ESTONIA Pilot I Case Report - the formation of the **cross-university and local ecosystem capacity development** in the areas of sustainability, digital transformation, STEM/STEAM and entrepreneurship.

Guiding questions for the reporting and evaluation of the planning and actual implementation stages of the pilot case - description of country approach to capacity development and main findings from the process. *If applicable you can refer back to pilot progress reports you shared in monthly meetings and challenge team's progress reports (if these were used).*

For developing community/ collective capacity the critical question is - how can the Winnovators' program, from its planning, through its implementation to its evaluation:

- build empowering organisational structures to improve target groups' participation and develop leadership within?

- increase target groups' problem assessment capacities, including critically evaluating the causes and mobilising the resources?

- strengthen links within the community and to other organisations and people?

- increase target group authority over their decisions and actions within the project?

-        *How was the **leadership and participation encouraged and supported**? What was the **approach and organisational structures** established to improve engagement and interaction of the target groups (participants - young women & students, partners etc) to increase their independent action, incl to mobilize the resources etc?*

*What were the **changes** compared with the original planned approach? What were the **challenges** faced and **how were these met** during the process of the pilot?*

The chosen approach to engage and support the participation of young women in vulnerable life situations in Estonia was through youth and community workers. Strategy was guided by the principle of creating contact between the target groups (students and young adults) based on trusting relationships and strengthening their sense of belonging in the community. Youth workers working in rural areas in Estonia play an important part of a local community therefore could be a direct link with the target group and local ecosystem and therefore could build an empowering network to enhance young people's agency through active participation and leadership both in the society as well as in their own lives. Youth work organisations involved in the project were connected with HEI mentor through youth workers who are alumni of the youth work applied higher education and/or serving as a traineeship base for youth work students. Together with contact points (local youth workers) the main target groups were identified: young adults in unsatisfied life situations, young mothers and young unemployed adults and/or school drop-outs. Based on the interviews and co-creation of personas of the target groups the educational materials, including challenges were designed to address the needs and fit into the reality of the

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local community as well as correspond to the young adults' everyday life situations, their interest and needs. Previous collaboration between HEI and local contact point had a potential to build and keep alive a dynamical co-design and learning process between students and young rural women, universities and the communities and between surrounding ecosystems.

During the pilot itself the cooperation with local partners became more complicated as one partner withdrew from the project, due to changes in the staff and budget cuts in the education/youth work field. In turmoil situations it is challenging for a youth worker to engage and start a new activity, especially with the target group which otherwise is not the most active one in the youth work. In another region the potential participants connected before the pilot dropped out due to personal life changes and finding new interested young adults in the short notice seemed to be more demanding than thought beforehand. Same challenge was experienced by the third partner who faced difficulties in inviting young adults to participate only on the basis of a general information /project brochure. If a young person doesn't know what he or she is getting involved in, it is always easier to say 'no' especially if there is no "requirement" as in students' case.

Given that a significant number of HEI youth work students are also working in local rural youth centres, they were encouraged to reach out to potential participants in the local community or through their professional/personal connections to identify suitable participants for the project. Direct, personal contact and invitation for concrete cooperation – e-g. planning a project idea together seemed to be most effective way to engage young adults in rural areas.

> *-   How were the target groups (young women, students, partners) supported in the **identification of problems and critical assessment** of the possible causes to develop strategies and decide upon the relevant actions? How has the target group **authority and control** over their decisions on planning, implementation, evaluation etc within the co-operation / pilot case been increased? What were the strategies **to empower** the target groups **participation**, to **execute their agency and develop leadership**?*

The 2nd year youth work students were involved through a study course/subject " Project Work in the Youth Work" (6 ETC) aiming to prepare students for project work as part of the daily activities of a youth worker, to find and use funding for youth projects and to support young people in the implementation of projects. Young adults (in Estonian youth work up until 26 yrs) are a highly underrepresented target group in the youth work even though there is a substantial body of knowledge about young adults in terms of their developmental needs, motivational aspects and recommendations on how to support their active participation. As a gap between the knowledge about the ways supporting young adults and capacity of implementing it in the youth work practice is evident, the study course focused on the   need to support youth work students' readiness for professional practice including supporting the development of young adults. The course was designed based on the Problem Based Learning approach with the main question: "How to engage young adults in an e-learning environment through project work?".

Specific tasks of HEI students were connected with collaborative (situated) learning as a real professional youth work task: to apply the basics of project management in the preparation of youth project (targeting young adults) and to prepare a project proposal that meets criteria set by the sponsor by completing as a team at least 1 Winnovators challenge module that they could choose based on their own interest. Based on the principles of youth work young people have/ or at least should have the main influencing power, so the decision about the challenges and the project idea to work with as a team came from young persons interest or real life situation.

To enhance students professional (transformative) agency the principles of critical pedagogy, mainly a dialogue between teacher, student and the social context to re-shape relationships and becoming co-learners both in posed problem as well as revealing concealed power relations were applied with the aim to facilitate the development of future youth workers social consciousness, formation of professional identity by enacting the values behind youth work while working directly with young people. Therefore the main driver of the cooperation and learning within WINnovator project/through challenges were youth work students. Teacher /HEI mentor met with students monthly to guide the process but did not have direct contact with the young women WINnovators. Monthly meetings (2 x 3 hours) were dedicated to identify and address the questions/challenges students have met in their cooperation with young adults as well as connected with project writing/management. Topics covered and tools/methods used tackling specific issues in the study meetings were directly supporting the development of the team, project idea or proposal writing process etc, e.g, team canvases to get to know each other in the group, to map the interest or resources for the initiative. This approach supported students' knowhow both in engaging target group as well as their entrepreneurial competences in the area of project work. In some cases where the team started to work effectively (had weekly meetings and shared responsibilities) young women took an equal active role as students throughout the whole process. In other teams were the initial team building and workflow development were not as successful the students bore the main responsibility for final results and young women took more of the consulting role.

- *How was the **formation and sustainability of partnerships**, networking, links with people and organizations **supported in the process**?*

*What were the strategies **to strengthen the cooperation** within the community, to other organisations and people?*

Based on the chosen pedagogical approach the the learning was mainly self-driven/ -directed and the cooperation in the teams was guided by a learning task of students focusing on jointly formulated problem question: "How to engage young adults in an e-learning environment through a project work?" that was explored through collaborative (situated - real life) learning task. Hence the students approached the target group with the aim to support and empower young adults through project work by identifying the needs of young person in local social context and in cooperation with young women involved in designing a concrete project proposal in a form of

application.

All the ideas were based on needs expressed by the young people themselves and the teams formulated the ideas into a project proposal and found potential funders, including local municipalities, the Rural Development Programme - LEADER and the EU Youth Programme – European Solidarity Corps. As all of the project ideas were directed to activate and empower young adults as a target group in the local community, the latter was considered, mapped and analyzed as a social context, during which also potential partners and stakeholders were mapped.

- *What have been the **outcomes**, both **tangible**: products or outcomes reached in team challenges and **intangible**: competences developed (collected badges) + formation and execution of core capabilities in team work while working on the Winnovator challenges. Including numerical indicators: how many teams, how many challenges implemented, how many partners activated etc?*

*What has been the **added value of the reached outcomes for network**, community, partners etc?*

As the set outcome to reach was a project proposal/application developed through a teamwork and not implemented project itself the outcomes could be assessed in the level of completed challenges, project applications and personal learning outcomes.

A total of 5 teams (one containing only exchange students) were created, with students collaborating closely with the young participants to undergo the chosen challenge module. Through this process, the groups mapped and developed concrete project ideas, identified potential funders, and prepared the project proposal for each idea. Out of these, 3 initiatives focused on sustainability - as an outcome of the Winnovator challenge „ Reducing Footprint...", aiming to create awareness about consumption behavior and engage the community in finding practical solutions to reduce overconsumption through collective action. One initiative focused on creating a digital learning community for and for young people in a rural area, helping them develop skills in team leadership, community engagement, and planning collective activities (as an outcome of challenge „Digital learning communities"). Another project will raise awareness about various social issues relevant to young people by using comics, including digital formats. Last project idea grew out of the teams' previous cooperation and interest, hence was nor directly connected to any challenge proposed in the Winnovator project even though the team completed a challenge „Gamified tourism..."
All project proposals were directed to activate/empower young adults as agents in the local

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community and meet the sponsors/funding programmes criterias thus have potential to be implemented if young people or students have the time to do so in their lives.

The involvement of the young people themselves in the preparation of the project application varies, and in the case of the 2 teams whose cooperation with the young people was interrupted, it can be assumed that the main responsibility in this respect fell rather on the students. All teams recorded their cooperation with the help of a progress report, which was also part of an assignment of the course work for students.

Direct cooperation with the local community was more likely to occur in those teams where the student was/is a member of the community and therefore knows not only about local conditions but also about potential cooperation partners, including funding opportunities. Of the two local youth workers (as a contact point) involved, one was indirect contact with the students and the university mentor, familiarising herself also with the Winnovators environment and actively recruiting new young people when the initial ones dropped out, while the other youth worker took more the role of a contact mediator (in case of one participant).

A total of 12 Estonian students + 1 who did not participate after the second meeting. In addition to the youth work students 5 foreign students were active on the Winnovators platform but could not involve local young people due to language and other barriers. Cooperation started with 11 young women, most of whom, 8 participants, joined the Estonian team on the Winnovators platform, combining in total 18 (students) + 12 registered members (in addition to teachers) from Estonia.

One way to evaluate learning outcomes can be through the attainment of badges. Since the majority of Estonian participants focused on completing the challenge module within the Winnovator environment, they accumulated fewer automatically acquired learning badges, which are only obtainable through individual learning modules. In total, in the Estonian team 9 participants (including 1 young woman) received badges, with almost half of them obtaining less than 5 badges. The scarcity of learning badges is partly due to the complexity of acquiring and assigning them – participants provided feedback such as: "It's challenging to select badge titles from a list and then enter them one by one elsewhere. It would be better if we could simply click on a specific badge and add a comment alongside it. This would make it easier for the user."

Additionally, since the badges awarded during the challenge had to be by technically assigned by mentor causing possible delays, resulting in participants losing direct oversight and immediate feedback on the badge assignment process, including positive feedback from peers or confirmation of badge delivery.

Within the framework of the course, self-assessment took place through learning journals, where students evaluated their project writing and management skills, including their abilities to involve the target group both before and after the course. The assessment was facilitated by the team's progress report, which guided the teams in mapping and analyzing their teamwork, identifying supporting and hindering factors, planned and implemented activities, achieved results, and broader learning experiences.

The formulated learning outcomes can be divided into know-how related to project writing: needs

analysis, goal setting, finding funding, planning the action plan and resources, and aspects related to project management - risk analysis, team building, and maintenance of smooth cooperation. As a result of going through the project writing process, collaboration skills and courage related to entrepreneurship were developed. Equally importantly, the established contacts - the created network and the experience of successful collaboration with strangers - were highlighted. Direct feedback from the young women from one of the teams at the end of the course was: "It's a pity that we don't meet on a weekly basis anymore to engage in something exciting."

- How has the knowledge and practice from the pilots integrated and applied into the HEI teaching practice / system?

What are the **main conclusions** from the piloting phase?

Based on the outcomes of the study course, including feedback from students, the pedagogical approach chosen was considered to be useful as it provided an opportunity to learn through practical experience that was supported by the reflection process with the aim to develop students' professional agency and identity.

The chosen self-driven approach (based on PBL and critical pedagogy) directly supported the youth worker students professional agency, and was strongly aligned with non-formal learning and youth work principles. On the other hand, giving the main responsibility to students presents a risk as it decreases the influence of HEI over the learning process, for example in the situations where learning obstacles or breakdowns in cooperation occur. In the future, more attention needs to be paid to ongoing support for the learning process, in particular with regard to the time between study sessions to monitor and address any difficulties that may arise during the process.

The use of Winnovator Space as a digital medium for learning was challenging (in the beginning facing quite some technical issues that slowed the process in pilots) and due to its limited functionality the teams abandoned working within the WINnovator Space and started to use different medium/environments for direct interaction (chat) and project work (common on-line documents in shared folder) only presenting the results as a final outcome in the Space.

From the pilot numerous learning moments can be identified , such as on how to integrate the additional activities of the WINnovator project into the curriculum, especially taking into account the specificity of session learning (meeting the students only once a month) and in field where most of the students are working full time, i.e. it is not just a question of limited time use for young adult women but the same is true for working students.

Another critical question raised is the time allocation (including individual study time) and amour taken up by project activities, including solving technical issues, etc., and how to ensure that the

study time is kept within the time allocated in curricula. Second major question is the balance between project activities and the learning outcomes set for the subject? The task connected with Winnovators project, incl challenges should be more directly linked with the University course and learning outcomes of it.

Also how do keep the balance in learning support, including in giving directed assignments e.g. requirement to put collaborative activities review on Winnovator Space or keep the track of their cooperation based on the progress report) and in supporting students/young people's self-direction and agency etc.? As one of the aims of the project is to explore new ways of teaching practice in HEI, these might be worthwhile questions to keep in mind for the next phase.