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CO-EVALUATION



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PARTNERS TEMPLATE FOR
OUTPUT TWO

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Name of Country: Finland

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Please answer the questions below, providing as much detail as you can. Each partner is expected to send their responses to the Yeditepe University Team by October 03, 2022.



Demographic Questions

⇒ Please provide the following demographic data pertaining to the participants of your local process. You may either use individual data or statistical averages (~ 400 words)^(*).

Age: about 18-29, (average 24-25)

Place of Birth: Finland (25), Pakistan (1), Bangladesh (1), Turkey (1) & Ukraine (5)

Gender: F & M & NB

Education: Almost all have completed a 2nd level degree, some of them have it slightly incomplete.

Employment Status: unemployment, studying on an integration course, disability pension, on long-term sick leave, working, students on 3rd degree

We completed 16 group coaching meetings, 30 individual coaching session, 4 meetings regarding the participatory action research, 8 art workshops, 4 visits in cultural places around Helsinki area, 3 meetings regarding the evaluation of HEI marketing materials. In total 33 different young people participated in OUYE activities in Finland. To increase the involvement of young people with immigrant background, we offered our activities in seven different languages (Finnish, Swedish, English, Slovak, Czech, German and Spanish).

In the Finnish context, we were not allowed to collect any personal data from young people participating in this project. It is also contrary to the Youth Guarantee House's policy.

^(*) The word counts are given as approximate guide.



Questions for the



Researchers/Volunteers/Facilitators of the Local Process

1- What were the general expectations of the participants before the local process?

- ⇒ Excitement? etc.) What did they expect/anticipate? Please give as much detail as you can, relying on your observations or informal conversations, or formal interviews, focus groups and surveys you may have conducted (~ 400 words).

The Finnish activities of the project started with individual and group coaching. The one-to-one coaching sessions were held face-to-face and remotely, for example via Teams. In group trainings, we met on-site in Helsinki, at Youth Guarantee House. In many ways, the activities were limited by the Covid-19.

Our aim was to get young people involved in the Valo-Valmennusyhdistys interested in their own opportunities for higher education. This meant discussing the realities of applying and studying, finding their own field of study, introducing them the various study support services, boosting their self-esteem and introducing them the actual joint application procedure for HEIs.

Some of the young people had already considered their opportunities for higher education and were well motivated. However, they needed more information and support to take the necessary steps. Most of the young people were in some way interested in their chances of going to HEI, but almost all were concerned about their own ability to cope. Their challenges have included mental health disorders, e.g., many had a diagnosis of depression. They were somewhat insecure when they participated, and working with them was challenging. We tried to encourage them to a little broaden their own horizons for their own future.

There was often some enthusiasm, but it was also rather often disguised as cynicism. Many of life's disappointments had taught them that there was no point in dreaming in, because they would certainly not get a place at university or, if they did, they would not be able to cope with the studies. Therefore, strengthening the self-efficacy is one important goal with our target group.

The Finnish data has been collected using a common survey diary. After each individual or group coaching session, the issues or themes discussed during the coaching session have been written down, but also a wide range of observations about the young person and the coach's own feelings, as well as reflections on the next steps in the coaching process. In addition, all project staff who have participated in the coaching sessions have together reflected on both successes and challenges the young people have had.

Other types of our experimentations included art work, visiting cultural places, participating on the evaluation of visual imagery of the marketing materials of HEI and participatory action research. The majority of our young people have interest in different crafts and art work. It feels sometimes easier for them expressing their feelings non-verbally. Together we experimented with various options how express their opinions, thought and feelings in artistic way. Many young people felt relieved and enjoyed the activities. Each artistic activity was usually accompanied by the discussion and participants felt more

relaxed to talk while being busy with manual work. Generally speaking, our participants mostly expected us to listen their opinions and time to express their thoughts and ideas on accessibility of higher education for them. These expectations were common during all the rest of our activities. We felt, it was probably one of the first opportunities for our project participants to talk about obstacles they face when thinking/applying/studying at HEI. Their expectation wasn't us to solve these issues, but point them out to authorities on HEI and let other people think about challenges that young people with mental health issues or neurodiversity have when dreaming about higher education.



2- How did the participants evaluate the local process?

- ⇒ Overall? Particular phases/aspects of the local process? What did they like? What did they dislike? Did they have any recommendations? etc.
(~ 800 words)

In our experimentation, young people participated in coaching only according to their own personal needs. No identifying information was collected from them, nor were any commitments made to participate. Each individual young person had their own process. No centralized feedback was collected from them, and all the feedback we received came directly from the young people themselves.

Here are some reflections on young people's thoughts:

Young people who were clear about what they wanted to study or where they wanted to work expressed satisfaction with the possibility of receiving individual or group-based coaching and help with finding information, applying for education, understanding the application criteria and orienting themselves towards studies. However, not all of them succeeded in getting a place at HEI and needed support to deal with their disappointment. With them we have been working to enable them to try again. With the ones who have started studying, we have able to support them to have as smooth start as possible with the studies.

In some cases, especially for young people with an immigrant background, parents seemed to have indicated the fields of study they could accept, e.g., law, medicine or business studies. These studies are very difficult to access. With these young people, we tried to broaden their ideas about the possibilities and to consider together whether the gap year is just a waste of time or whether it could be used to benefit their future. However, the pressure from parents was strong. This is also an example of cultural differences between young people who live in families of a more collectivist culture, in which decisions about studying may be made considering the community's needs, versus individualistic culture where decisions are made on independent basis.

Young people with neurodiversity symptoms were very concerned about how willing HEI would be to take them on as students and meet their needs, for example in relation to sounds, groups of people or lighting. We were able to point them some possible support services, but of course we could not promise them individual solutions. This was hard for both the young people and us as coaches. Can a young person for whom, for example, bright light causes symptoms be supported to apply for an education where they would have to sit in a lecture hall with bright lighting. The situation was similar for young people with mental health problems.

A few young people wanted to discuss the possibility of applying to university, but on the other hand, they may not have been ready yet. In the coaching sessions, they could look for any reason to show that they were not believed in or were not really welcome

to HEI as students. There was a lot of frustration in these situations.

Feedback on the actual coaching was generally positive. It was a new experience to have someone who cared and listened seriously. Many of the participants had not had the possibility to go through all the alternatives of study paths and degrees, so they were able to get a lot of new information and consider their interests and alternatives based on this. The young people expressed their gratefulness for and at least one feedback stated that the young person would recommend the coaching to others as well.

On the other hand, in some cases the young person seemed like they finally knew what they wanted, but after one week they had changed their plans already. Then we explored it together and looked for different ways to make their wish come true. The next time, the same young person told us that they had rejected the idea, but now they had found a new one.

Also, an evaluation of imagery in the HE marketing materials was made together with three young people. All of the three young people found some pictures where they could see themselves as a part of the student community, but they also had many ideas for the development of the representation. According to their views, for example representation of roma community, LGTBQ+ and young people with mental health issues or neurodiversity characteristics are not represented currently, but these groups should be a part of the representation in order to offer broader possibilities of identification.

3- Any observations you might have had about the participants, before and/or after the local process?

⇒ Participants' attitudes/feelings/concerns/expressed thoughts? Any eureka moments on your part? (~ 800 words)

Because of the voluntary nature of all the activities, a young person whose questions had been resolved could simply move on to the next stage in their life. In that case, we could not have received any feedback on the coaching from the young person after the cooperation had ended.

As described above, some young people were relieved to receive support and encouragement to find their own way and become students at HEI. At least one participant started studying at HE and several applied.

For some, it was very difficult to understand that the university might not be able to be as flexible as needed in its teaching systems giving them a real opportunity to study. It was particularly difficult to think together with young people about the meaning of mental health disorders for their own learning, but also how they would be perceived by lecturers and fellow students. Whether the young person would be left completely alone and unsupported.

Many of these young people were talented and had previously done well in their studies. Now, with their mental health challenges, the situation had changed and their feeling of self-efficacy had decreased.

During the participatory action research many surprising moments occurred. One example was how badly were higher education studies evaluated. Young people were talking about their studies in terms of "wasting time" and pointed to many negatives they could find. We also realized how difficult it would be to have university spaces adjusted for needs of young people with neurodiversity and/or mental health issues in terms of security, possibilities to concentrate and so on. When we went to visiting different cultural places around Helsinki, we also found out how important it was for young people to have a company. We had known before they rarely go on their own for such visits mostly because of the lack of friends. When visiting such places as a small group, they really enjoyed them. They sat there trying to make copies of some paintings they liked. They also didn't feel so alone and inappropriate when walking around the museum with noise cancelling headphones, or fidgets.

4- Self-reflective thoughts/concluding remarks?

⇒ What have you learned during and after your local process? Anything that worked great, and you would recommend to other practitioners? Anything you would have done differently if you had to design and carry out your local process all over again? (~ 500 words).

On one hand, it was a positive surprise to see how many of the young people in our target group have at least a slight interest towards higher education. On the other hand, the experiment was strongly influenced by young people's disbelief in their own abilities. This was challenging to work with. In higher education, challenges arise when neuro-diversity-related factors prevent participation. Similarly, mental health disorders limit opportunities. The question remains, how broadly and intensively are the HEIs able to support learners struggling with such challenges.

Young people also strongly emphasized the importance of being seen and heard. It is therefore worrying to think about how young people are treated and perceived in our society.

Here is a list of the things the young people have said they need in order to be able to apply for higher education:

- Knowledge about education system
- Knowledge about structure of higher education, different degrees and fields of study
- What kind of study skills are needed
- Application and enrolment process to the studies at HEI
- Future planning about studies and working opportunities
- Understand the own attitudes and self-abilities
- What kind of welfare and support services are available in higher education
- Is there any financial support and how to deal with personal finances
- What does mean working life
- Become aware of their own skills and strengths

For the future if running similar project, we would probably be even more creative and thinking outside of the box much more. Our young people seemed to enjoy many activities and with inspiration that we gained through the project from our project partners, we would probably set-up activities a bit differently. Probably we would also cooperate with other organisations that are active in the field of arts in Helsinki area. We will organise in spring 2023 a mixed-seminar and dissemination event, where we would like to discuss topics appeared with teachers and students at the university of applied science.