

STAKEHOLDERS' VOICE ABOUT A YOUTH PARTICIPATORY ACTION-RESEARCH PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT: Through a qualitative research, this study presents the voice of stakeholders in the analysis of a Youth Participatory Action Research program, together with their standpoints about social participation of this population. A convenience sample of 13 stakeholders directly and indirectly linked to a Youth Participatory Action Research project was individually interviewed based on a semi-structured script. The analysis, views, and recommendations for future programs were studied, coded based on a content analysis, and subsequently analyzed using NVivo 12 qualitative analysis software. Stakeholder's voice analysis was based on four categories: (Q1) Youths seem to depriorize school-related issues; (Q2) Youth face too much bureaucracies when facing the adult world; (Q3) Lack of statistically significant improvements in pre and post-test; and (Q4) Scenario of youth participation and their engagement in policies. As conclusions, responsibilities are attributed to the Government, organs of political power, and school, but also to young people. The involvement of stakeholders can enhance their support to Youth Participatory Action-research, and the guidelines / strategies will support the improvement of future programs.

Keywords: youth participatory action-research program, stakeholders, voice, qualitative research.

A VOZ DE STAKEHOLDERS SOBRE UM PROGRAMA DE INVESTIGAÇÃO PARTICIPATIVA COM JOVENS

RESUMO: Com base numa investigação qualitativa, este estudo apresenta a voz de stakeholders, na análise de um programa de investigação participativa com jovens, a par dos seus pontos de vista relacionados com a participação social desta população. Uma amostra de conveniência de 13 stakeholders, direta e indiretamente ligados a um programa de investigação participativa com jovens, foi individualmente entrevistada com base num guião de entrevista semi-estruturado. As análises, perspetivas, e recomendações para futuros programas, foram estudadas e codificadas através de uma análise de

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conteúdo, e seguidamente estudadas com recurso ao software de análise qualitativa NVivo 12. A análise da voz dos stakeholders teve por base quatro categorias: (Q1) Jovens parecem despriorizar assuntos relacionados com a escola; (Q2) Jovens são alvo de muitas burocracias quando enfrentam o mundo dos adultos; (Q3) Ausência de melhorias estatisticamente significativas do pré para o pós-teste; e (Q4) Cenário da participação dos jovens e o seu envolvimento nas políticas. Como conclusões, as responsabilidades são atribuídas ao Governo, órgãos de poder político, escola, mas também aos jovens. O envolvimento de stakeholders pode aumentar o seu apoio aos programas de investigação participativa com jovens, e as suas guidelines / estratégias, apoiarão a melhoria de futuros programas.

Palavras-chave: programa de investigação participativa com jovens, *stakeholders*, voz, investigação qualitativa.

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Youth Participatory Action-research Programs (YPAR)

Important echoes of voice and experience of the youngest, YPAR have assumed a great emphasis in recent decades (Livingstone, Celemencki, & Calixte, 2014). Based on three main principles: (1) promotion of research methods and techniques; (2) involvement in the action-research process; (3) power-sharing youth-adult in the decision-making process (Ozer, Ritterman, & Wanis, 2010; Ozer & Piatt, 2017), YPAR are important promoters of youth competencies. In a systematic literature review, Anyon and colleagues (2018) report their impact on agency and leadership, followed by academic or professional, social, interpersonal, and cognitive level.

Encouraging the awareness and collective effort to tackle problems that affect them, it is an important tool for understanding young people, through their own voice and experience (Kim, 2016). Through participatory research, in the study of their problems, young people derive solutions that promote their greater well-being and development (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). In YPAR, young people are targets, and resources (Ozer & Piatt, 2017; Tolan, 2016).

With a positive role in positive youth development (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2003; Cook & Krueger-Henney, 2017), YPAR also contribute to positive changes in the community (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2003) and society (Cammarota & Fine, 2008).

The Dream Teens Project

Started in 2014, to make young people's lives more visible, through the increase of their social and civic participation in areas such as health, well-being and citizenship (Branquinho, Matos, & Equipa Aventura Social / Dream Teens, 2016; Matos et al., 2015), the Dream Teens project involved a total of 147 participants, aged between 11 and 18 years (<http://www.dreamteens-en.aventurasocial.com/>; Frasilho et al., 2018; Matos et al., 2015).

Through Facebook and Skype, Dream Teens was ruled by a first phase, with young people to identify their problems, in areas such: (1) mental health, personal resources and well-being; (2) social capital; (3) love and sexuality; (4) consumptions and dependences; (5) leisure and physical activity; and (6) citizenship and social participation, as well as strategies for its resolution. In this stage, in a young-adult mentorship, action-research techniques were promoted; group action-research projects were developed; and their participation in the book “Adolescents: safe navigation through unknown waters”; Matos, 2015) was enhanced.

In a new phase, for the development of research-action projects, individual projects were developed, and the request for support to schools and municipalities for the development of their projects encouraged. Dream Teens program and Health Behaviour in School-aged / World Health Organization 2014 study report (developed in Portugal by the research team; Matos, Simões, Camacho, Reis, & Equipa Aventura Social, 2015) were presented by youth in their schools.

In this national study, two-face meetings were held, counting with the presence of several national and international stakeholders.

In a third phase, a core group (more motivated and participatory youth), streamlined the network, developed action-research projects, and participated in scientific events, giving a voice to their generation.

In line with other YPAR (London et al., 2003; Ozer et al., 2010; Ozer & Douglas, 2013), and with the six components proposed by the World Health Organization (2014): establishing needs and priorities; provision of a model / project for actions planning; identification of support structures and processes; facilitation of the evaluation and involvement process; assurance of supervision, evaluation and dissemination; and empowerment, this project promoted a more positive development of their participants (Branquinho, Cerqueira, Ramiro, & Matos, 2018; Branquinho, Matos, & Equipa Aventura Social/ Dream Teens, 2018).

Why engage Stakeholders?

With prominent roles in society, and in the decision-making process related to health and well-being, stakeholders are often defined as "any group or individual who is affected by, or can affect the achievement of an organization's objectives" (Freeman, 1984). A non-consensual description, in this work stakeholders are understood as anybody susceptible to be influenced or influencer in the field of youth health, well-being or education, and / or policies that directly affect youth.

In a study conducted by Goodman and Sanders Thompson (2017), stakeholders' engagement can be categorized into three broad areas: (1) non-participation; (2) symbolic participation; and (3) engaged participation.

Cottrell and colleagues (2014) highlighted identification and prioritization of research topics, methodology feedback, support in participants recruitment and their understanding, readability guarantee, accessibility of data to the entire population, and dissemination support, as benefits of stakeholder's engagement in the research process. It is believed that their participation promotes the impact of researchs (Boaz, Hanney, Borst, O'Shea, & Kok, 2018), and a more valid assessment process, empowering not only research, but also others stakeholders and their commitment to use results (Morris, 2002). Although this field is emerging, evidence-based publications of stakeholder's engagement are still scarce (Boaz et al., 2018; Ray & Miller, 2017).

The Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) to explore and analyze data

In the study of programs, interventions, and stakeholder perspectives, qualitative research is highlighted as a valuable information gathering resource (Neal, Neal, VanDyke, & Kornbluh, 2014). CAQDAS, facilitator of the visualization process, organization and data analysis (Carcary, 2011), presents itself as an important tool in the systematization and presentation of information (Chandler, Anstey, & Ross, 2015; Rademaker, Grace, & Curda, 2012).

Valued when combined with traditional content analysis techniques, optimizing the results (Welsh, 2002), CAQDAS provides a more complete and correct interpretation. Widely used in community

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research, the qualitative analysis software NVivo, it is recognized for its positive impact on the quality of research (Hilal & Alabri, 2013).

In this paper, we present the voice of 13 Portuguese stakeholders, in the analysis of an YPAR – Dream Teens program, and their standpoints about youth participation, youth engagement in policies that directly affect them, and the proposal of guidelines / strategies to improve new YPAR programs.

METHOD

The present work follows the structure:

- (1) study of four words most frequently uttered by stakeholders in each of five categories;
- (2) presentation and analysis of word similarity cluster map;
- (3) based on word similarity clusters map results and in the four words most frequently uttered, comments were aggregated, and not compared between internal and external stakeholders.

Participants

A total of 13 stakeholders (six female and seven male), nationally renowned and linked to education and health fields, were included in this study. Five of which were directly involved in the program with an engaged participation as collaborators, other one had a symbolic participation with a cooperative role, and the other seven had a non-participation roles (Goodman & Thompson, 2017).

Procedures

Preceded by an email with a meeting request, this study was developed from April to June 2018. The content was recorded through notes, to not compromise respondents' impartiality. After transcribing, the data were analyzed using the NVivo 12 qualitative analysis software. A semi-structured interview script was developed and applied to each participant (see Figure 1).

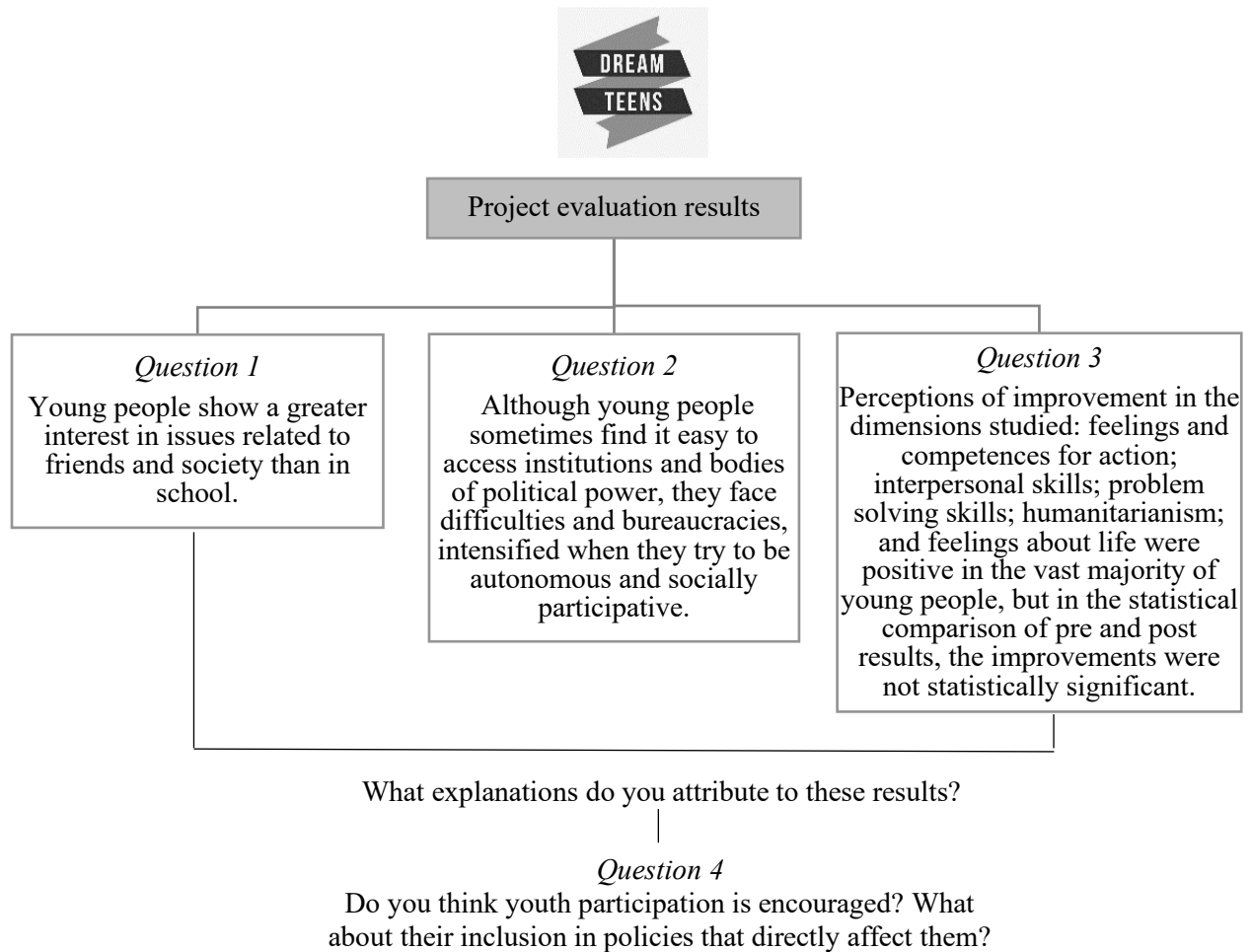


Figure 1. Interview Script Map

The interview guide was developed by the research team, focusing on YPAR program evaluation: (Question 1) Regarding the fact that youths seem to deprioritize school-related issues (Branquinho, Cruz, & Matos, 2017); (Question 2) Regarding the fact that youth face too much bureaucracies when facing the adult world (Branquinho, Cerqueira, Ramiro, & Matos, 2018); (Question 3) Regarding the fact that at the end of the program there was a perception of improvement of participants' competencies, but without statistically significant differences (Branquinho & Matos, 2018); and stakeholder's (Question 4) view about youth participation, and their inclusion in policies that affect them.

The YPAR program – Dream Teens, under analysis in this work, was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Academic Medical Center of Lisbon, University of Lisbon.

Data analysis

All the notes taken were transcribed shortly after the end of each interview and analyzed in the language in which the interviews were conducted. The most relevant contents were highlighted and inserted in the NVivo 12 qualitative analysis software. In the first phase, the authors read the content of the interviews, and performed a preliminary content analysis. To ensure greater accuracy in coding, all data were crossed. After this phase, a new content analysis was conducted, reinforcing the categories to be created.

A tree of nodes was created, along the nodes “(Q1) Youths seem to deprioritize school-related issues”; “(Q2) Youth face too much bureaucracies when facing the adult world”; “(Q3) Lack of

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statistically significant improvements in pre and post-test”; and “(Q4) Scenario of youth participation and their engagement in policies”.

In the end, all the data of each interview were codified by the nodes and cases, with attributes name, sex, and relation with the project (internal stakeholder (IS) - directly involved in the project; or external stakeholder (ES) - indirectly or not involved in the project). A memo of the project was created to ensure a greater detail in work presentation.

The process of data analysis started with the number of responses, studied through the response matrix. A search of the most frequent words (criteria: four most frequent words with a number equal to or greater than eight characters, grouped by synonyms) was conducted.

A cluster analysis that allowed cases visualization by word similarity, guided the analysis of all the data, revealing the possibility of unifying the feedback from internal and external stakeholders. The four words most uttered in each category support the identification of the most relevant excerpts, facilitating the study.

RESULTS

Analyzed the number of responses for each node, knowing that due to stakeholders time constraints, it was not possible to put all the questions present in the script, it was verified that all nodes presented a percentage response higher than 66.66% (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of responses in each node and sub-node

Nodes and sub-nodes	IS1	IS2	IS3	IS4	IS5	ES1	ES2	ES3	ES4	ES5	ES6	ES7	ES8
Dream Teens project knowledge	X	X	X	-	X	-	X	-	X	-	X	X	X
Analysis of the results of study 1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	-	X	-
Analysis of the results of study 2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Analysis of the results of study 3	X	X	X	X	X	-	X	-	X	X	X	X	X
Participation and engagement in policies	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Participation promotion	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	-	X	X	X

Notes: IS = Internal Stakeholder - directly involved in the project; ES = External Stakeholder - indirectly or not involved in the project; X = question answered; - = lack of response

A new word frequency search (criteria: four most frequent words with a number equal to or greater than eight characters, grouped by synonyms), to analyze more words repeatedly uttered in context, emerged the words: (Q1) Youths seem to depriorize school-related issues: society, information, teachers and knowledge; (Q2) Youth face too much bureaucracies when facing the adult world: institutions, participate, characteristic and difficulty; (Q3) Lack of statistically significant improvements: difficulties, competencies, commitment and different; and (Q4) Youth participation and engagement in policies: participation, policies, evaluation and competencies.

To study the relationship between the comments to the interview questions, an analysis of clusters with visualization by words similarity was developed (Figure 2).

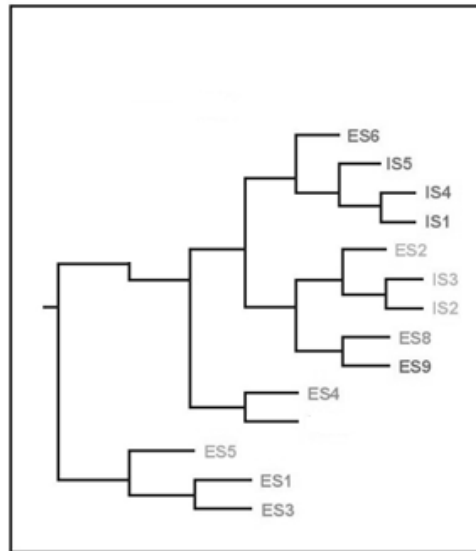


Figure 2. Cluster cases by word similarity

From this study, and from internal and external stakeholders' clusters proximity observation, a union of their comments was held, rather than a comment comparison.

(Q1) Youths seem to deprioritize school-related issues

In issues related to friends and society prioritization, instead of school, stakeholders highlight:

(“... The information they collect in more formal education is fading by informal education they acquire in information sources.”); (“... This generation seeks alternatives, paths. They are more concerned about society, respect for themselves and for others.”); (“... School is not very captivating now. They do not feel that school makes them more competent. Teaching is all centered on the evaluative moment.”); (“... Schools have never been a priority, only as an object of socialization. Networks are replacing the school.”).

(Q2) Youth face too much bureaucracies when facing the adult world

In the explanations for difficulties and bureaucracies in institutions and bodies of political power, when they try to be autonomous and socially participatory, stands out:

(“... Unfortunately, even institutions have difficulties.”); (“... Most projects and initiatives have difficulties and are exacerbated when they leave from youth.”); (“... With an association to the Government they may have more voice... Institutions do not reform, they are very conservative in the way they work, changes are acculturations and take time.”); (“... Municipal and parish assemblies exist, and youth can participate. It is necessary to have information, to know and to know whom to address.”); (“... It is closely related to the directions. It's important to encourage them to participate.”).

(Q3) Lack of statistically significant improvements in pre and post-test

In the understanding of the young perception improvement, but in the lack of statistically significant differences, stakeholders state:

(“... It has an impact on the opportunity for expression, gives a feeling that they are being heard, and that something different will happen.”); (“... These results are very common in personal and social skills promotion programs. Often, when they start working, they see that they do not have so many competencies as they initially thought.”); (“... It could be due to the first-moment overestimation. They ignore simple themes and after the intervention, I see and feel that I am improving and if I have already put four or five, then I do not improve.”); (“... Groups and these results may be compliance with social desirability.”).

(Q4) Scenario of youth participation and their engagement in policies

As for their participation and engagement in the policies, stakeholders agree that:

(“... There is a breakthrough in rhetoric. To change we need to change politics and policies.”); (“... We have invested very little in youth policies. First, the receiver has difficulty noticing the positive impact change can have.... Secondly, young people still do not give anything generously to others. Their capacity has to be encouraged.”); (“... Young people have a genuine willingness to participate, but when they want to look like adults, lose interest ... They are almost never included.”); (“... Young people are not heard in public policies.”); (“... Young people are included in the municipalities, the Young Deputy's Day, the Youth Parliament. Teachers or someone must move forward with young people.”); (“... There is a lack of participation in life in general. Participation should receive a thorough review, create in school conditions for citizenship ... participation should be a product of learning from birth.”).

Limitations

Recognizing study limitations, highlighting the innovative nature that hampers comparison with similar studies, sample size, interpretation process or results analysis complexity, it is thought that these limitations could be dissolved, with the advantages of using this method, that enables a more detailed study of the subjects, and a more active participation, with a voice in the first person.

It is also believed that this work will be preponderant for stakeholders, and so for organisms, in their awareness for youth participation, and incentive in consultants' networks development; as well as in the research community, promoting the action-research programs development or adaptation, making them more effective through the adoption of strategies and guidelines proposed in this study.

DISCUSSION

With different links to the project, but complementary interpretations of results, 13 Portuguese stakeholders were involved in Dream Teens project evaluation. Along with their considerations related to youth participation, and youth engagement in the policies that directly affect them. Agents that drive to a more valid evaluation process (Morris, 2002), it is believed that stakeholders' inclusion may enhance their work (Boaz et al., 2018).

In *(Q1) youths seem to deprioritize school-related issues*, stakeholders are concerned that school is losing the relevance and transversality of youth' concerns, associating this situation to the fact that school focuses too much on the evaluation process and did not follow the evolution. Serdyukov (2017), in a study focused on education, argues that innovation can be directed to only one or several areas of the educational system: theory and practice, curriculum, teaching and learning, politics, technology, institutions and administration, institutional culture and training of teachers, and that this can have a positive impact on learning. Technology in the classroom demonstrates an equal effect on learning, coupled with an increase in motivation (Montrieux, Vanderlinde, Schellens, & De Marez, 2015; Twining & Evans, 2005).

In their opinion, school is considered a promoter of socialization (Garbarino, 1978; Garibaldi & Josias, 2015), that still does not raise serious problems like changing the world.

In *(Q2) Youth face too much bureaucracies when facing the adult world*, the difficulty of organizations to self-reform, the people who receive young people and the bureaucratic weight, are perceived as the main blockers. Systemic barriers, including tokenism, institutional bureaucracies, lack of adherence, or relational challenges, can also be found in institutions where advisory councils of youth are already established (Blakeslee, 2018). Although the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the European project RICHE - Research Into Child Health in Europe (Staines et al., 2014) consider participation a priority, it is not part of the country's culture.

They consider that young people are not in an expressive number, and that they should be valued through social marketing. With influence on the subjects' health behaviors, social marketing still has important benefits for society (Andreasen, 2006; Lee & Kotler, 2011).

Outstanding participation in parish and municipal associations, it is believed that an association with the Government can be fundamental in youth voice promotion. In this process, professional support importance is highlighted, supporting YPAR programs characteristics relevance (London, et al., 2003; Ozer & Douglas, 2012) in youth voice promotion.

In *(Q3) Lack of statistically significant improvements in pre and post-test*, is argued that the group is not robust enough to draw conclusions or result in statistically significant differences (Cohen, 1962), it is highlighted a possible overestimation of the first-moment, common in personal and social skills promotion programs (Branquinho et al., 2017). A greater awareness, competencies development, meeting evaluators expectations or social desirability, manipulating their response to a more favorable view of themselves (Kaminska & Foulsham, 2013) could be associated with these results.

In their *(Q4) Scenario of youth participation and their engagement in policies*, most agree that little is invested in youth policies. Although some progress is taking place (eg. National Youth Plan 2018-2021 - IPDJ, 2018), and that some initiatives begin to gain some prominence, we do not yet have a desirable reality. It was argued that different segments of society could be more representative if the system represented them.

Emphasizing the scarce preparation of institutions to listen, a thorough review of participation is suggested, along with programs to promote personal and social skills in schools (e.g. Branquinho et al., 2017).

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Benefiting from their knowledge and potential for achievement, they presented strategies and guidelines (information about how YPAR should be) to encourage new YPAR programs.

- Schools and universities in youth participation promotion;
- Delineate programs at the local level, and only later transpose to the national level;
- Train young people in personal, communication, problem-solving and planning skills, ensuring constant follow-up and supervision in the process;
- Design of specific participation plans for minorities;
- Increase awareness of agencies and institutions, and leadership train for their leaders;
- Support of stakeholders, partners, and media. Good marketing through sports clubs, festivals, social networks, families, and participatory youth;
- Finding sustainability mechanisms, such as school health programs.

Believing that this work could increase stakeholder's motivation to use project results (Morris, 2002), we expect in short-term, youth consultants' networks in political bodies and institutions, and in the medium term the guarantee of their sustainability. To reach these goals, in addition to the work of raising awareness of political power and institutions for the true involvement of young people. It is believed that the use of a multisystem model, based on a socio-political perspective, considering the multiple systems in which young people are inserted and their contextual characteristics (Kia-Keating, Dowdy, Morgan, & Noam, 2011), together with the promotion of psychological capacities and the creation of opportunities (Michie, van Stralen, & West, 2011), could enhance more effective YPAR programs, more motivated and socially participative youth, and consequently healthier youth, communities and societies.

Key-findings

- Less and less attracted to school, it is urgent to modernize the education system, making it more appealing to young people, not just focusing on academic skills and evaluation. It is believed that youth involvement in this process will be the path to success.
- Recognizing the importance of the school's role in encouraging and empowering young people for social participation and active citizenship, it is fundamental that teachers are aware to the importance of young people' voice and able to develop these skills.
- Very common in the United States, but still few in Europe, YPAR programs should be widely disseminated in Europe, to encourage the development of programs in the region.

Future Work

Based on the Dream Teens program model, and according to the needs identified by stakeholders, to develop YPAR programs at local level and to promote social-emotional skills in youth, will be developed *Dream Teens powered by Cascais Jovem* project. Based on the development of action research and socio-emotional skills, it intends to create a youth network (residents of Cascais, Portugal), promoting discussion of the main needs and strategies to their problems, making them more socially active and participative. During one year, young people will be supported in the development of action research and social entrepreneurship projects in the county. In a final event, project results will be presented to the main change agents.

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