



Empowering Praxis: Participatory Action Research Results

"Nothing about youth without youth is for youth."



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Introduction

This booklet serves as a comprehensive guide for youth practitioners across Europe and beyond, including youth workers, educators, trainers, activists, teachers, and researchers in the youth field. It aims to illuminate the path of Participatory Action Research (PAR) – a dynamic and empowering approach that places young people at the heart of understanding and transforming their communities. The goal is to equip practitioners with the necessary knowledge and tools to confidently implement this methodology, fostering a new generation of active citizens.

It was created as a result of Erasmus+ KA2 Strategic partnership project “Inclusive pathways to peace” 2024-2-HR01-KA220-YOU-000279458. The project is being implemented by Association Studio B from Croatia, Association Light from Serbia, YEU from Cyprus and Erasmiau from Spain. This booklet also incorporates the good practice examples from the national reports of “The Power of Participation” activity implemented within the project, created by Association Studio B, Association Light, YEU Cyprus and Erasmiau. All of the organizations implemented Participatory Action Research on the topic of "Youth perspectives on violence incidence, attitudes towards marginalized groups, and solutions for positive change" and created a comprehensive national report that includes description of the process, data analyses, description of the activity implemented in the action phase and evaluation. These reports were merged into one final report on the project level and this booklet includes key data from the researches and participants' feedback as well as the descriptions of the undertaken actions, therefore showcasing not only the how to in theory, but also practical examples to other NGO's and other relevant stakeholders, so they could use this guidebook in their communities – either use the methodology itself or apply the action part if their communities encounter same or similar issues.

Why Participatory Action Research (PAR) for Youth?

Traditional research often approaches young people as passive subjects, observing and studying their behaviors or circumstances. Participatory Action Research fundamentally shifts this paradigm. It actively engages young people as co-researchers and change agents, empowering them to explore complex issues and co-create solutions that are genuinely relevant to their lived experiences. This innovative approach aligns perfectly with the principles of positive youth development and community advancement, recognizing the vital role youth can and should play in shaping their own futures and the institutions designed to serve them.

This methodological shift carries profound implications. By involving young people directly in the research process, PAR redefines who is considered an expert in knowledge production. It asserts that those who directly experience the issues, the young people themselves, possess invaluable expertise that complements, and is often more immediate than, that of professional adult researchers. This redefinition transforms young people from passive recipients of services or research into active contributors and decision-makers. This is not merely a change in research technique; it represents a philosophical reorientation that acknowledges youth's inherent capacity and unique perspectives. Such an approach fosters genuine empowerment, leading to solutions that are more relevant and effective because they are deeply rooted in the authentic experiences of those they aim to serve.

How Will This Guidebook Support Your Work

This guide is designed to provide both the theoretical understanding and practical strategies required to confidently implement PAR in youth work settings. It will systematically break down the methodology, walk through each phase of the PAR cycle, highlight its profound benefits for young people and communities, and address common challenges that may arise during implementation. By offering a blend of foundational knowledge, actionable tools, and inspiring real-world examples, this guidebook aims to ensure practitioners are well-equipped to embark on this transformative journey, fostering youth-led change and empowering young voices across Europe and beyond.



Chapter 1: Understanding Participatory Action Research (PAR)

1.1 What is Participatory Action Research (PAR)?

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a collaborative research approach where individuals directly affected by an issue actively participate in understanding, analyzing, and addressing it. It is fundamentally a bridge between scientific inquiry and practical action, combining the rigor of research with the immediacy of real-world problem-solving. The core aim of PAR is not merely to generate knowledge but to use that knowledge to drive positive social change within a community. This methodology facilitates community members to collectively discover, design, and implement solutions to the problems and challenges they face.

The essence of PAR lies in its commitment to transformational impact. It is not simply about collecting data for academic purposes; it is about facilitating a dynamic process where proposed solutions emerge from the community and are then put into action by that same community. This means PAR inherently aims for what is often termed "second-order change" – addressing the underlying, systemic conditions and inequities that contribute to a problem, rather than merely focusing on individual behaviors or superficial symptoms. This distinguishes PAR from more traditional research methodologies, positioning it as a powerful tool for advancing social justice and challenging existing power structures within society. By engaging those most affected in the entire process, PAR ensures that the resulting actions are not only informed by evidence but are also owned by the community, increasing their likelihood of success and sustainability.

1.2 Core Principles of PAR

Participatory Action Research is guided by a set of fundamental principles that ensure genuine participation, ethical conduct, and meaningful, sustainable impact. These principles are crucial for building authentic youth-adult partnerships and driving transformative change.

- **Participation:** This is the bedrock of PAR, meaning that community members, particularly young people, are actively involved in every step of the research process. They are not merely subjects of study but active co-researchers who contribute to designing the inquiry, collecting and analyzing data, and taking action based on their findings. This principle emphasizes that research and action must be done with people, not on or for them.
- **Action-Oriented:** The ultimate goal of PAR extends beyond knowledge production; it is to use that knowledge to drive tangible change and address real-world problems. The research informs action, and the outcomes of that action, in turn, inform further research in a continuous, iterative cycle. This ensures that the inquiry is always connected to practical application.
- **Empowerment:** PAR aims to empower marginalized or underrepresented groups, including young people, by building their capacity, voice, and sense of agency. It helps participants recognize their inherent strengths, talents, and potential to create solutions to issues affecting them. This process fosters a sense of ownership and capability.

- **Social Learning & Dialogue:** The methodology promotes mutual learning among all participants – youth and youth workers / researchers. It fosters open dialogue, encourages respect for diverse perspectives, and leads to a deeper, shared understanding of complex issues. This collaborative learning process builds trust and a cooperative mindset for tackling challenges together.
- **Contextual Relevance:** Research questions and the solutions developed are deeply rooted in the specific experiences, needs, and cultural contexts of the community involved. This ensures that the findings are directly applicable and that the actions taken are effective and sustainable within their unique social and cultural environment.
- **Reflexivity and Critical Reflection:** All participants are encouraged to continuously reflect critically on their own assumptions, biases, and the broader social contexts that influence their lives and the issues being studied. This ongoing self-assessment and group reflection inform the evolving research process and the actions undertaken.

A foundational aspect of PAR, stemming directly from the principle of participation, is the concept of power-sharing. While collaboration is emphasized, a deeper understanding reveals that true power-sharing between youth and adults is not merely a principle but a cornerstone of effective PAR. It represents a deliberate challenge to traditional adult-centric dynamics, where adults might implicitly or explicitly assume superior knowledge or decision-making authority. For genuine empowerment to occur, adult facilitators must be intentional about how decisions are made, how roles are distributed, and how youth voices are genuinely amplified throughout the process. Without this deliberate effort to share power, youth involvement can become tokenistic, undermining the very goals of empowerment and authentic engagement. This commitment to equitable power dynamics is essential for building the mutual trust and ownership necessary for successful and sustainable youth-led change.

Principle	Brief Description	Key Takeaway for Youth Work
<i>Participation</i>	Community members, especially youth, are active co-researchers in all stages of the process.	Engages young people as active shapers of their reality, not just recipients of services.
<i>Action-Oriented</i>	Research findings directly inform and drive practical actions to address real-world problems.	Ensures youth efforts lead to tangible improvements and visible impact in their communities.
<i>Empowerment</i>	Builds the capacity, voice, and agency of marginalized groups, including young people.	Fosters self-confidence, critical thinking, and a belief in young people's ability to create change.

Principle	Brief Description	Key Takeaway for Youth Work
<i>Social Learning & Dialogue</i>	Promotes mutual understanding, open communication, and shared knowledge among all participants.	Cultivates empathy, collaboration, and a deeper appreciation for diverse perspectives among youth and adults.
<i>Contextual Relevance</i>	Research questions and solutions are grounded in the specific needs and experiences of the community.	Guarantees that solutions are practical, culturally appropriate, and effective for the young people involved.
<i>Reflexivity and Critical Reflection</i>	Continuous self-assessment and group reflection on assumptions, biases, and the evolving process.	Encourages ongoing learning, adaptability, and a deeper understanding of social issues and personal roles.

1.3 The Unique Value of PAR in Youth Work

In the realm of youth work, PAR holds particular potency because it inherently aligns with the core objectives of positive youth development and civic engagement. It moves beyond simply providing services to young people; it acknowledges their inherent capacity as active agents with unique insights and the ability to drive meaningful change.

Firstly, PAR champions youth as knowledge experts. Young people possess invaluable lived experiences and perspectives on the issues that directly affect their lives. This positions them as essential "experts" in the research process, challenging traditional academic boundaries and redefining who holds valuable knowledge. By centering their voices, PAR ensures that the inquiry is rooted in authentic realities.

Secondly, by involving young people in identifying the research questions, PAR ensures that the focus remains on issues that genuinely matter to them. This intrinsic motivation significantly increases their engagement and commitment to the project, making the findings highly relevant and actionable for their communities.

Thirdly, engaging in PAR fosters holistic development in young people. The process provides them with a diverse set of transferable skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving, leadership, public speaking, and data analysis. These competencies are vital for their personal growth, academic success, and future career pathways, extending far beyond the immediate research project.

Furthermore, PAR moves beyond tokenistic forms of participation to foster authentic youth engagement. It creates spaces where young people have genuine influence over decisions and actions, leading to a stronger sense of ownership and empowerment.

A significant aspect of PAR's value in youth work is its capacity to catalyze sociopolitical development. Beyond individual skill acquisition, PAR explicitly promotes a deeper understanding of how systemic factors influence social issues. Through this process, young people gain insights into the root causes of injustice and inequality within their communities. This understanding equips them not just with personal growth, but with the tools and motivation to challenge existing power structures and advocate for change. It prepares them for active and informed participation in a democratic society. This transformation from individuals experiencing problems to informed advocates and agents of change is a profound contribution of PAR, leading to more just and equitable societal outcomes.

Chapter 2: The PAR Cycle: A Practical Journey with Young People

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) process is inherently cyclical, iterative, and deeply collaborative. It is not a rigid, linear progression but rather a dynamic journey of continuous learning, reflection, and adaptation. While specific models may vary, they generally follow a series of interconnected phases that ensure young people are actively involved at every step. This journey is fundamentally about co-creation, where knowledge is built together, and solutions emerge from collective wisdom and shared experiences.

The iterative and flexible nature of PAR is a critical characteristic. This means the process is designed for continuous learning, reflection, and adaptation, rather than adhering to a fixed, unchangeable protocol. Findings from one phase can and should inform and potentially reshape subsequent phases. This inherent flexibility allows solutions to be refined and become more contextually relevant and sustainable over time, as the community continuously learns and adjusts its approach based on real-world feedback. This adaptability also means that the PAR process can be tailored to align with the specific goals and capacities of the youth and adult facilitators involved, making it a highly responsive methodology.

2.1 Phase 1: Laying the Groundwork – Building Trust and Identifying Issues

This crucial initial phase establishes the foundation for a successful PAR project. It centers on cultivating genuine relationships, fostering a safe and inclusive environment, and collaboratively identifying the issues that young people are most passionate about addressing within their communities.

- **Building a Strong Youth-Adult Partnership:** The first step involves prioritizing team-building activities to foster mutual trust and understanding among youth and adult facilitators. This creates a safe space where all participants feel comfortable sharing their perspectives, collaborating openly, and engaging authentically. This initial investment in relationships is important for the success of the entire project.
- **Identifying Community Issues and Research Questions:** Youth are actively engaged in brainstorming and discussing the problems and challenges that directly affect their lives and communities. The chosen issue should be something they care deeply about and are motivated to change, ensuring the research is driven by their lived experiences and priorities. This step is critical for ensuring the relevance and impact of the subsequent research.

- **Defining the Scope and Goals:** Collaboratively, the team defines the overall goals, establishes a realistic timeline, and outlines the general framework for the work ahead. This shared understanding ensures that everyone is aligned on the aspirations and boundaries of the research, laying the groundwork for intentional design and meaningful change.

2.2 Phase 2: Designing the Research – Collaborative Methods and Tools

Once an issue has been collaboratively identified, youth and adults work hand-in-hand to design the research methodology. This involves selecting appropriate research methods, developing the necessary tools, and planning the logistics of data collection. The aim is to ensure the research is rigorous, relevant, and accessible for young people.

- **Selecting Research Methods:** The team discusses and chooses research methods best suited to answer their specific research question and accessible to young people. Common methods include interviews, focus groups, surveys, and questionnaires. Additionally, arts-based methods like Photovoice can be particularly engaging and effective for youth. The selection process ensures that the chosen methods align with the group's capacities and the nature of the inquiry. When necessary the facilitators organize several session where youngsters learn about different methods in research implementation, what they are and how to conduct them, and, if needed, the youngsters can also be trained in the topic of the research in order to gain a common understanding among the team.
- **Developing Research Tools:** Research instruments, such as interview guides or survey questions, are co-created with youth. This collaborative development ensures that the tools are clear, culturally sensitive, and effectively capture the diverse perspectives of the target population. Youth involvement in this step significantly enhances the validity and relevance of the data that will be collected. It is also recommended that the team implements several testings of the instrument (questionnaires, interviews, etc.) with youth in order to gain feedback whether the questions are clear, concise and understandable among the target group. Once they collect this feedback a final version of the instrument should be created.
- **Defining the Sample and Ethical Considerations:** The team determines who will be included in the research (the "sample") and meticulously plans for ethical considerations. This includes obtaining informed consent, which often requires parental permission when working with minors, as well as establishing clear protocols for confidentiality and safeguarding to protect all participants.

2.3 Phase 3: Gathering Insights – Data Collection and Analysis with Youth

This phase involves the active collection of data by the young researchers, followed by their collaborative analysis and interpretation. This is a pivotal point where youth begin to uncover patterns, themes, and stories within the data, leading to a deeper understanding of the identified issue. It's of high importance that the youth workers involved provide substantial support in this phase: organizational, logistic and emotional.

- **Data Collection:** Youth researchers take the lead in implementing the chosen methods to collect data from their peers and community members. This hands-on experience not only builds their practical research skills but also provides unique access to insights that might otherwise be inaccessible to traditional, adult-driven research. Their proximity to the issues often allows for more authentic and meaningful data gathering.
- **Data Analysis and Interpretation:** Young people are actively involved in analyzing the collected data. This can range from thematic coding of qualitative data (e.g., interviews, focus groups) to basic statistical analysis of quantitative data (e.g., surveys), or interpreting visual data from arts-based methods. This collaborative analysis fosters critical thinking and strengthens their ownership of the findings.

The active involvement of youth in data analysis and interpretation is crucial for empowering them through data ownership. When young people are deeply engaged in making sense of the information they have collected, they develop a more profound and nuanced understanding of the problem and its underlying causes. This direct engagement with the data increases their commitment to the findings and, consequently, to the subsequent action phase. Furthermore, this ownership enhances the validity and reliability of the research itself, as the interpretations are directly informed by those who are closest to the issue and possess lived experience. This process transforms raw data into actionable insights that are not only relevant to the youth's experiences but also carry greater credibility with external stakeholders, fostering broader acceptance for the proposed solutions.

2.4 Phase 4: Taking Action – Dissemination and Implementation for Change

This phase represents the hallmark of Participatory Action Research: translating research findings into tangible action. Youth develop concrete recommendations, strategically disseminate their findings to relevant stakeholders, and actively work towards implementing solutions that create positive change in their communities.

- **Developing Action Steps and Recommendations:** Based on the insights from their research, youth collaboratively brainstorm and prioritize concrete actions and recommendations to address the identified issue. These solutions are often highly practical, innovative, and tailored to their specific community context.
- **Disseminating Findings:** Young people take the lead in presenting their research findings and recommendations to various audiences. This can include peers, community leaders, policymakers, and relevant organizations. Dissemination can take many forms, such as public presentations, comprehensive reports, engaging exhibitions, or compelling multimedia projects. The goal is to educate, raise awareness, and build support for their proposed changes.
- **Implementing Change:** The ultimate objective of this phase is to implement the proposed changes. This might involve direct meetings with decision-makers, advocating for policy modifications within institutions, designing and piloting new programs, or building coalitions to mobilize broader community momentum around a specific problem and its solution. This step cultivates young people's skills in strategic planning, advocacy, and civic participation.

The success of the action phase is critically dependent on securing stakeholder acceptance. While youth can conduct compelling research and develop powerful recommendations, their implementation often hinges on the commitment and support of key decision-makers and community stakeholders. Evidence suggests that a lack of stakeholder engagement or administrative support can significantly impede or even prevent proposed changes from being realized. This highlights that PAR is not solely a grassroots effort; it also requires strategic engagement with institutional power structures. Practitioners, as adult allies, play a crucial role in bridging the gap between youth researchers and these external systems, facilitating crucial dialogues and securing the necessary support for the youth's proposed actions. Planning for stakeholder engagement from the very beginning is important to maximize the likelihood of achieving real-world impact.

2.5 Phase 5: Reflecting and Sustaining – Evaluation and Continuous Learning

Participatory Action Research is an ongoing process of learning, adaptation, and growth. This final, yet continuous, phase involves evaluating the impact of the actions taken, reflecting deeply on the entire PAR journey, and planning for sustained engagement and further improvements.

- **Evaluating Impact:** The effectiveness of the implemented actions and the overall impact of the process are assessed. This evaluation spans multiple levels, including individual youth development outcomes, the immediate changes within the community, and potential long-term systemic transformations. Both quantitative and qualitative measures can be employed to capture the full spectrum of impact.
- **Reflecting on the Process:** All participants engage in collective reflection on the strengths, challenges, and lessons learned throughout the PAR journey. This critical self-assessment is vital for refining future PAR initiatives, identifying areas for improvement, and adapting strategies to better meet evolving needs.
- **Sustaining Engagement and Future Action:** A key consideration is how the positive impact can be sustained beyond the initial funding or project period. This involves exploring pathways for youth to continue using and building their PAR skills, potentially through new projects or by integrating them into existing community leadership and advocacy structures. The aim is to create a lasting legacy of youth-led change.

PAR functions as a powerful capacity-building engine for long-term impact. The evaluation process extends beyond immediate project outcomes to encompass individual youth development, such as gains in leadership, critical thinking, and planning skills. This broader perspective reveals that PAR is not merely a project-based intervention but a sustainable model for cultivating youth leadership and fostering ongoing community capacity for change. The skills, networks, and confidence built during one PAR cycle can be used for future initiatives, creating a ripple effect of empowerment that extends far beyond the initial project. This means that even if immediate policy changes prove challenging, the investment in PAR yields significant long-term returns in human capital and community resilience, making it a highly effective strategy for sustainable development in youth work.

Phase Number and Name	Key Activities	Youth Role	Expected Outcome of Phase
Phase 1: Laying the Groundwork	Building trust, team-building, identifying community issues, defining project scope & goals.	Active participants in building relationships and identifying issues they care about.	A cohesive, trusting team and a clearly defined, youth-relevant research question.
Phase 2: Designing the Research	Selecting research methods, developing data collection tools, planning ethical considerations.	Co-designers of the research, ensuring methods and tools are appropriate and accessible.	A well-structured research plan with youth-friendly tools and ethical protocols in place.
Phase 3: Gathering Insights	Collecting data, collaboratively analyzing and interpreting findings.	Lead data collectors, active participants in making sense of the data, identifying themes and patterns.	Rich, relevant data and a deep, shared understanding of the problem and its root causes.
Phase 4: Taking Action	Developing recommendations, disseminating findings, implementing proposed changes.	Primary advocates and agents of change, presenting findings and working to implement solutions.	Tangible community improvements, increased awareness, and shifts in policies or practices.
Phase 5: Reflecting and Sustaining	Evaluating project impact, reflecting on the process, planning for future engagement.	Critical evaluators, reflective learners, and future leaders contributing to ongoing efforts.	Lessons learned, sustained youth engagement, and enhanced community capacity for future change.



Chapter 3: The Transformative Power of PAR: Advantages for Youth and Communities

Participatory Action Research offers profound and multifaceted benefits that extend far beyond the typical outcomes of traditional research. When implemented with young people, PAR becomes a powerful catalyst for personal growth, social justice, and community-wide transformation.

3.1 Fostering Youth Empowerment and Holistic Development

PAR is inherently a youth development intervention, providing a unique and empowering platform for young people to grow, learn, and gain confidence in their abilities.

- **Enhanced Agency and Leadership:** Young people develop a profound sense of control over their lives and cultivate crucial leadership skills. They take the lead in identifying problems, designing research, and advocating for solutions, fostering a strong sense of agency. This direct involvement allows them to experience perceived control and creative autonomy.
- **Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills:** Engaging in the rigorous process of research, data analysis, and action planning significantly sharpens young people's ability to think critically, analyze complex issues, and develop innovative, practical solutions. They learn to ask probing questions and gather evidence to understand their world more deeply.
- **Increased Self-Efficacy and Confidence:** Successfully navigating the challenges of research and action, and witnessing their ideas translate into tangible change, profoundly boosts young people's self-esteem, confidence, and belief in their own capabilities. This positive reinforcement encourages personal growth and a positive self-concept.
- **Building Diverse Social Networks and Social Skills:** Working collaboratively with peers, adult facilitators, and various community stakeholders helps youth to build a broader and more diverse social network. This interaction also cultivates essential communication, teamwork, and negotiation skills, fostering social connection.

A significant aspect of PAR's developmental impact is its role in empowering marginalized voices. PAR is particularly effective and powerful for young people who experience marginalization due to factors such as racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, or ableism. For these youth, PAR is not merely a skill-building program; it serves as a critical intervention that directly counters deficit-focused narratives about their capabilities. It provides a structured and validating platform for their unique experiences and insights to be heard, valued, and acted upon. This can lead to profound shifts in their sense of agency, belonging, and self-worth. By intentionally centering the voices of those most affected by inequities, PAR directly contributes to more equitable outcomes and actively challenges systemic injustices, transforming it into a powerful tool for social justice that extends beyond individual improvement.

3.2 Driving Meaningful Social Change and Justice

At its core, PAR is fundamentally about creating positive, lasting change. It moves beyond theoretical understanding to practical application, directly addressing pressing social issues and contributing to the creation of a more equitable society.

- **Context-Specific and Effective Solutions:** By grounding research in the lived experiences and unique perspectives of young people, PAR leads to the development of solutions that are highly relevant, practical, and effective for their specific community context. These co-created initiatives are often more concrete and feasible, increasing the likelihood of successful implementation and sustained impact.
- **Challenging Dominant Narratives and Promoting Social Justice:** PAR provides a powerful platform for marginalized voices to challenge existing power structures and dominant narratives that might perpetuate inequality and injustice. It brings to light the complexities and nuances of community experiences, revealing the root causes of social issues and advocating for systemic change.
- **Increased Ownership and Sustainability of Solutions:** When young people are actively involved in co-creating solutions, they develop a strong sense of ownership over the initiatives. This deep personal investment significantly increases the likelihood of successful implementation and fosters the long-term sustainability of the changes achieved.
- **Mobilizing Community Resources and Capacity:** PAR fosters collaboration among various stakeholders, including young people, practitioners, policymakers, and broader community members. This collaborative approach leads to better coordination of efforts, more effective mobilization of community resources, and a collective commitment to driving positive change.

PAR also serves as a potent tool for democratic practice and civic engagement. It prepares young people for active participation in a democratic society and empowers them to create social change. This means PAR is not just a research method but a pedagogical approach that teaches democratic principles through practical application. By engaging youth in identifying problems, researching solutions, and advocating for change, it cultivates active citizens who understand their rights and responsibilities within a democratic framework. This direct experience can significantly foster institutional trust and reduce feelings of political alienation, as young people see their efforts directly contributing to societal improvements. In a broader European context, where youth engagement in democratic life is a key strategic priority, PAR directly contributes to strengthening democratic processes from the grassroots level, building a more engaged and empowered citizenry.

3.3 Enhancing Research Relevance, Effectiveness, and Collaboration

Beyond its profound impact on youth and communities, PAR also significantly enhances the quality, utility, and ethical integrity of the research process itself.

- **Improved Data Quality and Interpretation:** Involving those closest to the issues – the young people themselves – in formulating research questions and interpreting data leads to more reliable, nuanced, and meaningful findings. Their insider perspectives can uncover critical information that traditional, adult-driven research might miss.

- **Increased Validity and Relevance of Findings:** Research that is deeply grounded in the lived experiences and perspectives of young people is inherently more relevant and effective. This ensures that the solutions developed are truly fit-for-purpose and address the actual needs of the community.
- **Fostering Trust and Relationships:** The highly collaborative nature of PAR fosters deep trust and strong, reciprocal relationships between researchers, practitioners, and community members. This collaborative foundation creates a fertile ground for future partnerships and sustained community-led efforts.
- **Bridging the Gap Between Research and Practice:** PAR actively merges scientific inquiry with practical implementation, ensuring that the knowledge gained directly informs action. This approach effectively overcomes the common disconnect often observed between academic research findings and their real-world application. It ensures that theoretical understanding translates into tangible improvements.

A profound implication of PAR is its role in democratizing knowledge production. It fundamentally pushes against the traditional notion that experiential distance is required for objectivity in scientific and sociological research. Instead, PAR actively combines formal scientific and expert knowledge with the invaluable knowledge held by community members and those with lived experience. This democratization of the research process validates multiple forms of knowing and contributes to a more inclusive and responsive research ecosystem that directly serves community needs. This shift has significant implications for how research is funded, conducted, and utilized in youth work and beyond, promoting a more equitable approach to understanding and transforming social realities.

Category	Specific Benefit	Brief Explanation
Youth Empowerment	<i>Enhanced Agency and Leadership</i>	Young people take lead roles, gaining control over projects and developing leadership skills.
	<i>Critical Thinking & Problem-Solving</i>	Direct involvement in research and analysis sharpens cognitive abilities.
	<i>Increased Self-Efficacy & Confidence</i>	Seeing their efforts lead to real change boosts self-esteem and belief in their capabilities.
	<i>Building Diverse Social Networks</i>	Collaboration with peers, adults, and stakeholders expands social connections and skills.

Category	Specific Benefit	Brief Explanation
Social Change	<i>Context-Specific & Effective Solutions</i>	Solutions are tailored to community needs, increasing relevance and sustainability.
	<i>Challenging Dominant Narratives</i>	Provides a platform for marginalized voices to address root causes of injustice.
	<i>Increased Ownership & Sustainability</i>	Youth's direct involvement fosters commitment and ensures long-term impact of initiatives.
	<i>Mobilizing Community Resources</i>	Fosters collaboration among stakeholders, leading to coordinated efforts and resource mobilization.
Research Quality	<i>Improved Data Quality & Interpretation</i>	Insider perspectives from youth lead to more reliable, nuanced, and meaningful findings.
	<i>Increased Validity & Relevance</i>	Research grounded in lived experience is more effective and directly applicable to real-world problems.
	<i>Fostering Trust & Relationships</i>	Collaborative process builds strong, reciprocal relationships between all participants.
	<i>Bridging Research & Practice Gap</i>	Directly links scientific inquiry with practical action, ensuring knowledge informs tangible change.

Chapter 4: Navigating the Path: Challenges and Limitations in Youth PAR

While Participatory Action Research offers great potential for empowering young people and driving social change, it is essential for practitioners to acknowledge and proactively prepare for the challenges and limitations that can arise, particularly when working with youth. Addressing these complexities is crucial for successful, ethical, and sustainable implementation.

4.1 Relational Dynamics and Ensuring Equitable Power Sharing

The collaborative core of PAR, while its greatest strength, also presents significant relational challenges that must be carefully navigated.

- **Lack of Mutual Trust:** Building deep and authentic trust between youth participants and youth workers / researchers is a time-intensive process. Young people often have limited and fragmented availability due to school schedules, family commitments, and other extracurricular activities, which can present an obstacle for the consistent interaction needed to cultivate strong bonds. Furthermore, changes in group composition can prevent the formation and maintenance of trust among team members.
- **Unequal Power Relationships:** Despite the foundational principle of power-sharing, adult-centric environments can inadvertently lead to adults dominating the process. This can result in youth being assigned tokenistic roles or their involvement being subtly manipulated, particularly when working with younger adolescents or when adults hold negative preconceptions about youth capabilities. Teachers, for instance, may perceive youth's rights to participate as a threat to their authority or traditional teaching practices. Insufficient research skills among youth can also lead adult researchers to exert more control over the research process, as projects are often initiated by educated individuals with established expertise.
- **Differences in Beliefs, Culture, or Interests:** Discrepancies in perspectives, cultural backgrounds, or fundamental beliefs between youth and adults, or even among youth themselves, can create significant barriers to trust and effective collaboration. It is highly important to ensure that the research topic genuinely aligns with the interests and motivations of the young people involved, as a lack of interest can undermine engagement.

A critical challenge often encountered in PAR, particularly within institutional settings like schools, is the paradox of empowerment within structured environments. While PAR aims to foster youth empowerment and autonomy, students and teachers are frequently unfamiliar with unstructured learning methods and approaches that limit direct teacher involvement. This can create confusion and uncertainty for students who are accustomed to clear tasks and specific assignments, leading to sentiments like "We had too much influence... what should we actually do?". Teachers, in turn, may struggle to adopt a "withdrawn" facilitative role, believing that more structure would benefit students, especially those who typically require clearer guidelines. This tension arises because the very institutional structures designed to educate youth can be inherently adult-centric and resistant to relinquishing control.

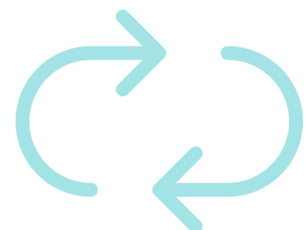
This necessitates significant capacity building for adults, preparing them to transition from instructors to effective facilitators, and for youth to embrace their newfound agency in a supportive, yet less directive, environment. When it comes to NGO setting, especially the ones experienced in youth work and non-formal education, these limitations are lesser, but still existent. Due to its non-formal and less structured nature, youth and for youth NGO's will more easily adapt to the flexibility and principles of PAR methodology, yet experienced youth workers able to provide facilitation and knowledge in the research process are a must. However, even youth workers are not immune to having a need for control, therefore implementing PAR will be a learning process not just for youth but for youth workers as well, and they should be prepared for that.

4.2 Methodological Rigor, Time, and Resource Considerations

Implementing PAR effectively requires not only careful planning but also a substantial investment in time and resources, which can pose significant challenges.

- **Question of Scientific Validity:** PAR can face scrutiny regarding its scientific rigor and objectivity, particularly from proponents of traditional research paradigms. Its flexible methods and emphasis on subjective experiences and community-driven processes can make it difficult to be considered as rigorous by conventional academic standards. This can sometimes lead to questions about the generalizability or replicability of findings.
- **Time and Resource Commitment:** The iterative and cyclical nature of PAR, with its continuous cycles of research, action, and reflection, demands a tremendous commitment of time and dedicated resources. Short project periods, limited funding, or busy academic schedules can lead to superficial results, rushed data collection and interpretation, or even prevent the completion of the crucial action phase. Effective training for analytical skills, for instance, requires sustained engagement that short-term projects often cannot accommodate.
- **Complexity of Data Analysis:** While youth involvement in data analysis is vital for ownership and deeper understanding, it often requires substantial adult support and training. Guiding young people through complex qualitative coding or quantitative analysis methods can be time-consuming and requires facilitators with relevant expertise.

A truly transformative PAR project, characterized by deep community engagement and systemic change, frequently requires an extended duration, often six to twelve months, with regular meetings. This contrasts sharply with typical short-term project funding cycles. Consequently, a shorter, less resourced project might achieve valuable youth development outcomes, but it may struggle to deliver significant community-level change or produce highly rigorous research findings that meet traditional academic standards. This requires realistic goal-setting by practitioners, who must carefully balance the scope of their PAR project with the available resources. It also highlights the importance of advocating for longer-term, more flexible funding models that align with the organic, iterative nature of PAR, rather than forcing complex social change processes into rigid, short-term frameworks.



4.3 Ethical Responsibilities and Safeguarding Young People

Working with young people in a research and action context introduces unique ethical considerations that demand detailed planning and continuous vigilance to safeguard their well-being.

- **Potential Harm to Youth:** Engaging young people in social action, particularly when it involves challenging existing power structures or addressing sensitive community issues, can expose them to unintended risks. These risks may include social exclusion, political backlash, or emotional distress coming from conflicts or resistance from dominant groups. For example, youth discussing tobacco advertisements might feel intimidated by store owners, or group discussions could escalate into serious conflict.
- **Confidentiality and Privacy:** The collaborative and often open nature of PAR, especially when youth are involved in data management or when their research participants are peers they know well, can make maintaining strict confidentiality challenging. In smaller communities where residents are interconnected, the risk of exposing identities or compromising privacy is particularly high when sharing findings with community members.
- **Informed Consent:** Obtaining truly informed consent from minors is a complex process, typically requiring parental permission. This can become a barrier if adult disagreement, such as a conflict of interest between youth and parents regarding participation benefits or research topics, prevents youth from active engagement. Ensuring that youth fully understand their rights, the risks, and the voluntary nature of their participation is important.

Practitioners engaging in PAR must constantly balance the imperative of youth empowerment with the crucial responsibility of protection. The very act of challenging existing power structures, which is central to PAR's social change objective, can expose youth to negative consequences. Therefore, the desire for youth autonomy must be carefully balanced with the ethical responsibility to safeguard their physical and emotional well-being. This requires implementing safeguarding protocols, including clear risk assessments, providing adequate support systems for emotional distress, and carefully considering the political and social landscape of the community. Youth practitioners need to be prepared to navigate and mitigate potential conflicts, sometimes even shielding youth from direct exposure to severe backlash. This highlights the ethical tightrope practitioners walk in PAR: maximizing youth agency while minimizing potential harm. It underscores the need for continuous ethical reflection and adaptability throughout the project, ensuring that the pursuit of social change does not inadvertently jeopardize the well-being of the young people involved.

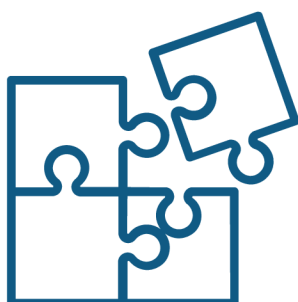


Challenge Category	Specific Challenge	Mitigation Strategy
Relational	Lack of Mutual Trust	Prioritize consistent team-building activities; ensure stable youth and adult participation; foster a safe, open environment.
	Unequal Power Relationships	Implement explicit power-sharing protocols; train youth practitioners in facilitative roles; validate youth expertise; address adult biases.
	Differences in Beliefs/Interests	Ensure research topics are genuinely youth-driven; facilitate open dialogue and mutual understanding of diverse perspectives.
Methodological	Question of Scientific Validity	Clearly articulate PAR's unique value and methods; use mixed methods for triangulation; focus on context-specific relevance over broad generalizability.
	Time & Resource Commitment	Set realistic project scopes and timelines; advocate for longer-term, flexible funding; secure adequate adult support for all phases.
	Complexity of Data Analysis	Provide comprehensive, accessible training for youth in data analysis; ensure sufficient adult support and guidance during this phase.

Challenge Category	Specific Challenge	Mitigation Strategy
Ethical	Potential Harm to Youth	Conduct thorough risk assessments; establish clear safeguarding protocols; provide emotional support systems; prepare to navigate conflicts.
	Confidentiality & Privacy	Implement strict data management protocols; clearly define what information will be shared and with whom; ensure anonymity where possible.
	Informed Consent	Develop clear, youth-friendly consent forms; obtain parental/guardian permission; ensure youth fully understand their rights and voluntary participation.

Chapter 5: PAR in Action: Inspiring Good Practice Examples

Witnessing Participatory Action Research in practice is often the most effective way to grasp its transformative power. The following examples highlight how youth-led research has successfully translated into tangible action and significant impact, with a particular focus on the crucial "action phase" of the PAR cycle.



5.1 Case Study 1: Empowering Youth for Health Equity and Policy Change (USA)

Context: A Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project was initiated to address inequities in physical activity (PA) access within school-based aftercare programs for middle school youth in under-resourced settings in the USA. The primary objective was to increase youth voice in decisions concerning PA options and to align activities with their genuine interests. This initiative aimed to move beyond individual behavioral changes to address systemic barriers to health.

Research & Findings: The participating youth engaged in photovoice activities, systematically exploring their school environment and documenting their observations through photographs. This process allowed them to identify and highlight specific inequities. For instance, girls in the program explicitly noted that boys had a wider array of PA choices, leading them to propose the creation of a dance team. They also observed and reported unequal access to PA breaks between honors classes and other student groups. Their direct experiences provided unique and compelling evidence of systemic disparities.

Action Phase & Impact: The youth researchers took their findings and recommendations directly to the school administration through powerful presentations. The impact was immediate and significant:

- **Youth-Proposed Changes Implemented:** All of the changes proposed by the youth were implemented within six months post-intervention. This included the introduction of universal 20-minute end-of-day recess for all students, addressing the previously unequal PA breaks that the youth had highlighted. Additionally, water and healthy snacks became readily available, an after-school dance team was established, the high ropes course was fixed, and fields were designated for active use.
- **Facilitators of Success:** The remarkable success of this action phase was attributed to several critical factors: early relationship building with key stakeholders, strong administrative acceptance from the school leadership, a clear alignment between the views of stakeholders and the youth's findings, and the establishment of a continuous feedback loop that ensured ongoing youth input.

While the youth's research was compelling and their recommendations well-founded, their successful implementation was explicitly linked to the commitment and support from the school administration and early engagement with stakeholders. In contrast, a parallel YPAR-only program, which lacked this crucial administrative support, saw none of its proposed changes implemented. This demonstrates that for PAR to move beyond individual youth development and genuinely impact systemic inequities, securing commitment from decision-makers and key stakeholders from the very beginning is very important. Practitioners, therefore, must act as vital bridges, facilitating not only youth research but also the dialogue and securing the necessary acceptance from those who hold the power to implement change within the broader system.

5.2 Case Study 2: Youth-Led Urban Design for Community Transformation (USA)

Context: The Nashville Youth Design Team (NYDT) embarked on a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) initiative to address critical urban design issues impacting youth health and well-being. Their work explicitly focused on understanding and challenging how structural and environmental racism manifested within the built environment of their city. This project aimed to empower youth to reshape their physical surroundings.

Research & Findings: NYDT youth co-researchers employed a mixed-methods approach, conducting surveys, interviews, and community mapping to identify disparities in urban spaces. A flagship initiative was their "Dream City Workshop," which engaged over 2,000 young people aged 5-18 across 30 sites. Through presentations, creative designs, and surveys, they gathered extensive data on what a city designed for young people would look like. The team analyzed this rich data using iterative deductive and inductive coding, identifying recurring themes and developing a set of youth priorities for Nashville's built environment.

Action Phase & Impact: The NYDT translated their research into tangible urban interventions and significant policy influence:

- **Tactical Urbanism Projects (2020-2022):**

- **Pedestrian Safety Measures (2021):** The NYDT successfully implemented pedestrian safety measures at one of Nashville's most dangerous intersections. Their work gained attention from local news and transportation departments and was even credited by the Tennessee Department of Transportation for inspiring a \$30 million street improvement project in the area.
 - **Mini-Soccer Pitch (2022):** The team installed a mini-soccer pitch at a local park in a community with a large international population. This initiative was so successful that the design was later selected for permanent funding through a city-wide participatory budgeting campaign, with the Metro Nashville Parks Department actively working on its permanent installation.
- **Dream City Workshop (Ongoing):** The visionary designs and recommendations generated from the "Dream City Workshop" are being included in the official "Imagine Nashville" city-wide visioning report. This ensures that youth voices are directly centered in the city's long-term civic planning processes.
- **Youth Voice Exhibition:** The NYDT regularly hosts exhibitions to share their research and designs with the public, including family members, community leaders, and government officials. These events foster dialogue and build broader support for their initiatives.
- **Building Power and Reputation:** Through these impactful projects, the NYDT has successfully established itself as a key player in Nashville's youth organizing and urban design spaces. This reputation has led to invitations for their participation in broader civic engagement initiatives, demonstrating their recognized influence.

The NYDT's success in implementing concrete urban design changes and influencing policy decisions was not just about the quality of their projects, but also about the reputation and power they built through their work. This evolution from informal advocacy to formal integration into city-wide visioning initiatives demonstrates how PAR can serve

as a powerful advocacy tool. It not only generates effective solutions but also builds the credibility and capacity of youth groups to be recognized as legitimate and influential stakeholders in civic and policy-making processes. This model shows how youth-led initiatives can transcend grassroots efforts to become institutionalized voices, fundamentally shifting how local governments and institutions engage with and incorporate youth perspectives into long-term planning and decision-making, ultimately fostering a more inclusive form of governance.

5.3 Case Study 3: Fostering Active Citizenship and Well-being in Schools (Italy)

Context: An Italian Youth-Led Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project was specifically designed to promote European active citizenship and enhance social well-being among high school adolescents. This initiative was structured as a quasi-experimental study to systematically evaluate the effects of the YPAR approach. The project aimed to explore how direct engagement in research and action could influence young people's civic attitudes and overall well-being.

Research & Findings: The intervention group, comprising 35 high school students, actively participated in the YPAR process, focusing on social issues that were directly relevant to their lives and their community. The study employed a pretest-posttest control group design to assess the impact of the YPAR intervention, comparing the outcomes of the intervention group with a control group of 34 students. This methodological approach allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of the project's effectiveness.

Action Phase & Impact: The YPAR intervention yielded significant positive outcomes for the participating youth:

- **Increased Social Well-being:** Participants in the YPAR intervention group reported notable increases in their social well-being, indicating a positive impact on their overall sense of connectedness and satisfaction within their social environment.
- **Enhanced Institutional Trust:** The project led to a significant increase in trust in institutions among the participating youth. This suggests that direct engagement in civic processes, even at a local level, can build confidence in governmental and societal structures.
- **Greater Participation:** Youth in the intervention group demonstrated increased levels of participation in civic activities, reflecting a heightened willingness and ability to engage actively in their communities.
- **Decreased Political Alienation:** A particularly noteworthy outcome was a significant decrease in feelings of political alienation among the intervention group, indicating that the PAR process helped bridge the gap between young people and political processes.

This Italian case study highlights PAR's nuanced impact on civic engagement, particularly beyond a shift in broader political identity. The findings demonstrate that PAR is highly effective in fostering active citizenship, civic engagement, and trust in local or national institutions by addressing tangible, immediate issues that directly affect young people. For youth work across Europe, this implies that PAR is an excellent tool for building practical civic skills and fostering local engagement, which are foundational for democratic participation.

6. PAR "Youth perspectives on violence incidence, attitudes towards marginalized groups, and solutions for positive change"

This Youth Participatory Action Research was conducted within the Erasmus+ KA2 Strategic partnership project “**Inclusive pathways to peace**”, under the “Power of participation” activity in Croatia, Cyprus, Serbia and Spain.

The process took part from April to July 2025 in all countries and 5 young people from Croatia, Serbia and Spain and 6 young people from Cyprus, along with 8 youth workers, 2 from each country, were involved. It resulted with comprehensive national reports that describe the process, present the research findings and provide a description of the action undertaken based on the results, as well as the evaluation of the process. Those reports were compiled in one final report on the project level. Within this guidebook we want to **share our process** and the **main findings**, and inspire youth practitioners Europe-wide and beyond with the results of our **action phase**. By sharing the insights, experiences, and solutions generated through this process, we strive to raise awareness, inform policy and practice, and inspire wider social change.

Despite being directly affected by violence and marginalization young people are rarely included in formal discussions or decision-making processes that aim to address these issues. Therefore, this research was made to gain a deeper understanding of how young people **perceive and experience violence, social exclusion, and the potential for change within their communities**. It focused on youth as the primary target group, including diverse backgrounds and social realities, such as students, members of marginalized groups, and young people actively engaged or interested in social issues.

The main purpose of this PAR was:

- To **equip youth practitioners** with a new approach in youth research which focuses on social change that promotes democratic values; is context-specific, targeted on the needs of youth; with an iterative cycle of research, action and reflection
- To **explore and understand** youth perspectives on violence, their perception of **inclusion and exclusion** in social and institutional settings and attitudes towards marginalized groups
- To identify **levels of awareness**, empowerment, and willingness to take part in social change and collect **concrete ideas** on how to promote greater inclusion.

The process included several meetings and workshops held among the national teams, each with clear purpose and goal. Once a common understanding was reached the teams proceeded with setting the specific objectives of each PAR and creating the questions accordingly, followed by distributing the surveys, creating analysis report and finishing with implementing intervention, evaluating the whole process and creating report.

It was interesting to notice that each national team chose the same instrument – an online questionnaire. The number of questions varied: 15 in Serbia and Spain, 28 in Cyprus, and 33 in Croatia. This choice was deemed more practical for analysis and allowed them to reach a larger and more diverse participant pool, including those that are usually hard to reach or out-of-reach. Their choice also confirms that regardless of which part of Europe youth come from, they share the same everyday life, which increasingly takes place online.

6.1 Key findings and comparative analyses

In the research “Youth perspectives on violence incidence, attitudes towards marginalized groups, and solutions for positive change” conducted in Croatia, Cyprus, Serbia and Spain a total of **237 young people** aged 13 to 30 were surveyed, exceeding our initial expectations for participant numbers.

Each online questionnaire was designed by national teams; therefore, the questions were distinctive and the data collected cannot be compared in its entirety.

However, since there was a **great level** of mutual understanding among the partner organizations regarding the topic and the purpose of the research, quite a lot of the findings are similar and we can draw comparison among them.

Violence

When it comes to experienced violence in all four countries, we found that the number of youths who experienced some form of violence in Spain, Croatia, and Cyprus ranges from 48% to 60%, while in Serbia, where the question was framed differently, 64 % of the respondent witnessed violence against marginalized groups. The types of violence most frequently cited in all countries were physical, online, psychological, sexual harassment and discrimination/isolation.

Key findings per country were as follows:

Croatia: physical violence, peer violence, psychological violence, and sexual violence.	Serbia: psychological violence, online violence, discrimination/isolation, and physical violence.
Cyprus: verbal violence, discriminatory violence, sexual harassment, and physical violence.	Spain: verbal aggression, online violence, social exclusion, and physical violence.

Comparative analyses showed that in all four countries violence most commonly occurs in the community/neighborhood, schools, and online. The fact that schools were mentioned in all countries worries us, as there are “zero tolerance to violence” policies in all of them, yet violence still happens within school premises. We can draw the conclusion that these policies are insufficient or not implemented properly, and wider community – from decision makers, teachers and other staff to parents and students – should change their approach and implement different measures to ensure schools are a safe environment for all.

Marginalized groups

When comparing the findings on marginalized groups, we found that in most countries migrants, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, LGBTQ and women were mentioned the most. The results by country are:

Croatia: victims of domestic violence, people with mental health issues, women, homeless individuals.	Serbia: Roma people, LGBTQ, migrants, women.
Cyprus: migrants, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ.	Spain: migrants, people with disabilities, people living in poverty.

Solutions for change

Respondents across all countries largely believe they can impact society and are eager to do so. They proposed various solutions for reducing violence and enhancing social inclusion, which can be categorized by type:

Educational workshops on respect, violence (especially prevention), and communication, peer mediation trainings, youth for youth workshops	Creative projects like art, cinema, forum theaters or street activities
Volunteering in vulnerable communities	Safe dialogue spaces for youth meetups and discussions (peer-to peer and with decision makers), cross-community mentorship
Awareness raising campaigns, both online and local; digital hate-speech monitoring	

Research in all four countries has shown us that young people actively contemplate the environments they live in and that they have concrete ideas on how to improve their communities and the position of marginalized groups. They are sensitive to the problems faced by their peers, aware of institutional barriers and negative forms of behavior, and have developed empathy. The solutions they propose are feasible and do not require high financial investments, however, they require a broad consensus of relevant stakeholders who would act in synergy towards reducing inequality and creating better policies with more effort invested in their implementation.

6.2 Action Phase & Impact

Drawing from the research findings each national team implemented context-specific initiatives. Croatian and Spanish team held an on-spot workshops using different non-formal learning methods with a high number of attendees. Cypriot and Serbian team had to change their initial plan for an in-person activity due to external factors, however they swiftly implemented changes and transferred their action online.

A significant achievement across all countries was the empowerment of young people, enabling them to actively identify problems, design research instruments, analyze findings, and create solutions. The inclusive methodology and peer-led approach were especially valued. Young people felt heard and respected and they emphasized how PAR has significantly changed their perspective, making them more aware of social problems and more ready for actively initiating positive changes. Most of them were particularly satisfied with the implemented actions and the visible results. Among the acquired skills, they highlighted teamwork, data analysis skills, and decision-making skills. Also, young people developed a sense of ownership over the results, which was particularly evident in the design and implementation of the interventions. Final evaluation showed that the planned activity outcomes were achieved: most of the participants felt fully included in decision-making, all believe they had a very high level of autonomy, all were very satisfied with how their ideas and comments were included in the research report, and their sense of personal responsibility for implementing activities increased, especially the action part.

This process significantly influenced the development of valuable professional and personal knowledge of youth workers, that learned to use new methodology. They expressed very high satisfaction with the application of this method, believing that the independence of young people in decision-making increased and the need for directive guidance decreased. The process had a significant influence in increasing the level of connection and trust with youth. As one of the challenges they learned to overcome youth workers highlighted handing over decision-making to young people, as well as achieving balance between providing support and giving autonomy to youth, and maintaining a substantial level of motivation among participants.

A detailed description of the interventions / initiatives carried out in the action phase is available on our projects' website in the PAR Final report. Here is a short overview of the action implemented in each country:

Croatia: "Youth Loudly Without Filters"

Recognizing that young people view peer-led education as a solution to violence and marginalization, they organized an educational and engaging workshop focused on violence and marginalized groups using debate simulation method. The debate questions derived from the research questionnaire, to elicit deeper responses and influence attitudes. The event took place on June 23, 2025, at the Bodovaljci Community Center, with 22 attendees aged 13 to 30. The activity revealed that even high school students are very aware of issues like corruption, judicial inefficiency, and systemic barriers for victims of violence, which highlights the need for intersectoral cooperation and stronger institutional trust. It showed significant potential for engaging youth in active citizenship. Evaluation showed participants found the experience engaging and educational. They learned to debate with arguments, listen, share views, think critically, and discuss peacefully. The debate method was found useful, and they expressed interest in more such activities.

Cyprus: Social media campaign

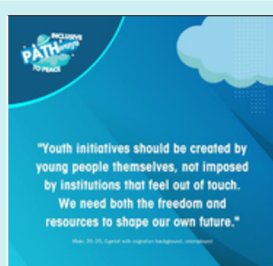
The research team wanted to organize a focus group in the UN Buffer Zone at Ledra Palace, Nicosia, yet despite the unique location the session was cancelled last minute. Since PAR methodology requests participants to be highly flexible and adaptive to changes, they instead launched a 7-day social campaign based on our youth-led survey, featuring carousel posts and Instagram Stories with polls, questions, and quizzes. The campaign highlighted youth perspectives on marginalization and peacebuilding. Each post combined key survey findings with quotes from young Cypriots and refugee stories from UNHCR Cyprus. The campaign showcased youth-identified solutions like peer mediation, inclusive events, and social media advocacy. Each post concluded with a reflective question or prompt, encouraging critical thinking and engagement. By translating research into human-centered storytelling, the campaign made data accessible and impactful, fostering dialogue and awareness in Cyprus.

Serbia: Social media campaign

A meeting with 15 participants, including young members and youth workers involved in our research, was held in Šabac, Serbia. Key findings were presented and challenges discussed, noting that escalating violence in Serbia is overshadowing the research's impact. Peaceful protesters, mainly youth and students, face increasing police repression, eroding public trust but also strengthening the desire for positive change. Given the current protests, the ability to organize in-person events was limited, affecting action plans. Therefore, the focus was shifted towards an online awareness campaign, promoting tolerance and equality.

Spain: World café workshop

On June 26, 2025, the research team hosted a discussion session at Youth Hostel, Puente Genil, with 20 young participants (aged 14–30). Using the World Café method, attendees shared views on violence, inclusion, resources and skills in a relaxed setting. Young people are eager to address community challenges, seeking more inclusive and dynamic environments. They want genuine inclusion, transparent communication, and opportunities to lead change. Youth show a deep understanding of the issues and a readiness to participate, lead, and co-create a more inclusive and dynamic local community—if they are given the tools and trust to do so.



Conclusion – Empowering Praxis

This guidebook has aimed to illuminate Participatory Action Research as a dynamic, empowering, and profoundly impactful methodology for youth work. By embracing PAR, practitioners are not merely facilitating research; they are actively cultivating a generation of critical thinkers, engaged citizens, and powerful agents of change. The journey of PAR, with its cyclical nature of inquiry, action, and reflection, fosters holistic development in young people while driving meaningful social transformations in their communities.

We've explored how PAR redefines expertise, placing young people's lived experiences at the forefront of inquiry, ensuring that the issues addressed are genuinely relevant to them. This approach not only sharpens their critical thinking, problem-solving, and leadership skills but also significantly boosts their self-efficacy and confidence. Beyond individual growth, PAR is a potent force for social justice, leading to context-specific solutions, challenging dominant narratives, and fostering a deep sense of ownership over the changes achieved. It also enhances the very quality of research by improving data interpretation and bridging the gap between academic findings and real-world application.

However, we've also acknowledged that the path of PAR is not without its complexities. Navigating relational dynamics, ensuring equitable power-sharing, managing time and resource commitments, and upholding rigorous ethical standards are crucial considerations. We can overcome these challenges with careful planning, continuous reflection, and a commitment to the core principles of PAR. The case studies presented vividly demonstrate how youth-led PAR initiatives can achieve remarkable success, from influencing school policies to reshaping urban environments and fostering active citizenship.

The role of the youth practitioners (adults) in this process is undeniably crucial. It involves creating safe spaces, providing structured support, navigating complex relational dynamics, and securing the necessary institutional acceptance to allow young people to lead this transformative work. By consciously shifting power dynamics and valuing youth as experts in their own lives, practitioners can unlock immense potential.

As you embark on or continue your journey with Participatory Action Research, remember that you are a catalyst for profound change. Embrace this methodology with confidence, trust in the inherent capabilities and unique perspectives of young people, and witness the incredible, lasting impact they can have on their communities and the broader society. PAR is not just a methodology—it's a movement toward equitable, youth-driven change. By embracing PAR, you join a network of practitioners amplifying marginalized voices and redefining what's possible. Start small, stay adaptable, and let young people lead the way.

Additional Resources

Online Platforms and Toolkits:

- YPAR Hub (UC-Berkeley and SF Peer Resources): A comprehensive collective, curriculum, and research hub for YPAR, offering extensive resources for practitioners and youth.
- Community Futures Community Lore Stepping Stones Curriculum (UC Davis): Provides a structured, step-by-step curriculum to guide youth through the PAR process.
- Hub for Justice Centered Youth Engagement (University of Colorado Center for Public Health Practice): Offers valuable resources and training for justice-centered youth engagement initiatives.
- SALTO Inclusion Resource Centre: A highly valuable European platform providing resources and tools for fostering inclusion in youth work, often overlapping with PAR principles.
- SALTO-YOUTH Toolbox of non-formal learning activities for enhancing youth engagement: Contains creative and experiential activities designed to boost youth engagement and participation, applicable in various PAR phases.
- NAF Youth PAR Toolkit: Offers practical resources to help educators and youth workers amplify youth voice and improve programs through PAR approaches.

Key Literature and Research:

- Academic Journals and Publications: Explore scholarly articles on Participatory Action Research and Youth Participatory Action Research to deepen understanding of theoretical underpinnings, methodological nuances, and diverse applications.
- Research on Youth Development and Empowerment: Consult literature focusing on positive youth development, civic engagement, and empowerment theories to gain further insights into the profound impacts of PAR on young people.

European Youth Policy Frameworks:

- Council of Europe's Recommendations on Youth Work and Inclusion: These documents provide guiding principles and policy recommendations to support inclusive youth work practices.
- EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027): This overarching framework for EU youth policy cooperation emphasizes three main areas of action: Inclusion, Connecting, and Empowerment. It outlines strategies and funding opportunities, including the Erasmus+ program and European Solidarity Corps, which can support PAR initiatives.

National Policies and Initiatives Supporting Inclusion in Youth Work:

- Research specific national policies within European countries to understand local frameworks and potential funding opportunities that can support PAR projects.

Networking and Training Opportunities:

- Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programs: Actively seek out and participate in training courses, youth exchanges, and networking events funded by these programs. They offer invaluable opportunities to connect with other practitioners, share best practices, and develop skills in youth engagement and PAR.

Technical Assistance and Training Providers:

- Identify organizations and experts specializing in youth engagement and PAR who can provide tailored training, mentorship, and ongoing support for your projects.

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