METHODOLOGICAL TOOLBOX

Youth For Change

ToolkitfortheMethodologicalGuideoftheYouth4Change Program

The toolkit was created as part of the Youth 4 Change (CERV-2022) program, implemented by the Autonómia Foundation and Caritas Alba Iulia. Below, we have summarized several specific methods and tools related to various parts of the methodology. These can be used independently, as part of other activities, or as elements of the comprehensive methodology.







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1. Inclusion

Introductory Session

We held introductory sessions in various schools to present the program to students, showing them what to expect if they joined and sparking their interest through a brief preview. Recruiting participants from among school students is a key priority for many civil initiatives. Due to the strictly defined timeframes available in schools, it is generally recommended to organize sessions lasting 45 minutes or a maximum of 2×45 minutes.

Elements and Objectives of the Session:

- Introducing the Goals and Main Activities of the Program

This includes clarifying what students can expect if they join and what we expect from them. This informative part should be logical, comprehensible, well-structured, and no longer than 10 minutes.

- Introducing the Facilitator

Beyond understanding the program details, it is equally important for students to get to know the professional they will work with later. According to feedback from participating students, the facilitator's personality and the trust they inspired were just as important in their decision to join the program as the activities they were invited to. The facilitator should briefly introduce themselves, share information about their professional background, and include any personal details that could help students connect with them on a human level. It is important for the facilitator to communicate openly and casually, using humor and friendliness as appropriate tools.

- Previewing Program Activities and Highlighting Related Messages and Focuses It is beneficial for young people to get a taste of the activities they will participate in if they join the program. These activities should provide them with enjoyment, success, and a sense of accomplishment. In addition to the specific activities, if the program has particular values or messages, it is good to highlight these as well. However, they should not be overly direct or theoretical; instead, they should relate naturally to the activities performed. It is essential to decide consciously which activities to implement within the limited timeframe to ensure they provide a rounded and fulfilling experience. At the same time, it is advisable to evoke curiosity and an inspiring sense of anticipation in participants, encouraging them to join and seek continuation.

A key consideration was to provide young participants with the opportunity to better understand themselves and their peers. They became aware of how much they have in common and how they differ from one another. Additionally, one of the program's objectives was to raise awareness of societal issues and reshape attitudes toward vulnerable groups, which we also aimed to incorporate into the introductory sessions. The triad of self-awareness, social awareness, and cooperation played a prominent role throughout the program, serving as fundamental pillars for collaborative work and growth.









With these goals and considerations in mind, we developed the "Everyone is Different – Everyone is the Same" 2×45-minute session plan, which was conducted by a local facilitator with several high school student groups. The session aimed to help young people recognize, through joint activities, that they may differ in many ways from a close classmate and yet have numerous similarities with a stranger sitting next to them on a tram.

The session began with a brief warm-up exercise: "If I say stop, you walk; if I say walk, you stop!" These simple instructions helped participants take ownership of the space, move around, wake up, and engage with each other.

A self- and peer-awareness exercise followed, during which students mingled in the group, briefly meeting and conversing with several less familiar classmates. They touched each other's fingers and asked questions corresponding to each finger:

Thumb: What is your name? Index Finger: Where do you live? Middle Finger: What is your hobby? Ring Finger: Who is your hero? Little Finger: What do you want to be?

In 10 minutes, each participant met approximately five peers, exchanged information, and likely learned something new about them while also reflecting on their own answers (e.g., their hobby, hero, or aspirations–questions that many young people may not have considered deeply).

"Common Hand" Activity

Students then worked in groups of 4–5. First, they traced the hand of the student with the largest hand in the group onto paper. In the fingers of the traced hand, they wrote things that only individual group members excelled at, highlighting how each person could strengthen the group. In the palm, they noted strengths shared by all group members. After identifying these unique and shared strengths, the group gave themselves a name and designed a team logo. The small groups then presented their findings to one another.

The session featured several cooperative group games before transitioning to the theme of heroes. Each participant was asked to close their eyes and reflect individually on their hero and the characteristics of that hero, guided by the following questions:

- Who is your hero or role model, someone you aspire to be like? Why are they your hero?

- Imagine stepping into their shoes.
- How does their day begin?
- What do they do after waking up?









- What do they eat for breakfast?
- Do they go somewhere? How, when, and by what means?
- What do they do in the morning?
- What do they have for lunch?
- What happens to them in the afternoon?
- What tasks must they complete that day? What do they want to achieve?
- When do they go home to rest?
- What is their way of relaxing?
- What heroic act are they most proud of that day?

After individually reflecting on their personal hero, participants engaged in group work focusing on unfamiliar individuals. Small groups chose a face from photos available at the following link and considered the same questions about their selected person:

https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo-contest

- Who are they? What is their name?
- How old are they?
- What are they currently doing?
- What is their usual occupation?
- Where do they live? What is their home like?
- Who are their family members?
- Who is the first person they share their joys or sorrows with?
- What do they feel at the moment the photo was taken?
- What happens to them one day or one week later?

Through these discussions, students connected more closely with individuals from different cultures, empathizing with their situations and finding ways to relate to them. Each group presented their photo and the accompanying story to their classmates during a plenary session.

The session concluded with additional exercises, such as creating tableaux or short scenes. These tasks emphasized imagination, empathy, interpersonal connection, reflection on values and future visions, and creative collaboration among group members.







2. Bringing Together Diverse Groups, Team Building

Shared Challenges Experienced Previously

It is easier for connections to form between people who do not know each other if they have experienced similar challenges in the past. Recognizing a shared experience in another person can create emotional connections more easily. Such challenges can be real, personal experiences, for example: "We both hated math in school," "We both moved into a dorm at 14," or "We both experienced discrimination." However, real-life experiences can often be too traumatic or sensitive for individuals to discuss in a new group setting. Moreover, in a mixed group, participants likely come with diverse experiences, making it difficult to find a challenge that is not too sensitive yet serves as a common connection point for everyone.

If, however, a preparatory session is held with both groups before the main meeting, we can create a shared challenge in a controlled environment. This shared experience can effectively bring together young people from diverse backgrounds and facing different challenges.

One example of such an activity is the game "From Straight to Cross."

This is a rule-discovery game, where participants must figure out the single rule that governs the process.

Participants sit in a circle and toss a ball to each other. When tossing, the person must say one of the four options:

- From straight to cross
- From cross to straight
- From cross to cross
- From straight to straight

The participants must figure out why a specific phrase is said. The rule depends on the position or posture of the thrower's and receiver's legs. If the thrower's legs are crossed, the ball starts "from cross"; if the receiver's legs are straight, the ball lands "to straight." Thus, "from cross to straight."

Finding the rule poses a challenge for both groups, giving all participants a shared difficulty but ultimately a shared success, as both groups discover the solution. When the two groups meet, they already have a shared experience that serves as a connection point. This experience initially plays a much more significant role in their communication than any potential social differences.







Short Film About Each Other

In addition to shared experiences, focusing on getting to know and introducing each other can also have a team-building effect. A commonly used icebreaker involves group members talking in pairs, asking each other questions to learn about each other, and then presenting their partner to the group.

This activity begins similarly to other tasks aimed at strengthening group dynamics. First, pairs are formed with members who do not know each other well. Each pair has 5–7 minutes to gather as much information as possible about each other. It is advisable to focus on interesting details: things no one else in the group knows about their partner, or even trying to guess what their "superpower" might be. Specific questions can be provided, or pairs can decide what to discuss. The key is to learn positive and intriguing things about each other.

Following this, each participant records a short voice clip introducing their partner:

For example: "This is Pisti. He is 18 and attends Kolping. In this team, he is the best at programming..."

After creating the audio recordings, participants film their partners in an environment that suits or excites them, then add the recorded audio to the video.

In larger groups, young people can create more complex videos about each other. These videos are based on questions like: What do you love? What are you good at? What recharges you? What calms you down?

Based on these answers, the group collaboratively develops the concept of the video. The final product introduces someone but not in a traditional narrative form; instead, it uses the widest range of artistic tools. For instance, it could be a drawing, stop-motion animation with LEGO, a cooking recipe video, a makeup tutorial, or any other creative approach. The person being introduced does not necessarily need to appear in the video, but the outcome should clearly indicate who it is about. This way, the activity not only facilitates deeper understanding of one another but also helps the group members introduce each other to the rest of the group.

It is essential to highlight that in these activities, creative tasks like filmmaking and getting to know each other happen simultaneously. This is important because some participants might not open up or show interest in others during a purely social game. In this case, having a professional task makes it easier for them to connect.

Another key consideration is that the completed creations are lasting and can be revisited later. For young people, this can provide strength and joy in moments when they feel down or less optimistic about the world. Hearing positive things said about themselves, knowing others have spoken kindly of them, and seeing it all documented in a creative piece has a reinforcing effect on their self-esteem.







3. Addressing Social Issues

Community Topic Selection

When collectively searching for a topic for the group to address through creative work or other project activities, it is advisable to initially propose some focused ideas. These can be based on issues that affect participants in their daily lives, but the scope can also be broadened to inspire more exciting and diverse ideas. It is essential, however, to make the group aware that unrestricted brainstorming can have its pitfalls. These should be identified and addressed in advance to avoid potential difficulties.

Successful brainstorming requires some kind of stimulus: a thought-provoking question, inspiration, or a scenario that encourages young people to participate actively. This approach helps them become more creative, bold, and communicative, enabling them to generate truly relevant and interesting ideas.

Creating a trusting atmosphere is of fundamental importance. Participants must feel that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers here, and their ideas will not be judged or rejected by the facilitator or their peers. This requires mutually agreed-upon and respected boundaries and positive group experiences, which can already be established during other tasks.

To achieve the mental state necessary for effective brainstorming, it is crucial that the young people feel relaxed in the non-formal educational setting. Activities that deviate from traditional learning environments, such as movement-based or interactive exercises, or tasks that activate their imagination, can support this.

If the group has established trust, participants feel comfortable in non-formal situations, and they have already experienced the joy and success of creative self-expression, the conditions are ripe for collective brainstorming.

Basic Guidelines for Brainstorming:

- Begin with a clear, open-ended question to collect brief ideas (e.g., "What social problems are present around us?").

- Participants should explain their ideas briefly without going into details.

- Do not judge any idea; maintain a generally supportive, positive presence.

- Write down all ideas briefly on a flip chart.

- If ideas are slow to come, pose follow-up questions to stimulate thinking or suggest new perspectives (e.g., "Besides women, what other groups face significant difficulties?" or "Outside healthcare, what other areas occupy the most time for young people daily?").

- As facilitators, avoid suggesting ideas ourselves if we want the group to brainstorm independently.

- If some participants suggest many ideas while others remain silent, direct more questions to quieter participants or address them specifically-not by pointing out









their silence, but with something encouraging that emphasizes their unique perspective. (e.g., "You, who enjoy football, have you heard of any social issues involving football players recently?").

- Brainstorming should last between 5 and 20 minutes and aim to generate more than 5 but fewer than 30 ideas. Write the ideas as one or two words each, clearly listed on a flip chart.

- To conclude brainstorming, shift from open-ended to closed-ended questions (e.g., "Do you have any more ideas?" rather than "What other ideas do you have?").

- At the end, thank the group for their collaboration and provide positive feedback, acknowledging the range of ideas they gathered.

After collecting ideas, the next steps involve evaluating, elaborating on, and selecting the options. If relatively few ideas have been generated (e.g., 5–10), the group can discuss each topic briefly. If there are too many ideas to address individually, consider grouping related topics (e.g., education, student rights, phone use in schools) or conducting an immediate vote. Each participant writes down the three topics they find most important or interesting on a piece of paper. Tally the votes for each topic and focus on the 3–6 most popular ones for deeper exploration.

How many times the topics are discussed, which criteria are used for analysis, and how often selections are made depend entirely on the group's process.

Engaging with multiple topics has the advantage of allowing young people to discuss issues rarely addressed, about which they may have limited information or which they might find less appealing initially. In-depth discussions can also lead to more conscious decisions about which direction the group wants to take and why.

However, there is not always enough time for lengthy discussions, and prolonged analysis and deliberation can become tedious, decreasing motivation.

The facilitator's role is crucial: asking guiding questions can support the process, but it is only worth expressing a firm opinion, offering a suggestion, or rejecting an option if the group fails to consider an important aspect and moving in the wrong direction could jeopardize the group's future work or its members.

Guiding questions can provide direction and highlight certain aspects. For example, if personal connection to the chosen topic is deemed important, you could ask, "Who feels a personal connection to this topic?" (For sensitive topics, phrase questions carefully, e.g., "Who regularly travels by train?" is appropriate, but "Who has used drugs?" is not.) To clarify the topic's focus, directed questions may also be posed, e.g., "Regarding abortion, what specifically interests you? What would you like to learn or present if we address this topic?"

During discussions, every participant should have the opportunity to speak. However, this can be time-consuming, and often the opinions of more talkative individuals overshadow those of quieter peers. To balance this, quicker methods for expressing







opinions can be used, such as raising hands or moving to indicate agreement or disagreement. For instance, ask participants to stand on the left side if they disagree and on the right side if they agree. This approach not only provides quick feedback but also helps refresh the group during longer conversations.

It is essential to eliminate options that may be too divisive or problematic. For example, a highly polarizing topic (e.g., abortion) might hinder collaborative thinking and creativity, while topics with a strong political component (e.g., teacher protests, teacher salaries) could pose risks to students or the school. Such options can be excluded by presenting thought-provoking questions to the group, e.g., "Is it a good idea to communicate a message about a topic where even you don't agree?"

If several topics emerge, and only a few are selected for the next session, ensure that excluded topics are discussed in detail only if someone objects to their omission.

Choosing topics that young people feel are underappreciated by their peers but are highly important can be particularly impactful. This ensures the chosen topic is relevant not only for the creation process but also for the message it conveys.

Mapping Social Issues

Mapping social issues that concern and interest young people can be carried out through a series of workshops.

As part of the Youth4Change program, students from one school participated in a series of 4×50-minute workshops during the recruitment phase. The mentor working on the project conducted sessions with several ninth- and eleventh-grade classes, involving approximately 150 students in creating a collective problem map. The social issues identified by the students were coded and categorized after the first session for better interpretation. The prioritization revealed that the issue cluster named "community fragmentation" received the most votes or mentions. This included bullying, various forms of verbal and emotional abuse, mistrust, prejudiced and judgmental speech, as well as multiple forms of discrimination. Consequently, the third and fourth sessions were structured around these topics, meaning the planning evolved during the process.

The social issues identified by the students were grouped into the following four categories:

- Mental Health: pressure to conform, addictions, depression, lack of self-esteem, suppression of conflicts, stress, drug use, suicidal tendencies, and issues related to digitalization.

- Discrimination: LGBTQ+ hostility, homophobia, racism, segregation, stereotypes, and social issues related to Roma communities.

- Community Fragmentation: lack of trust, indifference, isolation, lack of acceptance, lack of recognition, exclusion, lack of empathy, verbal harassment, and bullying.







Gender Inequality: objectification, sexism, lack of feminism, undervaluation of women, and stereotyping.

Structure of the Workshop Series:

First Workshop

A brief presentation by the facilitator about the program. Each student in the class introduces themselves briefly by answering two questions:

Mention 1–3 things that really irritate you.

Mention 1–3 things you love doing or areas where you'd like to improve (with a possible focus on artistic activities). The facilitator takes notes.

Lecture: A brief explanation of terms like "society" and "sociality" (e.g., "You are never alone; you debate others in your mind, use tools made by others, and live within a network of relationships: family, school, class, street, settlement, city, ethnic, religious, and gender groups").

Group Work: In groups of 4–5, participants collect social issues that:

They observe in their broader environment.

Specifically affect their age group or generation.

Summary: The results of the group work are summarized and recorded, ambiguities are clarified, and general statements are made more concrete.

Second Workshop

Warm-Up Exercise: Participants find 2–3 people in the room with whom they rarely communicate and ask how their day is going, what emotions they are experiencing, and what is currently occupying their mind.

Analysis: A presentation of the problem maps created by all parallel groups using a diagram:

- Categorization and prioritization of the identified social issues based on frequency of mentions.
- · Reflections on the previous workshop, reinforcement, and contextualization.
- Feedback is requested on the acceptability of the established priority order.

Introduction of the Key Topic: Verbal abuse, identified as the most significant and accessible issue, is introduced. Each participant writes down hurtful phrases, expressions, or gestures typical in their environment that have been used against







them or that they have used against others. Sharing these aloud is optional; submissions can also be written anonymously or skipped.

Closing Circle: Each participant shares 1–2 words to describe how they feel and what's on their mind.

Third Workshop

Focus Exercises: Counting to 20 as a group.

Finding the "gate": One participant leaves the room, while the others form a corridor and decide on a "gate." The returning participant must identify the gate through eye contact alone.

Discussion: Participants recall the topic of the previous session. Using examples from the previous workshop, they freely discuss and analyze the characteristics of violent communication, which are recorded on a board or flip chart (e.g., judging others, issuing commands instead of requests, aggression disguised as humor, etc.).

Brainstorming: A moderated discussion explores:

- What do we feel when we resort to violence?
- What do we hope to achieve with violence?
- Understanding the emotional state and group position of the perpetrator:
- Who is the aggressor?
- What do they feel?
- What do they want to achieve?
- What are the precursors to violence?

Group Work: Participants develop and act out dialogue scenarios:

Scenario 1: Someone uses verbal abuse, and the victim responds with verbal abuse.

Scenario 2: Someone uses verbal abuse, but the victim responds in a non-violent way, attempting to defuse or evade the aggression (situations can be familial, school-related, public, or store-related).

While one group performs, the others observe the emotional reactions of the participants, the actions of witnesses, and the outcomes of the first and second scenarios.

Closing Circle: Participants discuss what was difficult about the task or specific roles, where and why things escalated, overly submissive responses, and what could have been done differently. Observations and experiences are summarized.







Fourth Workshop

Reflection Circle: Participants share, in 1–2 words, how they feel and what thoughts or emotions they are bringing to the session.

Safe Space Exercise: Each participant reflects individually on the place where they feel safest, where they like to retreat, and which best expresses their personality (e.g., their own room, a park, a field, etc.). Participants may describe and share this place with the group.

Group Discussion: In small groups, participants discuss the characteristics of a good community (what defines it and what doesn't). Each group creates 3–4 fundamental principles or rules and provides justifications for them.

Formulating Rules: In the larger group, participants collectively create community rules by discussing what boundaries are necessary for forming a good community. These principles and rules are recorded on a board or flip chart.

Summary: The past four sessions are briefly reviewed, summarizing the progress made. Registration sheets are signed by participants who wish to continue the work initiated in these workshops through extracurricular activities.







4. Artistic Work

Artistic workshops played a central role in the project, fostering community and skill development through artistic activities. Below, we describe one of the methods used:

Community Songwriting and Music Creation

Over ten interconnected sessions, the young participants chose topics important to them, wrote lyrics based on those topics, and explored the tools of music-making, sound recording, and sound editing to create their own song.

The process emphasized step-by-step progress, ensuring each session included different types of activities with varying focuses. Below is a summary of the main modules, which can also be adapted for other types of creative group work.

1st Session

- Setting the rules and boundaries for the group.
- Activities to help participants get to know each other.
- Trying out instruments and recording simple sound samples.

The first session focused on building trust. It was important for facilitators to get to know the students, for participants to learn new things about one another, and for everyone to have their first positive experience with the creative activity.

2nd-4th Sessions

Progressive Engagement with the Creative Activity: Participants explored sound recording in their environment, participated in group musical games, and experimented with writing lyrics. For example, they personalized and rewrote lines from existing songs and practiced spoken word and rapping.

Topic Selection: The process started with personal reflections (e.g., "What are you good at? What are you most proud of?"), then expanded to broader community themes (e.g., "What groups are significant in your life? What positives and challenges exist in your surroundings?").

By the 4th session, the topic for the creative project was finalized, and participants had the chance to experiment with different elements of the creative process. This allowed both participants and facilitators to identify what appealed to them and where their strengths lay.

5th-9th Sessions

In the second phase of the workshop series, the focus shifted to ensuring the steps toward creating the chosen creative product were carried out. While earlier sessions









allowed participants to engage in creative activities that might not end up in the final work-since the emphasis was on exploration and experience-this phase required that all creative efforts contribute to the creation of the shared product.

This shift was important not only to keep the project on track and avoid last-minute rushing in the final stages but also because having a shared goal provided stronger motivation for the group members. At this stage, participants could experience how their individual contributions added to the success of the whole, strengthening group cohesion and collective responsibility.

Of course, changes could still occur during this phase: some details might not turn out as planned, or participants might take on new roles compared to their previous responsibilities. However, it was crucial to have a concrete plan that the group members knew and agreed upon, as well as clear and appealing tasks for all participants.

In this case, the theme of the song had already been finalized, and the roles were roughly outlined: who would like to write lyrics, record vocals, or work on the music. It was particularly important for everyone to have their own autonomous task to complete independently while also ensuring shared decision-making moments where the group could collectively make choices. For example, when selecting the musical base for the song, the group voted on three versions they had created. This approach not only facilitated decision-making but also reinforced the value of collective responsibility and individual creativity.

The completed song and its accompanying music video can be accessed here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KjXRQGO5-qU

10th Session

The final session was dedicated to celebrating the group's achievements, providing feedback to one another, and collectively evaluating the process: What did they enjoy? What didn't they like? In what areas did they grow, and where did they feel empowered? **







5. Presentation and Dissemination of Results

Organizing Presentation Events

Below are considerations for organizing a presentation event, inspired by the experience of a book launch prepared by one of the groups. These can serve as guidelines for similar events.

Relevant Venue and Quality Setup

It is crucial to present young people's creations in a setting that reflects their value, reinforcing their sense of achievement. For instance, since the mentioned group created a book, the local library served as a fitting venue, where future generations could also access their work.

Quality conditions also apply to execution. For music projects, good sound equipment is essential. For visual art, appropriate lighting and display conditions are important. For books, printing physical copies can enhance the experience. In this case, although an online publication was initially planned, the printed version created a more tangible, rewarding outcome.

Additional equipment, such as sound systems and projection tools, can make the program more engaging by showcasing photos or materials from the workshop series.

Speakers

The event should prominently feature the young participants sharing their experiences. Ideally, students who are comfortable speaking about their growth and collaborative experiences should take the stage. This could be done through individual speeches or moderated panel discussions.

Facilitators should prepare the moderator thoroughly, ensuring they understand the project and avoid sensitive or overly personal questions that could make participants uncomfortable.

In addition to students, project leaders can speak to explain the professional and human aspects of their work in an accessible manner. External guests, such as professionals or notable figures, can elevate the event's prestige. For instance, at the launch, the head of the local library gave a speech, and a professional actor from the capital city read excerpts from the students' writings.

It is important, however, to ensure external guests do not overshadow the event. The focus should remain on the young people's work.







Program Structure and Timing

The length of the event should strike a balance: it should be long enough to provide a meaningful experience but not so long that the audience becomes fatigued. In addition to speeches, interactive elements-such as audience participation-can enrich the program.

Timing should accommodate the availability of the audience, speakers, and participants. Late afternoon is often ideal, but this may vary depending on the circumstances.

Engaging the Audience

The target audience should be determined in collaboration with the young participants. Consider who they would like to invite and who they might feel uncomfortable having in attendance. In addition to close family and friends, consider inviting participants of similar initiatives, relevant professionals, and even the general public.

Communication should be conducted across multiple channels, such as the venue's own platforms and organizer-created Facebook events or registration pages. This helps estimate attendance and choose an appropriate venue.

For open events, inviting the press can be beneficial. However, ensure that the journalists are well-prepared and sensitive in their interactions with the young participants.

Small but Meaningful Details

Prepare thoughtful gestures for guests, such as snacks, small gifts, or surprises. Documenting the event with high-quality photos and videos is also important for future communication purposes.

A video of the book launch can be viewed here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RA6hpAREfsU

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