



Youth Empowerment through co-creative Activity development

Guidelines for identifying context to enhance social connection

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Guidelines

For implementing context analysis as part of the process of supporting community and building social bridges

Supporting participation and a sense of belonging in any area or group requires understanding of the local context's strengths and challenges. Also, utilizing the target group's expertise leads to better results in the development of new solutions that strengthen community and foster participation. Therefore, it is advisable to carefully gather information from the target group for development work using various data collection methods.

These guidelines describe how the perspectives and expertise of target groups can be collected by utilizing community-based participatory research methods. The utilization of community-based participatory research methods supports the agency of the target group in the development process and gives a voice to the target group. The guidelines are beneficial when developing practical solutions that support regional and community development, promoting local actors' networks and collaboration, and enhancing participation.

The guidelines were developed in the YEA project (Youth Empowerment through co-creative Activity development), which aims to build social bridges, strengthen youth participation, and support young people's sense of belonging through co-creation of leisure activities. Additionally, the project aims to support professionals and organizations working with young people in promoting youth participation and well-being. In the examples presented within these guidelines, the target group refers to the participants of the YEA project, namely youth and professionals working with youth. Nevertheless, these guidelines are adaptable to various contexts and different target groups.

WHAT?

What are the guidelines for?

These guidelines are designed for a range of projects and processes focused on enhancing community development and participation within a specific area. The guidelines outline the process of gathering background information from the target group for the development phase, employing community-based participatory research methods. This ensures that the target group is actively engaged in the development process right from the start.

In these guidelines, two different data collection methods are employed. Information from the youth is gathered through Photovoice, while data from professionals and organizations is collected through surveys utilizing the perspectives of NOISE analysis. Photovoice is a participatory needs assessment tool that emphasizes community involvement and values local knowledge as a crucial source of expertise. In this method, people take pictures of their own lives and things that are important to them, thus defining the topics for discussion and the important themes of the assessment. Additionally, individuals provide context and meaning to their captured subjects through discussions about the photographs. (Wang & Burris, 1997.)

Photovoice is especially effective for capturing information about individuals' experiences at the individual level. Conversely, for professionals and organizations with potentially limited time and resources to engage in development work, methods such as online surveys may offer a more efficient means of collecting information. These guidelines instruct on shaping surveys by framing the questions based on the perspectives of NOISE analysis. NOISE analysis, representing Needs, Opportunities, Improvements, Strengths, and Exceptions, functions as a strategic planning tool, providing an alternative to the conventional SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis. This approach promotes a thorough examination of projects or endeavors, bringing together diverse perspectives to formulate a plan that not only identifies challenges but also uncovers new opportunities. Therefore, the incorporation of NOISE analysis into the survey proves beneficial for gathering valuable background information and conducting needs assessment, contributing to the design and implementation of the development process.

In essence, the methodologies for gathering digital stories from youth and distributing questionnaires to professionals working with youth aim to provide young people and these professionals a platform to assess the state of youth engagement and inclusion. The whole process should not be seen as a mere and static collection of data, but as a dynamic exchange of personal and professional experiences, emotions, perceptions, ideas, and challenges. These insights shape the direction of the project's future stages.

WHY?

Why use photography as a tool for data collection?

Supporting community development and participation in any area or group requires an understanding of the strengths and challenges of the local context. Additionally, utilizing the expertise of the target group leads to better results in the development of new solutions that strengthen community and foster participation. Therefore, it is advisable to carefully gather information from the target group for development work using various data collection methods.

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The utilization of community-based participatory research methods supports the agency of the target group in the development process and gives a voice to the target group. The Photovoice approach avoids a common challenge in many needs assessment methods, where the issues identified as important by researchers may not necessarily align with what the community deems significant. In other words, the Photovoice method for participatory needs assessment avoids imposing a predetermined paradigm on the collected data and makes visible how individuals themselves give meaning to and construct what is important to them. (Wang & Burris, 1997.)

By linking needs assessment with community engagement, this methodology goes beyond conventional roles, encouraging individuals to become advocates for their well-being. Photovoice provides a platform for individuals to voice their concerns, prioritize issues, and discuss potential solutions, ultimately fostering social action and community organization. (Wang & Burris, 1997.)

The integration of photographs within the Photovoice method serves as a powerful and efficient tool for conveying information, meanings, and emotions. Moreover, photographs offer a more accessible avenue for sharing information, rendering them potentially suitable for diverse groups. Engaging in picture-sharing and discussions, for instance, may not necessitate complete language proficiency. Furthermore, the Photovoice methodology can serve as a catalyst for bringing together young individuals residing in the same local setting, fostering a shared experience of capturing images that reflect their sense of belonging within their city or village. Photos provide a chance for participants to break from their routines and contemplate their local surroundings. Led by the youth, discussions on the images help participants become more aware of their community dynamics, sense of belonging, identify areas for improving their quality of life, and explore opportunities for contributing to this process.

HOW?

How to implement participatory research methods?

The process of engaging the target group and gathering background information in the development process consists of several phases:

1 Planning and ethical considerations

- **Preparation for surveys and interviews:** Draft survey and interview frameworks, and translate them when necessary, such as for international projects.
- **Ethical considerations:** Consult with the local Ethical Committee to address ethical considerations. This involves preparing participant information and consent forms, as well as drafting copyright agreements.
- **Scheduling:** Consider potential delays, stakeholders' own schedules, and other factors that may affect collaboration timelines, such as school holidays and NGO funding decisions.

In the first phase, a survey and interview framework are drafted, and the project's implementation is examined from an ethical perspective. Additionally, participant information and consent forms, as well as copyright agreements for the use of images related to the photovoice method, need to be prepared. Furthermore, a

schedule plan is developed. It is important to consider the schedules of various stakeholders and other factors that may affect collaboration timelines, such as school holidays and the NGO funding decisions.

2 Mapping Stakeholders

- **Think about the context and the needs of a project:** What kind of actors are needed to be involved in the project to collect the necessary information and implement the project successfully?
- **Stakeholder Diversity:** Ensure diversity and comprehensiveness among stakeholders and target groups by considering the local, regional, and national levels.
- **Consider contextual differences:** In international projects, consider the possible differences in country contexts and the structural division of organizations.

Consider and address the potential special needs of target groups: age, language proficiency, and social vulnerabilities within the community and financial and time resources of organizations.

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The project's context and distinctive requirements need to be examined to identify pivotal contributors for efficient information collection and effective project implementation. Ensuring a varied and broad representation within stakeholders and target groups may involve incorporating representatives from local, regional, and national levels, as necessary.

For international projects, it is important to acknowledge and navigate contextual differences, adapting the approach to suit diverse country contexts and organizational structures. The potential special needs of target groups, such as age, language proficiency, and social vulnerabilities within the community, need to be considered and addressed. Also, the financial and time resources of organizations involved in the project must be considered.

3 Making contact

- **The initial contacts:** Emails and first meetings online
- **Prepare brochures:**
 - Informational: Project presentation material
 - Practical: A description of what participation in the project means in practice and what kind of participation is required
- **Initiating data collection:** Surveys for professionals

Emails and virtual meetings serve as effective methods for initiating the first contact and introductory meetings with potential target groups and organizations. To present the project, a concise overview of the project and a brochure outlining what participation in the project practically means for collaborators need to be prepared. It may be necessary to create separate and easy-to-understand versions of the project brochures for young people.

Following the online meeting, it's recommended to send a follow-up email to confirm and reinforce the established collaboration. The follow-up email should encompass the agreed-upon matters and key project information. Additionally, any project brochures presented during the meeting can be sent at that time. The data collection can also be initiated by including a link to a survey for professionals in the follow-up email.

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4 Collaboration

- **Visiting in person:**
 - Building trust and deepening cooperation
 - Strengthening organizations' commitment to the project
- **Initiating data collection:** Photovoice method for young people

It is beneficial to enhance collaboration through in-person meetings and potentially by visiting target group organizations. It is important to meet face-to-face with young people, allowing project staff to become familiar with them. Building trust is crucial to engaging young individuals in the project. During the

meeting, the project and its objectives are explained to the young participants in clear language.

During this phase, data collection begins with the youth using the photovoice method. They are briefed about the photovoice process, and their willingness to participate is gauged. Those expressing interest receive detailed photovoice instructions. Subsequently, the young individuals complete consent forms and any requisite copyright agreements. A follow-up meeting time is scheduled to review their captured photographs, which they take at their convenience before the next session. In the next meeting, photovoice interviews will be conducted.

5 Co-Creation and workshops

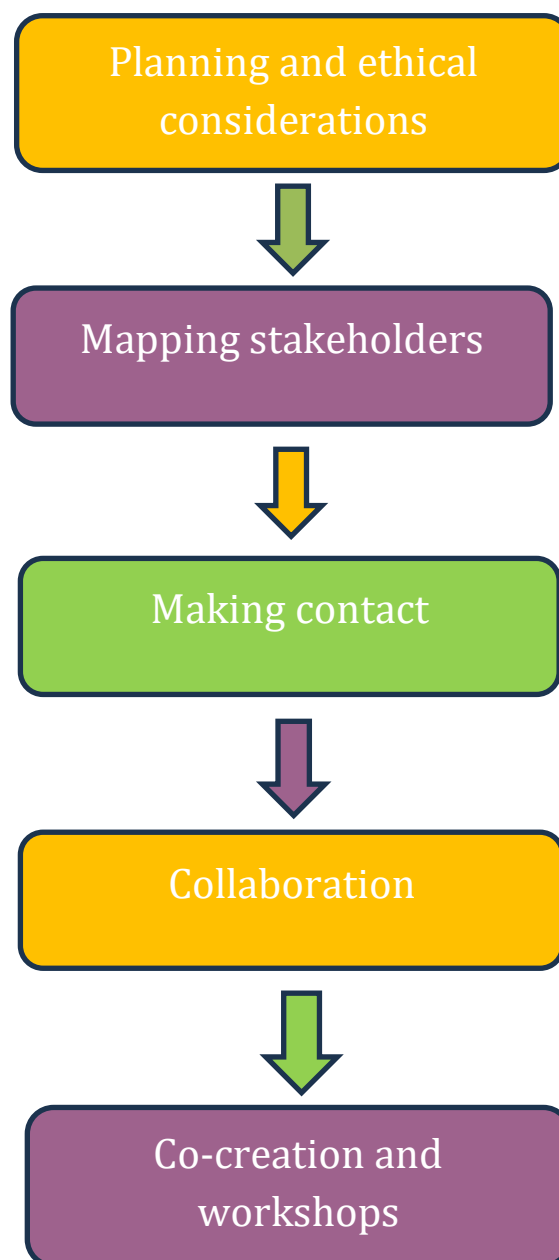
- **Building Social Bridges Workshops**
 - Defining your Group: a workshop to focus on connection building within a target group
 - One Voice: a workshop to focus on connection building between target groups
- **Co-Creative Workshops**

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After the context analysis and data collection, co-creation begins through workshops. The workshops utilize the materials collected up to that point from professionals and young people through the photovoice method and surveys. In workshops, connections are developed within and between each target group. Firstly, the focus is the relationships within each target group and each group will participate in a workshop aimed at building connections within their group. They discuss how the information from the Digital stories and NOISE analysis could help them build connections. Through these workshops, participants will gather new insights from the groups and define what they need to "connect" with the other.

Next One Voice -workshop brings all target groups together and is designed to have them meet each other, and share stories, in an interactive environment. This workshop works on connecting professionals with youth and can focus on what commitments people make and developing connections between all focus groups.

Following the workshops, participants build on the knowledge already gained from the Photovoice and Noise analyses about the needs, thresholds, and resources of each stakeholder. The target groups cooperate closely with each other to eventually arrive at concrete activities and commitments together. They do this by making their strengths complementary to each other and through a co-creative process. Active participation of each participant, particularly the youth, is valued and heard in this process and thus become co-responsible for the activities.



References:

Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health education & behavior*, 24(3), 369-387.



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