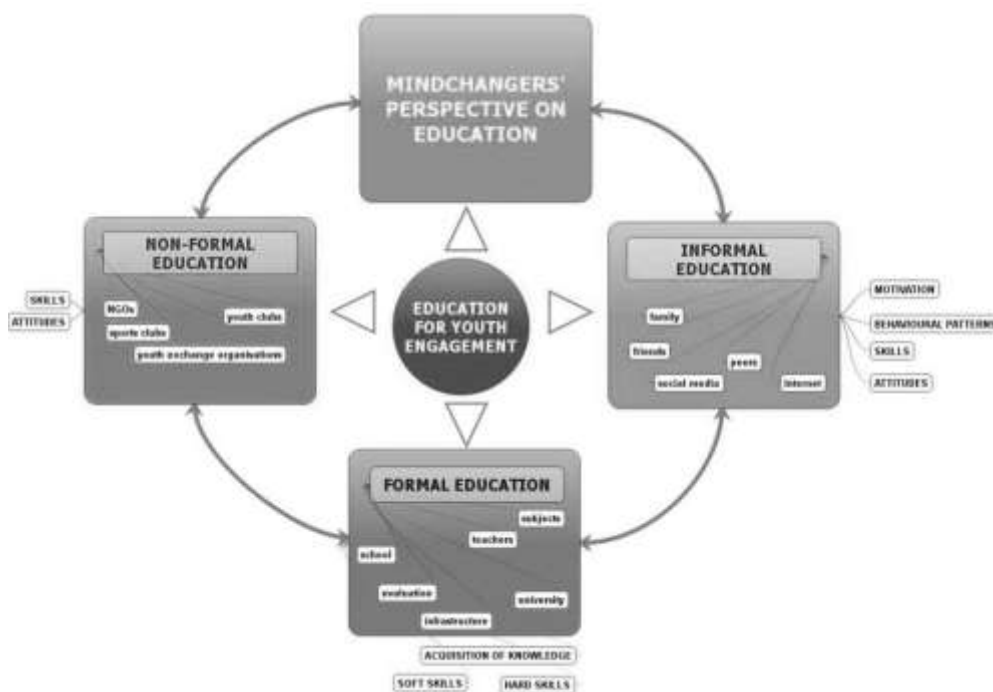

Figure 1. Education for youth engagement from the participants' perspective

This map shows that young people are aware not only of the major role of education in training the active citizens of today's world, but also of the relationship that exists between its three subcategories (formal, informal, non-formal).

In the next subsections, we describe this systematized overview of the research results and exemplify with interview excerpts so as to pinpoint the participants' perceptions on the importance of education in shaping the future generations of mindchangers.

2.5.1 Informal education

The context of learning varies from family, friends or neighbours to educational institutions, and all embed education as an open and ongoing process. In their stories, participants made explicit references to elements that can be coded under informal education as defined by Brander et al. (2020):

> Informal education is a lifelong learning process, whereby each individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from the educational influences and resources in his or her own environment and from daily experience. People learn from family and neighbours, in the market place, at the library, at art exhibitions, at work and through playing, reading and sports activities. The mass media are a very important medium for informal education, for instance through plays and film, music and songs, televised debates and documentaries. Learning in this way is often unplanned and unstructured. (Brander et al., 2020:30-31).

In the participants' opinion, family is an important source of encouragement and support, and, for some of them, the parents (one or both) or grandparents are seen as role models, whose behaviour they try to imitate. They first attracted them in doing volunteering activities and strongly encouraged them to continue. For Monica, her parents were always there for her and taught her to be empathic and to help others whenever she can, and her mother is her "model, since she is always so helpful, she is far better than I am. I want to be like her". In Emi's case, his grandmother was the driving force behind all his actions and was always very supportive with his endeavours. He also acknowledged the support of his friends and his colleagues who encouraged him a lot. Similarly, Andrei mentioned the important role his parents played in involving him in their activity (both professional and philanthropic) and in motivating him to start and manage his own initiatives. He is also the one who brought up the constant encouragement he received from his social media followers and 'friends', which he found both inspirational, and gratifying.

However, family is also seen as a barrier, because parents are considered to be tributary to the old mentality, as Maria D. pointed out. In her opinion, they do not do "everything they can to raise educated and responsible children and thus teenagers still depend on their parents even when they are supposed to be independent". She goes on saying that "in Romania, the sense of responsibility is not cultivated so much for us. There's still that conception that parents have to be there to help you, you're not very independent. This responsibility needs to be cultivated more and young people should be more aware of the obligations they have".

An explanation is the fact that parents preserve fears that they accumulated in the past and transmit them to their children and thus limit their independence and freedom of action. As Maria D. puts it "we have been blocked in the old mentality for quite a long time and parents who educate their children today still have fears. […] My colleagues, when faced with the opportunity to get involved, to do something new, they find all kinds of obstacles, they have fears, they carry with them the fears of their parents. That seems strange to me. I've always encouraged them. I would always tell them to try".

A negative effect of this parental attitude is the low level of self-esteem transmitted to their children, supported by a strong fear of failure. For instance, Maria D. states that:

> Some colleagues saw volunteering as a waste of time. Others were very curious, they wanted to do something, but they did not have the support of the family. The support of parents is very important. They didn't believe in them enough. Self-esteem is very important, we do not believe that we can achieve something, it hinders us very much, even if we have potential, if we are well prepared. This fear of failure or that something might happen to us can hold us back or prevent us from discovering wonderful things.

Friends are also an important catalytic factor in promoting engagement, be it about the activities where friends are involved, or the activities where one can make friends. Games and other fun activities could be combined with volunteering and shared among friends. As Tiberiu reckons:

> Young people are attracted by fresher, more immersive actions, like computer games, for example, that can be used to attract young people to volunteering projects. One solution is to teach them that they can combine these activities with the idea of going out with friends. Let's tell them that it's not a chore to volunteer, but it could be just an outing with friends to work in different projects. You end up being not surrounded by colleagues, but surrounded by friends. You've solved the problem of lacking time and you become a volunteer in a group of friends! You also have fun and you do good for the community.

2.5.2 Formal education

All young people interviewed pointed to the important role of educational institutions and educators in training the younger generations not only to be adequately skilled, but also to be able to overcome difficulties, barriers, stereotypes and biases, to fight social anxiety and prejudice and to build

confidence in their role and power in a world that has become more globalized than ever.

In general, formal education refers to

the structured education system that runs from primary (and in some countries from nursery) school to university, and includes specialised programmes for vocational, technical and professional training. Formal education often comprises an assessment of the learners' acquired learning or competences and is based on a programme or curriculum which can be more or less closed to adaptation to individual needs and preferences. Formal education usually leads to recognition and certification. (Brander et al., 2020: 31).

School was identified by all interviewed participants as a positive influence on motivating them to get engaged. For example, some of the participants spoke about the advantage of starting to get involved in extracurricular activities as early as possible. Both Monica and Maria B. agree that these activities had a positive response from children because they saw them as adventures, which allowed them to learn by playing and to strengthen their relationship with the other children. When describing her initial experience with extracurricular activities at school for the benefit of the community, Monica pointed out that "We, being children at the time, it all seemed like an adventure to us, not like work at all". Her colleague and friend, Maria B added:

It all started for me in secondary school, when our head teacher tried to involve all of us in as many activities as possible. Being children, so very young, she did tell us directly: Look, children, we have this project. She did not asked us: Do you want to do this and that? […] Do you want to get involved? She just took us to the activities and we all liked it, because we were together, we did something together, we were with the rest of our colleagues, so we were not with someone unknown and we played a lot. It was like play for all of us. We learned by playing. We did not realise it at the time.

For Emi C., his 'adventure' started during high-school when he joined his school club, a group consisting of 10-15 high-school students, coordinated by a teacher, who got involved in activities targeting the development of the high-school community, activities that took place within the school premises. He stressed the importance of doing something useful within the school, but outside regular school classes. Moreover, in Emi's case, teachers were of great support and an encouraging factor: "My teachers encouraged and supported

me, they inspired me to do something outside the formal educational system. I, just like many of my colleagues, have potential, but we had to be pushed from behind".

On the other hand, some participants also spoke of cases in which some teachers were a deterrent element, because they did not understand, nor support their engagement in extracurricular activities or their volunteer work, telling them that these activities were a waste of time or even punishing them for skipping classes to go to such activities. Bianca M, an activist for the rights of students and former president of the Students' Council at local level, described her experience of being involved in giving her colleagues a voice with regard to the school setting for which she was faced with reluctance and disinterest, mostly from teachers, and she even received 'threats' when advocating the students' obligation to formally assess the activity of their teachers. Although the teachers' assessment was stipulated in the Law of Education 1/2011, its implementation is still of recent date in Romanian schools, since it started only in 2021. This reflects, in our opinion, the need to continue building a coherent and solid background for the development of an educational culture in Romania (Stirling 22) and for an education that is also sustainable, namely "continuously reviewed so as to adapt to the educational context" (Tilea et al., 2017:17). Nowadays, understanding sustainability on a conceptual level across fields of study is considered an essential requirement for students, especially in higher education (Drăgoescu-Urlica et al., 2019: 753).

Access to education itself can be a barrier for youth engagement, especially since Romania is still struggling to provide equal access to education for all children, a problem worsened by the recent pandemic. Maria D. emphasizes, for example, a problem that the Romanian educational system still has, namely the lack of equal opportunities for all learners. This does not mean that it is impossible for them to succeed, but, as she says when referring to Roma children, they have to make a greater effort to reach their goals and their internal motivation plays a major role in their personal and professional development:

> The access of Roma children is limited, without the support of the authorities and without any financial support. […] I am no more special than other children from vulnerable groups, but I have had more opportunities and privileges. Unfortunately, not all children have them. Everyone should have these opportunities guaranteed, especially access to studies. I had all these chances, because I also looked for them. A lot of young people think they come to you like that, no, I was looking a lot, I was always looking for new things. And behind my success, there is a lot of work.

Moreover, educational inequalities also arise from central/peripheral or urban/rural dichotomies. As Maria D. remarks:

> Now more and more young people are getting involved. I see on Facebook that many young people get involved. But we've seen more in cities, in more equipped schools, with infrastructure, so the context matters a lot. We cannot say that the opportunities in the cities are the same as in the rural areas or in the Roma communities, where they do not even have a school.

This view is shared by Monica, who speaks about the opportunities she had as a student of one of the top high-schools in her home-town: "I found out about different projects at school. I was favoured that I was in this high-school, it was always the first place visited by the representatives of NGOs". However, she was also faced with the barriers raised by the principals of various educational institutions when she promoted the activities of youth clubs and organisations: "There were a lot of principals who didn't allow us to talk to the students, to promote our activities, we could only put up a poster".

2.5.3 Non-formal education

According to Brander et al. (31), non-formal education refers to "planned, structured programmes and processes of personal and social education for young people designed to improve a range of skills and competences, outside the formal educational curriculum". More specifically, it is "what happens in places such as youth organisations, sports clubs and drama and community groups where young people meet, for example, to undertake projects together, play games, discuss, go camping, or make music and drama." (Brander et al. 31) This form of education may be more favourable to youth workers in encouraging youth engagement, since their engagement would not be limited or isolated (i.e. to the classroom/school), but directly extended towards the community.

For our participants, non-formal activities were of utmost importance for complementing their formal education. In Romania, however, there is still a lot of talk about implementing elements of non-formal education into the formal school curriculum, because on paper we are aligned with the European guidelines, but in practice we still have to go a long way.

As they recount in their stories, these activities help them discover new things and develop new skills: public speaking, socialising, oral presentation, organisation skills, problem-solving or communication skills. Emi, for instance, admits that his participation in summer schools and training courses helped him "overcome obstacles and frustrations, and become interested in personal development, thus being able to exit the comfort zone".

Furthermore, participants found these activities useful, because they learned how to overcome difficulties or how to become interested in personal development. More importantly, five of the interviewees talked about their gained experience on how to educate others, thus moving to a higher level of engagement as trainers of future mindchangers: "I love training the others, making them discover themselves. I feel that my actions have an impact" (Andrei Z).

The young people also referred to other contexts for the organisation of non-formal activities and insisted on the positive effects of their participation in youth camps, youth clubs or NGOs projects. For Monica, her first experience in joining a youth club was "something super, super important to me and I evolved a lot and met a lot of people". Even the parties organised within these clubs are considered not only as places for interaction, but also as places for learning. Monica said that the evening parties after the meetings turned into "social gatherings where we talked to everyone, we got to know each other better, to interact, just like a continuation of the workshops or conferences we attended". On the other hand, both Teodora and Vlad remembered that they regularly participated in camps organised by the Romanian Scouts' Association. These camps were equally fun, informative and instructive for them, because they discovered new things, found out interesting information about nature and accumulated as much information as possible. They learned "a lot about nature" (Teodora), how to protect it and how to protect themselves, how to overcome unforeseen situations, how to deal with problems, how to prevent accidents or how to "survive in the wilderness" (Vlad). These camps also gave them the possibility "to take part in meetings with experts from our country, about environmental protection, about forestry" (Vlad).

Non-formal education could also contribute to changing mentalities. Maria B. complains about people's reluctance when it comes to organising and participating in protests, about their unwillingness to do something about the problems of their community. In her opinion this passivity could be overcome if the example, courage, initiative, imagination, confidence of young people were followed:

> If we go out into the streets, I don't think anyone would hear or listen to us and then the young people would say that all is just a nuisance since nothing happens anyway, that is, it is not up to us, clearly we cannot do anything. I mean, we have this mentality that we can't do anything at first, in other words we don't even try, because we know for sure that we cannot solve a problem, and thus do nothing about it. [...] We should change this mentality and say 'why not try?'. In the end, it is in our favour to try to get what we want as students or as citizens. To

do small things, to organize ourselves, go out in the streets, post everywhere on social media. But we don't. Eventually, all we do is talk to a friend and say to him: 'Oh, I'm not comfortable with this' and do nothing about it. That's it.

Likewise, Tiberiu points out that "young people are the engine of the society" and consequently, it is important and quite urgent to give them a voice in addressing current issues: "Young people must always have a voice [...]. What moves a society forward are the youth, because adults are already formed. Young people are flexible and they can bring the change in others, and that's how the course of society changes".

Conclusions

Our analysis of the ten stories about youth engagement emphasized not only the priority of education and its important role in developing skills, knowledge and attitudes, but also the need for an interplay of informal, formal and non-formal activities aimed at making young people more aware and more willing to be engaged. These stories put forward the universal value of education, as well as its regional and national characteristics. They confirm the view that education, irrespective of its attributes of formality or informality, is more important than ever and should be adapted to the changing needs of the future generations, in the sense that all educational actors should strive to ensure that young people acquire the adequate skills so as to successfully engage in solving stringent issues of the world they live in.

In order to identify innovative approaches that would transform learning into an effective educational experience for the new generations of our global society, educators should give a voice to the young generation and listen to their stories. Our study indicates that they should act in synergy with all the other actors of the educational process. Moreover, these educators should be aware of the impact they could have as both stimuli, and barriers for young people's actions. Consequently, as suggested by the young people themselves, an increased level of responsibility would lead to a better short or long-term feedback to formal, informal or non-formal educators' actions.

With regard to the limitation of our study, one such limitation is that extended relationships with the participants were not established. We only interviewed each participant once, but multiple interviews would have been ideal. Nevertheless, we consider that the initial research findings resulted from our analysis could provide the foundation for subsequent in-depth examinations of the elements related to education that stimulate or discourage the engagement of young people.

Acknowledgements

Works Cited

Brander, Patricia et al.. *COMPASS. Manual for human rights education with young people.* 2nd edition, Council of Europe, 2020.

Cohen, Louis, Lawrence Manion, Keith Morrison. *Research Methods in Education*. 8th edition. London/New York: Routledge, 2018.

Creswell, John. *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research.* 5th edition. Pearson 2015.

Council of Europe. *The New European Consensus on Development 'Our World, Our Dignity, Our Future'*. 2 June 2017. Online: ww.consilium.europa.eu/media/24004/european-consensus-on-development-2-june-2017-clean_final.pdf (accessed 10 May 2021)

Dragoescu Urlica, A. A.; Coroama-Dorneanu, L. Kamberi, L. "Sustainable Learning and Material Development in ESP - English for the Life Sciences". *International Journal for Quality Research* 13 (3), 2019, pp. 753-760. DOI: 10.24874/IJQR13.03-16

European Parliament. *Eurobarometer Survey 91.5 of the European Parliament*. The 2019 Post-electoral Survey. Have European elections entered a new dimension?. 2019. Online: https://www.europarl.europa. eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2019/post-election-survey-2019-complete-results/report/en-post-election-survey-2019-report.pdf (accessed 10 September 2021)

Fontana, Andrea, James H. Frey. "The interview: From structured questions to negotiated text". In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research,* 2nd ed., 2000, pp. 645-672.

Hochschild, Jennifer L. *Conducting intensive interviews and elite interviews. Workshop on Interdisciplinary Standards for Systematic Qualitative Research*. 2009. Online: http://scholar.harvard.edu/jlhochschild/publications/conducting-intensive-interviews-and-elite-interviews [Accessed 10 September 2021].

Jahan, Tariq. *How can education empower youth to become tomorrow's leaders*, European Youth Forum, 3 October 2014. Online: https://europeansting.com/2014/10/03/how-can-education-empower-youth-to-become-tomorrows-leaders/ [Accessed 1 October 2021]

McClintock, Charles. "Using Narrative Options to Link Program Evaluation and Organization Development". *The Evaluation Exchange* IX: 4 Winter 2003/2004. Online: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/ 288914118_Using_Narrative_Methods_to_Link_Program_Evaluation _and_Organization_Development.

Rosenblatt, Gideon. *The Engagement Pyramid: Six Levels of Connecting People and Social Change*. 1 February 2010. Published online: http://groundwire.org/ blog/groundwire-engagement-pyramid/

Seidman, Irving. *Interviewing as Qualitative Research. A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*, 3rd edition, New York/London: Teachers College Press, 2006.

Salm, Mundie. *Stories,* 2021. Online: https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/ evaluation-options/stories

Sole, Deborah, Daniel Gray Wilson. *Storytelling in Organizations: The power and traps of using stories to share knowledge in organizations*, *LILA* Harvard University, 2002. Online: https://www.researchgate.net/ publication/242189756_Storytelling_in_Organizations_The_power_a nd_traps_of_using_stories_to_share_knowledge_in_organizations

Stirling, Stephen. "Sustainable Education – Re-Visioning Learning and Change", *Schumacher Society Briefing* no. 6, Dartington: Green Books, 2001.

Strauss, Anselm, Juliet Corbin. *Basics of Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990.

Tilea Monica, Oana-Adriana Duță, Jón Freyr Johanssón, Patrick Murphy, (editors). *Transversal Skills Development in Modern Teaching Practice: a Good Practice Guide*. Bucharest: Pro Universitaria, 2015.

Tilea Monica, Oana-Adriana Duță, Alina Reșceanu. *Sustainable and Solidary Education. Reflections and Practices*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2017.

Tilea Monica, Olivier Morin, Oana-Adriana Duță. (coord.). *Competențe transvolsale în educația pentru dezvoltare durabilă și solidaritate internațională/ Transversal Competences in Education for Sustainable Development and International Solidarity*. Craiova: Universitaria, 2019.

Tilea Monica, Oana-Adriana Duță, Alina Reșceanu. *Developing Democratic Competence through ICT. A Handbook for Language Teachers*. University of Craiova, 2020. Online: http://proiecte.ucv.ro/acta/ media/O4_EN.pdf>

Tilea Monica, Alina Reșceanu. "Training Foreign Language Students to be Mindchangers: A Local Perspective on a Global Issue". *ICERI2020 Proceedings 13th International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation* November 9th-11th, 2020 - Seville, Spain, 2020, L. Gómez Chova, A. López Martínez, I. Candel Torres, IATED Academy, pp. 6156-6165, 2020. DOI: 10.21125/iceri.2020.1325

Tilea Monica, Oana-Adriana Duță, Alina Reșceanu. "Extracurricular Projects in the Romanian Educational Context: Between Students' Mere Participation and Genuine Engagement". *INTED2021 Proceedings, 15th International Technology, Education and Development Conference*, March 8th-9th, 2021 - Valencia, Spain, 2021, IATED Academy, 2021. DOI: 10.21125/inted.2021