

Direct benefits and informed decisions with YOUTH CARD



Lessons learned



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Recommendations document for the YOUTH CARD project

Document produced by City of Joensuu (FI), with contributions from Innoventum Oy (FI), Municipality of Lousada (PT), Medimurje County (CR), Aklub (CZ), JKPEV (DE)

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Introduction

Although the young people are the future of our planet, Youth work, which targets especially those young people who are in need of support and encouragement to become and stay as active players in our society, is at best an underfunded and often also scattered sector trying to make the best out of the scarce funding it receives.

The YOUTH CARD project has created a supporting digital tool for Youth work that helps to bring together the organisations in the field, disseminate services and activities available for the youth, and collect statistical evidences that can be used to steer the funding to the activities that best reach the youth, in places where it is the most needed.

This Recommendations document collects the learnings of the project and gives suggestions for the future based on them.

The document is targeted especially for policy makers to disseminate the collected good practices and lessons learned within the Youth Card project.

The Recommendations document has been created by the coordinating partner of the project, City of Joensuu Youth Services, with contributions from all partners participating in the Erasmus+ funded project, running between 6/2019 and 5/2022.

Project rationale

The YOUTH CARD project set out to create a supporting digital tool for Youth work that helps to bring together the organisations in the field, disseminate services and activities available for the youth and collect statistical evidences that can be used to steer the funding to the activities that best reach the youth, in places where it is most needed.

In addition to this, this tool includes modern and innovative supporting mechanisms for activating youngsters, such as support for rewarding and gamification processes and targeted benefits.

Collecting statistical information of young people's interest, and actual participation in activities offered, and feeding this information forward to tools used for auditing youth work, also raises the level of professionalism in the evaluation of the whole field of work.

The project, implemented by organisations both professionalising in Youth work and / or providing institutional funding for it, set out to create Youth Card ecosystems in each participating country, reaching in total thousands of young people within the project duration.

By the end of the project, each participating region or organisation would have a better evidence-based understanding of their offering for the young people and the actual impact of the activities organised, and the youth in these regions have a unified source to find information about them.

Youth Card Approach

Youth card is a digital tool, based on the combination of an activity/event calendar and individual user ID's, which are most often presented as QR codes. Youth Card enables marketing activities and events targeted for youth on a single website and mobile App, and also collecting statistical information of visits to these activities, as well as locations such as youth cafes.

The Youth card as a support tool fits into the daily operation of the partners who reach out to young people and informs the partners who have the capability of financial steering of supports provided for youth on a monthly level.

Analysing the collected evidence-based statistics makes it possible to target youth services where and when they are most needed.

The YOUTH CARD project took a multi-faceted approach with the planned outputs to maximise the effect and impact potential, and enable collecting heterogeneous information of the possibilities and challenges related to them.

- In Joensuu, where the Youth Card environment was already in use, the focus was on further development of the tool to better support the needs of the Youth work field, and involving other organisations in the region working in the field using the environment. On the other hand, Joensuu and Innoventum provided support for the other partners in their piloting process.
- Throughout the project, feedback was collected from all three key stakeholder groups - youth work organisations, youth workers and young people - to support the development work and evaluate the quality of results from their perspective.
- The consortium was formed around organisations working in the field of youth, but with different capacities, roles and located in different countries around the European Union; the partners present three different types of organisations in five different locations and countries across Europe. Involved are three public bodies, two non-governmental organisations and one SME with role as a specialist technical partner
- The Youth Card piloting was designed not as a short push, but as a process running along the normal activities of the organisation over a long timeline, to create a feedback loop for the digital development work and building the new native Mobile Application.

The needs which the YOUTH CARD project addresses originate from the Youth work field, and the digital supports built were designed together by the Youth sector professionals of Joensuu, Lousada, Medimurje, JKPEV and AKLUB and the technical specialists of Innoventum.

Results and Findings

Results in Finland

When the YOUTH CARD project started in June 2019, the card had been in use in the city of Joensuu, starting from one Youth space in 2017 and expanded to 8 spaces controlled by the city. By the end of the project, there had been about 60 locations created (including schools for the Finnish Model of Leisure Activities and Kindergartens for the Open summertime playground activities). The number of activity visits on a monthly level has risen up to 7000 (10/2021). A total of more than 1000 activities have been created on the nuortenjoensuu.fi site and there are more than 100 organisations in the organisations register.

Summary of Audit results by Youth Academy Finland

The user experiences of the YOUTH CARD were mainly positive. After starting to use the digital YOUTH CARD, the users generally didn't want to go back to old methods and habits.

There were some technical issues in the development phase which distracted usability. Together with the developer, we concluded that the users probably didn't always know that the product was still in the development phase and not ready yet. There were also some challenges in data transfer between YOUTH CARD and a third party. However, these challenges were not related to YOUTH CARD and will be solved by the third party in question.

According to users, the mobile application looks good, and the user interface is easy. They feel that scanning feature and YOUTH CARD's benefits and tracking possibilities are very innovative compared to similar services.

For the users the most important features of the YOUTH CARD are real-time data (such as the movement of the young people between different areas), benefits for users, event calendar, and possibilities to expand the service to new sectors such as NGOs and schools. In addition, users have spotted new benefits in YOUTH CARD that could not be predicted in advance, such as detection tracing during the Covid-19. The users also

pointed out that the YOUTH CARD could be used to gather statistical evidence about open playground activities and other similar experiments.

Collecting statistics of the youth work is felt important because

- It supports further development of youth work
- It makes the youth work visible, fosters developing the quality of youth work and proving the benefits and need for youth work.

Utilising digital methods in collecting the statistics is important because

- It provides a unified way to collect statistics and makes working with the results easier
- It removes a lot of manual work from the persons responsible for collecting the data, compared to collating paper lists and similar methods used in the past.

Results from Portugal, Germany and Czech Republic

The YOUTH CARD project sought to test the use of statistical data in youth work in several European partner countries, while further developing the tools especially based on the experiences already gathered in Finland. The piloting of the Youth Card ecosystem suffered heavily from the COVID-19 epidemic which hit the world in February 2020. However, some results were collected, from which we can derive initial conclusions;

- AKLUB tested using the system in 3 weekly clubs starting in April 2021, continuing until the end of the project. The feedback collected from both youth workers and young people was 100% positive in all aspects
- Municipality of Lousada managed to pilot the system and a technical supporting workshop was organised to tailor the environment for their needs. The initial feedback was positive, but unfortunately the COVID-19 situation prevented piloting in the intended scale
- In Germany, JKPEV tried to extend the use of their environment within peer organisation networks, but was met with a very sceptical reception. The use of statistical data as a basis for developing youth work was not fully understood and stakeholders had many concerns about privacy issues with data collection.

Results from Feedback questionnaires

As part of the project, youth workers and young people were polled for their feedback and ideas in a series of workshops.

The quantitative evaluation of the results from the feedback collected from the Youth in all participating countries showed very positive response to claims about the ease of use of the Youth Card, with 86% of all responses to the usability claims either somewhat or completely agreeing to them:

Claims	4 3 2 1				Not applicable	Total
	Completely agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Completely disagree		
Getting a personal youth card was easy	21	1	2	0	0	24
Logging visits using Youth card is easy	24	0	0	0	0	24
Logging in to the Youthcard website is easy	18	1	1	1	3	24
Finding activities is easy	16	3	1	0	4	24
I benefit from having a personal youth card	15	5	2	1	1	24
	94	10	6	2	8	120
	78 %	8 %	5 %	2 %	7 %	

As expected by the partnership, the most used feature for the card was logging visits to activities, followed by scanning activity QR codes, and searching for available activities.

Tested features					
Using my card to log visits	21				21
Scanning a QR code (of activity) to log a visit	19				19
Searching for available activities on the website	18				18
Registering for an activity	16				16
My Activity CV	0				0
Points and Rewards	6				6
Benefits attached to the Youth card	8				8
	88	0	0	0	88

When asked to evaluate the usefulness of different features, using the card to log visits, and searching for activities were seen as the most useful uses and features planned for motivating youth - points and rewards and benefits raised most doubts in terms of usefulness.

Evaluation of features usefulness	Not at all useful 1 2 3 4 5 Very useful					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
Using my card to log visits	1	0	1	0	22	24
Scanning a QR code (of activity) to log a visit	0	0	1	2	16	19
Searching for available activities on the website	1	1	0	5	16	23
Registering for an activity	1	1	0	3	16	21
My Activity CV	1	4	1	3	2	11
Points and Rewards	2	4	4	1	6	17
Benefits attached to the Youth card	1	1	9	1	0	12
	7	11	16	15	78	127
	6 %	9 %	13 %	12 %	61 %	

For the Youth workers the quantitative evaluation showed that the key features were considered easy to use by 67% of the respondents. Especially logging visits were experienced as an easy to use feature. The German youth workers did not see collecting statistical data of the youth work at all relevant or useful in their work.

Claims	4 3 2 1				Not applicable	Total
	Completely agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Completely disagree		
Creating new Activities on the Youth Card webs	4	5	2	0	6	17
Logging Young people's visits is easy	10	3	4	0	0	17
Viewing and managing the visit history is easy	2	8	2	1	3	16
The statistical information provided is relevant a	8	3	1	2	2	16
The Youth Card is a useful tool in my work	9	3	0	2	2	16
	33	22	9	5	13	82
	40 %	27 %	11 %	6 %	16 %	

Evaluating the usefulness of the different features provided, 88% of all responses showed them to be either useful or very useful. Benefits was considered the least useful feature offered in this query and tested only by 3 out of 17 respondents.

Tested features						
Using my card to log visits	21					21
Scanning a QR code (of activity) to log a visit	19					19
Searching for available activities on the website	18					18
Registering for an activity	16					16
My Activity CV	0					0
Points and Rewards	6					6
Benefits attached to the Youth card	8					8
	88	0	0	0	0	88

Mobile Application

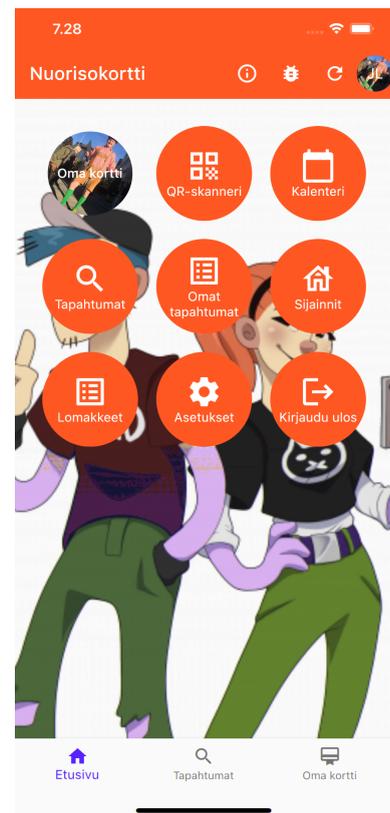
Output 3 of the YOUTH CARD project was about developing a native Mobile App to support the Youth Card ecosystem, including the unique Youth Cards, showing enabled benefits in real time, listing the Activities available for the Youth, and featuring a QR code scanner for logging visits. The App, available for Android and iOS systems, makes the digital processes easier to use. The application prototype was tested especially by youth workers of the city of Joensuu, and feedback for the first public version was also collected from the municipality of Liperi as an external stakeholder.

The youth workers participated in development - stage testing very actively and provided quick feedback of issues experienced, which made it possible to get a solid functioning application, developed from scratch, published within the scope of the project.

The Mobile Application has proven to be an efficient tool especially for the youth workers as a part of their work.

In Finland, the marketing of the App for young people started in spring 2022, supported by two events organised by the Youth services, where you could use the app to interact with a Band contest and register for a live concert directly with the App.

The Youth Card Mobile App developed in the project has been installed on about 250 Android devices and 10 iOS devices (iPhones) by June 2022. The numbers show that further need for marketing the App for youth is needed in the future.



Recommendations

Policy work is needed

Digital tools, such as the Youth Card can provide support for daily routines in the field of youth work and save time by automating manual work. Collecting data of the work and results makes the work visible and also fosters the motivation of youth workers. In the YOUTH CARD project the partnership has learned that despite of the many benefits this supporting tool offers, taking the first steps can be very challenging; In Finland where statistics of youth work is already collected on national level, this dimension is better understood, but in other participating countries, it was very difficult to convince third organisations of the value of this information and on the contrary scepticism about possible privacy issues was prevailing - especially in Germany.

Based on user feedback and the Audit by Youth Academy, the users feel the system is good concerning both privacy and security aspects. When it comes to privacy, the ecosystem supports many different types of uses, such as leisure activities or use with schools (using activation codes, pre-created cards)

This issue should be primarily addressed on policy level to support the intake of tools such as the Youth Card.

The Card works best on municipal or regional level

The YOUTH CARD project tested different approaches for building networks on the piloting ecosystems; JKPEV in Germany and AKLUB in Czech Republic represent Non-governmental organisations and they attempted to build the regional ecosystems from the ground up.

This approach proved very difficult at least in the scope of the project - partly due to the COVID-19 epidemic which affected much of the activities and piloting process - but based on the experiences it would seem that a regional government bodies, such as City of Joensuu (FI) and Municipality of Lousada (PT) have a better chance of success as they are in the position of directly benefiting more from the information collected, provide settings for youth work and on the other hand support NGOs in the field.

As the Youth Card creates a user register to make full use of the features such as registration to activities, the regional bodies are also a better fit for the data administrator role compared to a single national register - for which the statistical data would be completely anonymised.

Connectivity is the key

In Finland, municipalities are obliged by law to organise youth services. National level statistics are collected of the numbers of youth reached and youth worker hours invested in activities organised for youth.

To maximise the benefits gained from the Youth Card - and minimise double work by youth workers in entering information to statistical tools - the platforms designed to collect statistics on national level should provide an API for automatically uploading data which is collected automatically. As the modern trends of web software development are geared towards micro services and headless architectures, providing API connections should be something built in already in the initial design phase.

The YOUTH CARD project prepared to automate data transmission, since the national - level tool used in Finland in 2019 - Logbook - included an API interface. Unfortunately this target system is no longer in use and at the moment (last information from 2/2022) the replacement tool which is being developed by the Association of Finnish Municipalities has no API connections planned for external data sources.

Combining regional marketing of available activities and services, automation of the local - level data collection which also benefits the activity organisers, and passing the numeric data to a national level statistics database would lead to best use of resources on all of these levels.

The technological base exists..

The feedback project partners have collected from the stakeholders show that there are sufficient technologies and devices available in all participating countries to make use of digital tools as part of youth work. The evidence also shows a very positive attitude towards the use of Youth Card, once the decision has been made to take it into the daily processes.

...But human resources are still needed

When embedding new practices and tools in a new environment, allocating sufficient human resources are critical for the success; The staff who will use the new tools need to be trained and receive support in case they run into any issues. Starting with a small pilot group and expanding the use making use of a cascading model helps in solving initial

problems and achieving a higher complacency among users, in turn fostering rooting the practices in use.

Making work measurable

During the project, the partners have seen numerous cases of how the data collected can bring added value to youth work - sometimes in unexpected ways.

The Audit organised by Youth Academy showed the following results:

The has provided information about how young people commute between neighbourhoods, age division of the youth and which postcode regions the youth come from to different locations and activities. This real-time information fosters planning and resourcing the youth work.

The Youth Card also enables measuring the use an effect of benefits provided; For example in Joensuu, visits to the local swimming halls are now saved in the Youth Card statistics when the local K789 benefit is used, making it possible to follow which benefits are of interest for young people and use them as one way of motivating and activating the youth.

Next steps

Making the best use of the Youth Card requires cooperation between stakeholders. This is true both across the different types of stakeholders (organisations, youth workers, young people), but also with other service providers.

Although it was not written as a goal of the Youth Card project, the partnership hoped to gain a bigger momentum in terms of new ecosystems created within the project timeframe; Nevertheless, municipality of Liperi started with their own Youth Card platform in November 2021 and in July 2022 municipality of Kontiolahti has also decided to join the system. About a dozen Finnish cities and municipalities have expressed interest in joining and about 30 more have been contacted by Innoventum and informed of the project and the system available.

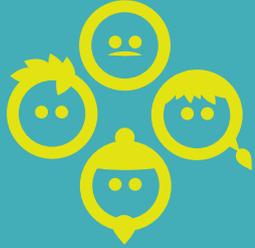
The Mobile App created in the project has received very positive feedback for the ease of use and we are hoping to see it receiving an increasing number of downloads in the future.

A question that arose in the audit is how to deal with the fragmentation of the youth field and collection of data - how to share and make use of the tools already developed and

further build them together instead of creating similar tools in every city? It would be good to find a common model (software, programme), that is reasonably priced also for smaller municipalities. The evaluation did not bring an answer to this question, but different obstacles were discussed.

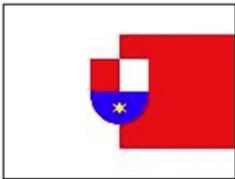


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YOUTH CARD

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