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# STRATEGY PAPER ON SOCIAL SPACE ORIENTATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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access



[www.bisev-berlin.de](http://www.bisev-berlin.de)



[www.suedwind.at](http://www.suedwind.at)



[www.vhs.at](http://www.vhs.at)



[www.musol.org](http://www.musol.org)



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The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

# 2 INTRODUCTION

To this day, education and vocational training fails because of being exclusionary and thus denies many people equal access to participation in democratic life. This exclusion specifically affects disadvantaged young people, such as those with learning disabilities, who belong to marginalised groups or who find themselves in a NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) situation. Many educators, social workers and youth workers lack the proper tools, resources or opportunities to keep up with the evolving nature of youth work in their methods. This means that they struggle to work effectively and inclusively in their work against the background of constantly waning appreciation in society. To counteract this struggle, it is necessary for all actors in the youth work sector to work cooperatively and readily embrace new intervention models of participation and youth perspectives - that is, by regarding youth as both experts of their own lives and able to shape the worlds of tomorrow. Local, national and regional decision makers bear the responsibility of ensuring sustainable and inclusive access to means of self-determination, fulfilment and participation in society to all young people. The studies executed in Germany, Austria and Spain were carried out with young people who had dropped out of formal education or vocational training or have experienced marginalisation due to specific identities, be it migration background, religious identity or a disability. All actors in the sector are called to step up and demonstrate their engagement to help build youth trust in society and counteract their loss of hope in the future.

The intervention models presented in this paper address youth potential by allowing it to unfold and their values to crystallise in so-called social spaces. The three case studies presented in this paper demonstrate how individualised participatory educational programmes remain essential to building hope and mutual trust and empowering youth to embark on their own transformative journey.



## CONTEXT & BACKGROUND

In line with the universal call of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to enhance environmental sustainability and increase social justice regarding human rights, equity, inclusion, diversity, equal opportunity and non-discrimination, the Access project strives to contribute by empowering disadvantaged (young) people in Europe and capitalising on their human capital. It seeks to unpack their potential, strengthen their skills and competences, and assist them in voicing their wishes to participate in society.

The Access project proposes concrete action and practices for reaching disadvantaged young people directly in their cities, their neighbourhoods, and their social-spaces to leave no young person left behind.

Confronted with structural inequalities and barriers, due to limited financial resources, learning disabilities, language barriers, migration background, or gender identity, the young participants in the three pilot cases in Berlin, Germany; Vienna, Austria; and Valencia, Spain were struggling to find motivation and acquiring the life skills needed to face and counter disadvantages. The Access team calls for coherent interventions by organisations and institutions to step up to their responsibility to initiate social activation. They are called to work towards ensuring social well-being for all young people, and counteracting socio-cultural stereotypes. This would help empower young people to battle mechanisms of exclusion and access opportunities otherwise unreachable. The Access project calls on all actors in Europe, including social and cultural institutions and organisations, to take concrete action to re-design mechanisms determining access to resources, to counter current practices of exclusion in Europe and to empower vulnerable youth.

## OBJECTIVES

In Europe, there are well established support mechanisms for young people in fragile situations, for example youth education and youth work. These go hand in hand with the evolving nature of the target group: young people. Youth work continuously evolves. There is today, more than ever, an urgent need to raise awareness on the impact of youth work on the young people. Why is the recognition and validation of youth work so important, and what is the condition of youth work in Europe at large? This strategy paper sheds light on the relevance of the contribution and added value of participatory quality youth work on the lives of young people. It further highlights the variance in youth work practices in Berlin, Vienna and Valencia, the variety of actors involved, observes trends in the sector within national and local ecosystems, and presents successful youth work practices. The best practices presented apply tools to activate and co-create meaningful activities with (and for) young people, with a particular focus on those who suffer from societal disadvantages. This includes youth who are 'not in employment, education or training'. In line with the priorities of the EU Youth Strategy – engage, connect, empower the central aspect of the project Access is the social space-oriented youth work, anchored in institutional strategic framework. In some cases, there is a need to move away from the institutional level of analysis toward that of the local neighbourhood (social space). In line with the concept of active citizenship and participation, the three case studies presented contribute practical knowledge to support institutional development. Institutions acquiring a "new role" as supporters of youth work in their scope and mission are called to ensure an equal and respectful basis for action in the social space.



# STRATEGY PAPER ON SOCIAL SPACE ORIENTATION

Transformative and inclusive learning experiences for disadvantaged young individuals are necessary for ensuring the well-being of societies, the future generations and our planet. This strategy paper emphasizes the need to enhance multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary collaborations at all levels and to put social space-oriented models into practice. Promoting quality youth work and education for all fosters youth empowerment, and the establishing of more just, inclusive and sustainable societies. In order to design a future, we all want to live in and in which democratic life in Europe is upheld, all actors in society must take responsibility and translate their commitment into their practices. To ensure a broader societal well-being, ensuring active access and participation to all young people is crucial - especially for those groups whose opportunities are continuously shrinking. The Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development emphasises the urgent need to provide all (young) individuals with equal learning opportunities for sustainable development. Approaches to achieving this include technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and formal, non-formal and informal learning offers. The three Access models presented in this paper focus on cognitive skills and social learning, as well as the importance of transferring the skills acquired into action that leads to tangible transformation for the benefit of individuals, communities and society at large. Building on expertise on inclusion and diversity, sustainability and globalisation, digital media, learning environments and politics. Access has developed tailored and attractive educational and participatory intervention models in the three thematic areas of the EU Youth Strategy - inclusion, sustainability and digitalisation. For inclusive youth work, young people need to be regarded as "experts" of their own world and social spaces. All activities and learning programs were embedded in those spaces recognised as familiar and where relational interactions between groups of young individuals unfold: the neighbourhoods, city squares, streets, schools and care centres, as well as any other space (either physical or relational) acknowledged as such by the young participants.





*“So, when young people express an idea in a plenary session, in a meeting, and then experience that we don't reject the idea, but actually take it up and try to implement it, then I experience a tremendous moment of empowerment.”*

Advisor for Association Communication at a youth organisation in Berlin

## WHAT IS YOUTH WORK?

The term 'youth work' describes a broad range of activities and measures carried out by various actors in social and educational settings. Three core foci of youth work are: 1) young people, 2) individual and group personal development, and 3) activation of voluntary participation. At the EU level, youth work is formally defined in several forms. Based on successful examples of youth work in Europe, this paper suggests a combination of behaviours, attitudes and methods for youth workers. The Access project considers the following key elements for quality and impactful youth work: 1) mutual trust and close relationships between youth workers and young people; 2) mobile and stationary (active) outreach to young people in their social spaces (neighbourhoods, peer-communities); 3) strong and continuous adaptation to the interests and evolving needs of young people; 4) enabling young people to co-design learning opportunities, define measurable goals and recognize their achievements; 5) the creation and preservation of safe spaces, or supportive environments that encourage mutual trust and the safe experience of success and failure; 6) respecting the responsibility and autonomy of young people in charge of their own development and 7) collaboration between actors (e.g. in formal education or social work).

The potential of youth work lies in a dynamic balance between support, fostering self-determination and empowerment and emphasizing a sense of autonomy, enabling young people to make mistakes and learn from them.

## CHALLENGE OF REACHING YOUNG PEOPLE

When it comes to youth work practices and mechanisms of engaging youth participation, Europe remains heterogeneous. Some individuals benefit more from access to youth work than others. Individuals who experience exclusion in their everyday life potentially benefit the most from youth work. These groups include:

- 1) Older teenagers and young adults (aged 18 and over);
- 2) Young people in low-income urban areas;
- 3) Young people with migration backgrounds;
- 4) Young people belonging to other minority groups (e.g. people with disabilities, LGBTQ+).

The target group of the Access project were young people in need and who would benefit the most out of youth work programs in their cities.

## WHAT IS SOCIAL SPACE ORIENTATION?

In the 16th Children and Youth Report, social spaces are defined as day-care, school, education, university, youth work, media, family, party-affiliated youth education, armed forces, voluntary services and social movements. In the context of the Access project, social spaces are specifically characterised by the presence of and exchange among youth workers. Here digital media, family, friends, and youth groups play a pivotal role.

Social spaces are defined in social contexts, characterised by the actions carried out within them and stabilised by social structures and institutions

To a different extent in regard to formal education structured by institutional rules, in the youth work the target groups are observed within defined open spaces, which are shaped by the interaction of young individuals within them. Motivations for young people to enter and interact within a social space are manifold. These spaces are strongly connoted by relational interactions of young peers acting in the space, and hence the young people involved are the main actors and makers of the space. This perspective captures the subjective dimension of young people's interactions with one another, their perceptions of themselves, their role within the social group and their values system as part of peer groups.

- 1) Involve young people who participate with specifications regarding age, gender, social origin, intentions, activities practices, etc.; have rules for inclusion and exclusion;
- 2) Include other (peripheral) actors, e.g. education and care staff, civil society, cultural providers, etc., with specific intentions and influence;
- 3) Have an inner structure including subspaces with their own specific structure and dynamics;
- 4) Uphold a normative dimension of formalisation, e.g. framework conditions, specifications/rules, underlying concepts/policies/strategies;
- 5) Exhibit addressability/influenceability and recommendations for acting according to "the policy" or supporting measures.

The social spaces assessed in the Access project were heterogeneous and differed in terms of the roles of their participants, rules for participation, hierarchies.



## WHY SYSTEMATIC SOCIAL SPACE ORIENTATION?

In the framework of the piloted projects, local working groups identified the need for local youth participation, observing not only the individuals themselves, but also the interconnections between them and their environment in the social space. Their life stories and living conditions (lifestyle, self-sufficiency, family, environment, work, etc.) of the young people granted the youth workers insight into their needs and aspirations. Individual and group wishes and visions for the future were discussed, including their wish to take active part in society, e.g. through access to employment, or the societal acknowledgement of different cultural identities. Observing the young people in their social spaces enabled youth workers and educators to support progressive enhancements of living environments and foster the youth's ability to participate in social processes. Building on the potential and visions of the disadvantaged young people in the case studies, a positive supporting mechanism emphasizing individual skills, interests and competences was developed. The youth groups were observed and interaction took place - within the boundaries of the current habitats and social network references (e.g. in semi-public garages, or "quartillos"). Workers gained access to knowledge of their current situation and living conditions. Having assessed the young people's needs in relation to their specific life situation, a tailored supporting system was designed and applied in close cooperation with a wide range of individuals occupying the spheres of family, education, associations or institutions. To enhance equal access to participation. To enhance equal access to participation in society, tailored solutions were designed collaboratively with the young individuals with a focus on enabling and facilitating factors.

***"Finding yourself" as a person with a disability is always linked to the question "How much is possible for me in this world"? This perspective is of course at odds with the general capitalist assumption: "You will always be able to manage yourself". But it is clear that no matter how much you work, you may not be able to do it yourself because you are dependent on help. That's a problem we need to keep working on."***

Participation Assistant in Berlin

In Spain, the XII Report on Poverty highlights that "(...) the rate of risk of poverty or social exclusion among young people between 16 and 29 years of age is 31.2. Likewise, 24.6% of young people in this age group are at risk of poverty (...). Likewise, 14.9% of those under 18 years of age are in a situation of severe poverty". Young people in disadvantaged living situations (social and economic) constituted the target group of the Access project. This meant that the participants demonstrated little to no digital proficiency at the start of the project. Thus, a digital training tailored to their interest and needs was designed.

In Austria, the so-called "Training Obligation Act" obliges parents to ensure the completion of compulsory schooling for their children and monitor their attendance in educational or training programmes until they reach the age of 18. The target group of the Austrian tandem are young people who, for various reasons, are not currently in education, training or further education after completing compulsory schooling and who are furthermore not employed. These young people attended courses as part of the AusbildungsFit/BOK-program of VHS Vienna in the area of handicrafts.

## THE TARGET GROUP

The Access project focuses on a target group of "disadvantaged youth", or young people in fragile living situations and NEETs (young people not in employment, education or training). More specifically, this study focuses on young people with fewer opportunities to receive adequate education or find employment to improve their socioeconomic position due to barriers and limitations to their active engagement as citizens. The proportion of young people in NEET situations continues to grow in Europe; it represents a range of different causes and thus requires varieties of approaches. NEET situations are involuntary and associated with social exclusion, lack of privilege, or exclusion from systemic welfare. NEETs are at higher risk of suffering long-term psychological challenges, even more so since the 2019 COVID pandemic. The project teams tackled three different dimensions of disadvantages faced by youth, that is various forms of societal discrimination and structural inequalities.

In Germany, disadvantaged youth is a codified legal term acknowledged in the provision of support programmes. While on the one hand this upholds their right to support, at the same time it is often associated with a social stigma. The tandem organisations in Berlin worked with young people with disabilities, especially learning difficulties, who have experienced discrimination. They all shared the desire to become active on the general labour market by participating in vocational training or finding regular employment.

## THE PLAYERS

[BIS e.V.](#) and [GDLB](#) are two organisations based in Berlin. Their main focus is to support people with learning difficulties to find internships, trainings and employment on the general labour market. Participation in working life and vocational training is the goal. BIS e.V. and GDLB's philosophy is based on a vision of humanity that values the dignity and esteem of the individual, their right to self-determination and social responsibility, and their abilities and potential to develop. The two organisations reject any form of exclusion and are committed to a democratic society in which social diversity is understood and cherished as an enrichment of that society. This is why the organisations aim to achieve equal participation of all people in all areas of life.

[Südwind](#) is an Austrian based NGO that primarily works in three areas: Global citizenship education, campaigning and media work. Südwind has been working in development education and awareness raising for the last 40 years. With headquarters in Vienna and six regional offices, it reaches out to local actors all over Austria. Südwind has become one of the leading organisations in the field of global citizenship education, global education, and awareness raising programmes for global and development issues and sustainable development (SDGs) on the national level with a strong networking role among European organisations working in this field.





VHS Vienna looks back on a history of more than a hundred years and allows millions of people to work on their skills and above all overcome social barriers. With its wide range of courses and its democratic approach, VHS Vienna offers an educational approach to further education of people with different qualifications. Over the past 130 years, VHS Vienna has become the largest organisation for adult education in the German-speaking realm. The activities of VHS Vienna include the development of certificate programmes for trainers and the implementation of extensive further education programs for teachers. The Vienna Adult Education Centres are also the largest provider of secondary education in Vienna.

They provide preparatory courses for the lower secondary school-leaving certificate, for the "Matura" and the "Berufsmatura" and study entrance examination. One of these preparatory measures is BHS Vienna's AusbildungsFit/BOK programme. This program focuses on adolescents and young adults 15-24 who require training in social skills, cultural techniques and knowledge of new media. The young people belong to the group of so-called NEETs (not in education, employment or training). They have completed compulsory schooling but have already left school and have not yet begun any type of (vocational) training.

MUSOL, short for Municipalists for Solidarity and Institutional Strengthening, was born from the initiative of a group of technicians, civil servants and academics involved in local and regional public administration in Spain. Specialised in strengthening local and regional governments, it defends democratic values, social justice, equity and human rights. Since its foundation, MUSOL has been committed to working with local authorities in the Global South, with the aim of supporting local actors and their role in local development. MUSOL's commitment aligns with democracy and participation, the empowerment of vulnerable people, achieving gender equality and overcoming all forms of discrimination.

FVMP, the Valencian Federation of Municipalities and Provinces, plays a pivotal role in enhancing the welfare of communities across the Valencian region. Committed to fostering collaboration and social progress, FVMP works with local governments, educational institutions and organisations advocating for equal rights and social progress in the municipality. FVMP empowers politicians and local government workers to discover their strengths, weaknesses, and interests by facilitating educational programmes and providing tailored guidance. FVMP actively empowers young people, as well, especially those with fewer opportunities, to realise and develop their own ideas, dreams and goals. This commitment aligns with the principles of active citizenship by ensuring that every voice is heard and valued in the pursuit of personal and collective development.



# THE CASE STUDIES

This paper presents three case studies as a method of studying (new) complex phenomena in a real-life situation. The purpose is to extend knowledge on investigated living realities and to promote knowledge transfer. Rather than suggesting unilateral standards of "best practice", the case studies from Berlin, Vienna and Valencia provide a detailed and in-depth analysis of the specific topic addressed, with the aim of encouraging and empowering other practitioners to find appropriate solutions to the specific challenges that they face. The ultimate goal is to capitalise on the experiences shared and achieve a 'just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met' (The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development).

The true value of the case studies presented lies in their contribution to building a sustainable development: based on a combination of primary field work and secondary data, sets of information and experiences are made available to practitioners outside the immediate situation at hand, in particular to those not active in the social spaces in question.

Aside from practitioners and institutions (e.g. donors and policy makers), the general public also benefits from the case studies as the real-life experiences and insights presented aid in ensuring a greater awareness on the subject.

For the Access project, the term "case study" - as used in social sciences - refers to the exploration of the "social construction of reality". The three case studies in Access project provide detailed insights from a practical perspective and strive to add real value to the day-to-day work of practitioners. The work is in progress and the results of the case studies are published on the project website as they are completed.





The case studies presented were designed to:

- 1) Afford insight into the process of successful cross-sector partnering and piloting;
- 2) Contribute to case study collection and dissemination;
- 3) Enhance the professional competencies and skills of practitioners active in the social space and all other actors relevant in youth education and the youth work sector;
- 4) Establish good practice in the field of youth work in line with the EU Youth Strategy;
- 5) Strengthen understanding on the effective adaptation of such models in other specific contexts, thereby contributing to current operational models of youth work and youth education.

The aim is to ensure that the results of the pilot phases and the knowledge acquired in the activities executed in the social spaces help make the organisations' (and the sector's) work more sustainable and thus enable upscaling and building upon international knowledge transfer. To tackle the complexity of the real-life world experienced by young people and to be able to identify their subjective impressions, needs, preferences and interests, the partners adopted special social space-oriented grounded in qualitative research.

## CASE STUDY

1

## REACHING ALL YOUNG PEOPLE

### INTERVENTION MODEL FOR INCLUSION IN SOCIAL SPACE-ORIENTED YOUTH WORK

Inclusion is defined for the scope of this paper as "actions and practices that embrace diversity and build a sense of belonging, rooted in the belief that every person has value and potential and should be respected". The work of BIS e.V. and GDLB with young people with learning difficulties is of complex and multifaceted nature. On the one hand, the goal of SDG 4 (Quality Education) is to operationalise inclusive education to all youth and young adults in Germany and in Europe at large. "Inclusive" education is thus education that also includes young people with disabilities. The struggle of these young people to achieve equality has historically shaped the discourse and practice of inclusion. Inclusion is a dynamic process "of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences". (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016, p. 4)

Good inclusion practice in Berlin advocates and embodies an in-depth transformation of local education programmes and the transformation of legislation and policies in Berlin that finance and inclusive youth education and access to the general labour market.

This case study was developed using the Personal Future Planning (PFP) model, focusing on self-determination, participation and inclusion. Inclusion is the first priority of the EU Youth Strategy and is anchored on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In Germany, it is based on the Book IX of the German Social Code (SGB IX, Rehabilitation and Participation of People with Disabilities). The PFP modular course, applying person-centred planning (PCP) methodology, was designed and piloted in Berlin between November 2022 and February 2023 with a group of 12 young people with learning difficulties.

***"Inclusion is very important, but it doesn't work on its own. It is more the case that you have to be there at the beginning and, in the best-case scenario, you will no longer be needed at some point. You just have to start acting much earlier. Then, in my opinion, there is no need for segregated schools anymore."***

Participation Assistant in Berlin

## THE PCP TRAINING PROGRAMME

For the case study, the BIS Team designed an educational course (eight modules) to encourage its participants to reflect on their individual support systems within their social spaces, their strengths and skills and their plans for the future. The course helped them to achieve greater self-determination and to strengthen their social engagement. The methods of person-centred planning and the Personal Future Planning Model enabled participants to identify the support groups that would help them realise their goals of participating in working life and an inclusive society. Through a person-centred perspective of their own needs and preferences, the target group with learning difficulties experienced a strengthened sense of self-determination and could focus on using resources available to them improve their living conditions and thus counteract their experiences of discrimination.

# CASE STUDY

2

*Consulting can now be incorporated into the topic of "green jobs" or mobility. But that is not the primary focus here. The primary focus in counseling is still on job profiles, strengths and skills, career guidance, interests, leisure activities and how to find the most optimal or suitable career path for you."*

Staff member of the Vienna WUK Education and Counselling

## COOPERATION ON ALL LEVELS: GLOBAL TO LOCAL

### EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY

The Access team in Vienna implemented a case study with the aim of tackling the globally interrelated challenges of our societies. The study led by Südwind and VHS Vienna shed light on how to call for action and empower youth to concern themselves with these challenges. The larger goal is to work in synergy across disciplines and sectors towards a joint transformation leading to sustainable development. In doing so the project contributes to a more fair, inclusive and caring society in which all individuals act out of the respect for each other and nature. Access proved successfully that individualised educational activities in youth work lead towards positive changes, that promote awareness and connectedness among young people. The educational programmes presented in the case study in Vienna offered knowledge of the many dimensions of sustainable development for society and the environment. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), in accordance with SDG 4 proved to contribute to positive societal transformation, providing young people from precarious backgrounds with the necessary knowledge and skills to enhance their sense of responsibility and take initial steps towards sustainable change.

### DYNAMIC AND REAL-LIFE LEARNING EXPERIENCES FROM VIENNA

"Global Citizenship: Cooperation at all levels – global to local" was offered in the form of modular workshops offered by VHS Vienna in cooperation with the Adult Education Centre Vienna. In line with the second priority of the EU Youth Strategy (connect), this model assumed concrete correlations between global interrelationships and sustainable solutions relevant for the living environment of young people in NEETs situation in Vienna. Both the topics and methodology addressed a current gap in educational programmes for young people and contributed to the national "training obligation act", which has been in place since 2017. The curricula of the courses were tailored to address the specific "social spaces" of their participants. Two successive pilots were held with seven and 12 participants, respectively, between November 2022 and April 2023. The course content, originally taught in formal educational settings, was easily adopted into the non-formal education context of the "Handcraft Workshops" provided, which promoted the active involvement of the youth involved and the educators as co-designers and content editors.



# CASE STUDY

## 3

***"Professionals should not exclude anyone, they should be able to assess well and pay attention to what can be done. They should be slow and let the young people do it themselves. The professionals should also know what is important".***

Young Participant  
of the Access Project

## ... AND THE VIRTUAL WORLD

### INTERVENTION MODEL FOR THE DIGITAL DIMENSION IN SOCIAL SPACE-ORIENTED YOUTH WORK

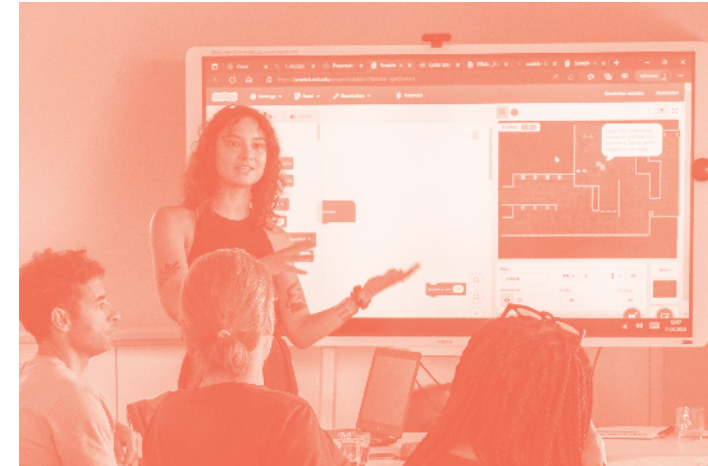
Digitalisation and digital technologies create new ways to learn, entertain, work, explore and fulfil ambitions. The Access case study in Valencia seeks to contribute to a more accessible digital world based on European values (e.g. human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law) that enables young citizens to exercise their freedoms and rights and to influence spheres beyond their physical communities. The young participants in Valencia from low-income areas were empowered to enjoy freedom, social protection and fair access to resources with no one left behind. In accordance with the Europe's Digital Decade, the young participants were called upon to learn basic digital competences and use everyday technology to shape their future regarding employment, education, training and social inclusion.

### TOWARDS DIGITALLY SKILLED YOUNG PEOPLE AND SKILLED YOUNG DIGITAL PROFESSIONALS

Led by the Musol Foundation in cooperation with FVMP, the case study "... and the virtual world" concerned itself with the third priority of the EU Youth Strategy (Empower), the digital world.

So-called "youth cultures" arise across social groups, in particular among young people, and can develop around specific music, sports, lifestyles, etc. Today it is essential also for youth cultures to be connected and active in the digital world. For many people in low-income areas of the outskirts of Valencia, however, digital skills still remain unattainable. This is the case for the district of Burjassot, which can be attributed to a variety of reasons, such as lack of financial resources to purchase technical equipment or to secure stable internet connection. Here, the strengthening of digital skills proved to be a promising tool in activating youth participation and raising awareness for, as well as sparking interest in, digital skills and untapped potential. The educators and youth workers of the local socio-educational center Diaz Pintado and the PAC programme of Shared Classes cooperated with digital experts to create pathways of access and integration of disadvantaged youth into society through the acquisition of digital skills. These skills increased their chances of finding employment or further training.

Youth workers and educators worked with a small sample of disadvantaged, socially excluded youth between the ages of 15 and 29 years old to address the social inequalities in their neighbourhood. The team did so by developing a training programme that would appeal to them: the development of a simple video game using the platform Scratch (a free online video game design software).



The case study helped:

- 1) provide young people from precarious backgrounds with (new) digital skills and peak their interest in further training to acquire additional digital competences;
- 2) promote their participation and commitment towards fighting against socio-cultural barriers and challenges experienced in their environment by investing in their future – in this case, through the acquisition of skills. This improved their ability to access the labour market and interrupt the circle of financial insecurity and marginalisation;
- 3) empower participants throughout the learning and creative process with "peer-learning sessions". Their position was shifted from learners to teachers and multipliers when asked to present their work to other young people in the neighbourhood. This allowed for a sense of achievement appreciation and acknowledgment of their progress and the skills they acquired.

The second objective of the case study was to provide an innovative educational intervention model based on the social space-oriented approach to strengthen the skills of youth and social workers working with social exclusion in the Diaz Pintado centre. Throughout the process, the social educators acquired skills and competences that enabled them to adopt and further develop new methodology (social space-orientation) and digital skills.

***"Improvements in social, cultural and economic well-being of disadvantaged youth can only take place when society contributes as a whole."***

## IMPACT

### SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF KEY COMPETENCES

The Access project achieved its goal of raising awareness about the role and scope of qualitative practices of inclusion of disadvantaged young people in the youth work sectors of Spain, Germany and Austria. A further accomplishment was the extent to which local stakeholders were involved in the evaluation of the case studies and demonstrated interest in working toward improvements at the local and regional levels.

On the level of the youth and educators, a concrete shift in perspective from the conventional top-down approach to education to an inclusive understanding and appreciation of the potential of young people occurred. Furthermore, youth workers uncovered the specific interests and preferences of young people with fewer opportunities in an individualised, flexible and purpose-oriented manner.

To go beyond these practical studies and involve further organisations and actors in the social spaces at hand requires a shift towards more participatory practices in youth work and a bolder commitment from these very actors. Improvements in social, cultural and economic well-being of disadvantaged youth can only take place when society contributes as a whole. To achieve this, it is necessary to include the youth perspective in political agendas at the local, regional and national levels of decision-making. The involvement of relevant actors at the municipal and provincial level by the Spanish tandem led by the FVMP served as a tangible impact of the Access project. The Vienna and the Berlin tandems, on the other hand, proved successful in sparking interest in the Access intervention models to be used within the framework of formal education. The teams gained greater acknowledgment for their work at the national and regional level through the attendance of working groups, conferences and other interactions with expert practitioners.

The earlier the proposed social space-oriented methods are applied, the more young people can be empowered, connected and engaged to actively contribute to their (peer) communities and act as agents in the shaping of their life decisions.

Not only were the needs, potential and skills of disadvantaged youth identified and improved, but also acknowledged as relevant by workers and organisations on the societal level. This impacted the skills of youth workers themselves. Better informed and further qualified youth workers and non-formal educators remain pivotal figures in social space-oriented intervention models. Understanding the social space-oriented approach empowers them in their work. This empowerment arises through the recognition of their role as key figures — "gate openers" — in the (co-)designing of individualised training programmes. As individuals entrusted by the young people, the youth and social workers are the pivotal figures in this transformation, hence our call upon all actors and organisations to reach, engage and support vulnerable learners.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the Access project reveal the need to promote a systemic institutional approach to youth issues that acknowledges the potential of disadvantaged young people and of youth education in social sectors. Youth participation requires their empowerment, connectedness and meaningful engagement through sustainable education and social development. The Access team believes that this is possible only when institutions become living laboratories for participation and active citizenship, where equal opportunities are secured and connections with and respect for the environment is encouraged. This means regarding the learning process as experiential, action-oriented, localised in social space, and culturally specific. This perspective allows young people to learn from what they experience in their environments and to be empowered to experience what they actively choose to create through their actions.

This project also recognises the pivotal role of youth educators, youth workers and social workers in the further development and adaptation of the social space-oriented method to promote sustainable personal development for disadvantaged youth. It is only through the acknowledgment, recognition and further development of the capacity of youth and social workers that the tangible impacts of the sector can occur. Empowered youth workers and educators should sustain and contribute to a participatory social space-oriented approach to social problems and involve relevant institutions in this transformation.



***"It is only through the acknowledgment, recognition and further development of the capacity of youth and social workers that the tangible impacts of the sector can occur."***

The Access project recognises the necessity of harnessing the potential of the digital skills and 'green' technologies to reduce the digital divide between groups. This means ensuring access, development and the use of technologies in a safe, equitable, and inclusive environment for all. Digital skills also ensure access to (free) educational resources and open pathways to employment and inclusion via digitally interconnected communities and digitalised labour markets.

The Access project prioritises marginalized individuals and groups of youth, including young persons with (learning) disabilities, people with migration background, and young individuals experiencing conflicts within their communities or society at large.

A systemic approach to social problems requires the enhancement of multi-sectoral and multidisciplinary collaborations across actors and institutions. This includes, but is not limited to, strengthened cooperation between practitioners in the education and environmental sectors and collaboration with other relevant stakeholders, such as non-governmental organisations, academia, the business sector, youth groups and youth alliances. Only through such cooperation will the dedicated efforts of youth work achieve reach and widespread impact.



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## Project partner

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The background is a solid orange color. It is decorated with several thick, hand-drawn lines in red and blue. These lines are mostly curved and looped, creating a sense of movement and organic form. Some lines are straight or nearly straight, while others form large, open loops. The lines are scattered across the page, with some overlapping each other.

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