

CHAPTER 1: CHALLENGES AND BLOCKERS

Many youth and community organisations, networks and movements have been working on either green, or inclusion, or *green inclusion* projects for some time now. There is already a track record on it, and good practices to share. However, with this experience comes the challenges. What makes it hard to do more quality projects with positive impact under this priority? What is blocking that progress, getting in the way of better delivery? Here are a few areas that are direct outcomes from the participants and invited guests during the different sessions in the seminar:

1. COMPETITION RATHER THAN COOPERATION

Climate change is a global issue, yet we are still separating ourselves by borders, nationalities and different ways of thinking. It is mostly inequality of environments that create competition, rather than the unwillingness of organisations. This element of competition, or having to prove that you are better than others, is also true in the NGO sector: having to win tenders, or apply for competitive grant funding, explaining why 'we' need the money more than others, or why 'our' way is better – all this creates a 'cycle of elitist movements'. Each one is trying to establish themselves in a limited space, framing themselves in a way that could take the space of others. There is a lack of cooperation between young people and NGOs, and separate parallel competing efforts to make sure that individual voices and needs are heard.



"People with low incomes can't afford to think about the environment"

Flipped study Visit (LFB)

2. LACK OF INTEREST

Coming back to the individual level, many young people have other priorities in life than being green; those at risk of social exclusion have bigger problems to deal with related to physiological needs. Basic material needs such as housing and food must be covered first, before worrying about self-determination. When your first struggle is to be part of society, green feels far away. YPWFO don't have the mental space to participate in environmental NGOs and their activities: they have many other challenges to deal with first. Sustainability can be a luxury for many people.

This is compounded by the way the subject is approached. Many young people feel blamed as individuals for the climate crisis. Knowing full well that they are not the biggest polluters, they often don't feel concerned directly by the discourse. For that reason, it is a challenge to approach the concern in a systemic way.



"Today I learned how exclusive green can be; how difficult and expensive it is to be green for some people; how travelling by train in post-communist countries is expensive. We have to fight to be green."

Participant, seminar

There are many people in societies all round Europe that do not support the green approach. Spending time and energy on climate deniers and conspiracy theorists is a waste of our resources. Also, convincing the wider community of the importance of *green inclusion* is a challenge: how to persuade others that inclusion is a good thing?

3. LACK OF DIVERSITY

It seems to always be the same profiles that represent climate activists. Those that volunteer and participate in activism, projects and events, are already aware, already interested in the topic and already persuaded of the need to change something. What about those who are not yet on board?

Knowledge and possibilities of how to reach, approach and include other communities (including rural youth) aren't shared enough. There is also a lack of interconnection between the school and youth sector in many communities, which reduces the opportunity to reach different audiences.

There is a lack of understanding of their needs and profile, knowing where and how to reach them, through which tools and channels, with which messages, and how to keep their motivation and involvement once they are aware of opportunities. Other priorities and demands in their life also prevent them from participating more long-term.

4. LACK OF RESOURCES

The capacity of NGOs is (very) limited. To make change, with NGOs involved, more resources and opportunities need to be made available to them. The projects that NGOs work on don't get enough financial support – especially before and after the mobility activities to prepare and then to embed the learning, or support participants on their next steps. NGOs find themselves applying for grants each year again and again, dealing with administration and bureaucracy, instead of channelling competence into learning, building on past experience for better advocacy and change. Not having paid long-term staff, who can re-invest learning and build competences again into next projects, pushes organisations to work on a day-to-day basis. It means they don't have time or capacity to plan longer-term or broad-reaching projects, nor to spend time reaching out to build a wider or more diverse participant base.



"To make change, we need the capacity and opportunities to do it."

Participant, seminar

Having European policies to underline the importance and need of these issues is important. But National and Regional level policy makers need to be encouraged to give more structural money to the youth sector, otherwise everything in the long term will rely on the European level.



What NGOs and young people are expected to do with these (very) limited resources is sometimes unrealistic. Policy makers and the older generations expect young people to use their own resources to contribute to the common good – but how much is that done by all layers of society? How much role modelling of this approach happens from those in power?

If organisations want to include specific target audiences, for example young people with disabilities, they need training, increased competence, tools and resources to work with them, and infrastructure to ensure additional needs are looked after. Organisations need to increase their knowledge and ability to work with young people with specific needs. More resources are needed to make that happen.

5. LACK OF PARTICIPATION

There is not a place at the decision-making table for everyone. Minority needs and voices are often not included or heard: solutions are often designed without taking them into account.



"If you don't have a gender lens, or a systematic approach with several lenses for the problem, then you are leaving people out of the solutions which leads to more problems".

Participant, seminar

Access to the policy system and to decision-makers is often limited or restricted. When there are policy discussions, accessing that space is a challenge, let alone being given the floor to talk about what affects you. Also, the jargon/vocabulary used in these decision-making spaces and even the buildings or structures themselves can be an obstacle for young people, who do not recognise themselves in these unfamiliar and seemingly inaccessible places.

Giving space to others to participate in discussions is important. Those that are oppressed have to struggle to assert themselves and to be heard.

Representation can also be a problem. Looking at the age of elected representatives internationally, youth is a very small minority. The figures also show that representatives with fewer opportunities are very rare too. The needs of future generations must be included in current debates and solutions.



"Every time we try to have a voice or be represented, someone thinks they can represent us better than ourselves"

Participant, seminar



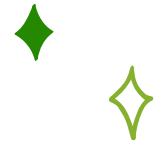
The current policy and governance systems in European countries aren't always enough, appropriate or relevant for everyone. Historical developments, and economic / societal influences have led many European countries to a policy position that many involved in green inclusion activism do not agree with. For many a sea change is necessary – a shift in paradigm.



"I don't want to sit at your table. You eat shit at your table, because that is what they have served for so long. I don't want to eat shit. If I want to stop eating shit, I shouldn't find my own table, I should plant a seed with my young people. And tell other people to plant seeds too. When everyone does this, we can eat vegetables, not shit".

Participant, seminar





6. UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

For some, the lack of social or political recognition of youth work or volunteering can be a barrier to the positive reception of their organisation, activity and impact of their projects. Different societies have different perspectives and cultural influences relating to *green inclusion*. The same activity held in different places can have very different interpretations based on these: for some it can be a positive socially respected activity well-recognised for its learning and impact potential, and for other cultures that same activity can be a sign of poverty and something to be ashamed of.



"Gardening can mean different things to different people"

Participant, seminar

Different countries have different education systems, which teach and raise awareness of *green inclusion* in very different ways. Some education systems don't give young people the opportunities to learn and think about these subjects in a structured curriculum; they have to learn and discover by themselves, depending on motivation, opportunity and support they get from other sources. This creates inequality.



"If you are more aware of climate change, you behave more aware of what you produce, use and waste".

Participant, seminar

7. SUPERIORITY

As a human race, we often feel more superior than other parts of nature. We often prioritise ourselves over all other natural things, and exploit nature for our own good. A sense of entitlement can be seen when human choices are made to the detriment of animals, plants, the environment etc. A disconnect from nature, from the wider eco-system, can put humans as 'superior'.

Superiority can also be seen in the powerful elite who make decisions for the rest, without including or listening to the needs of different people. People in power (multinationals, governments or the very rich) don't always show that they see the urgency of the climate crisis, or how the more vulnerable are being more affected. It's not a positive thing to emulate, nor the right role models for the young people of today. How can we make sure that when we come to the table, we don't become like them? The policies that are made without listening to diverse needs, and the rules we have to live by, can be blockers for more *green inclusion*.



"Older men often think they know best what's good for young people."

Participant, seminar





Young people are not encouraged enough in their school careers to make decisions. In most formal education systems, learning is still very top-down: it focuses on a teacher as a knowledge-holder and young people as passive listeners and note takers. There is little room for reflexivity. The younger generation often suffers from the lack of confidence of adults in them, from their mistrust. They are not seen as equals in decision-making powers. And yet, young people see themselves more and more impacted by the policies that have been made by previous generations.

The younger generation suffers from the actions of previous generations. They have to deal with the consequences. This gap of trust between society and decision makers is unhealthy for democracy; the lack of connection between young people and policy makers also.



“There is a struggle between the powerful and non-powerful: we fear that if we lose the power, we will be in a disadvantaged position. We do all we can to protect the power we have. We don't feel comfortable to share because we will lose our advantage”

Aart Bos, Keynote input

Greenwashing from companies (and from people in power) can make young people, and especially those with fewer opportunities, feel individually blamed for the negative climate effects. They are being asked to make more and more individualised efforts and there is a finger pointing blaming effect resulting in a lot of guilt. At the same time, many young people don't feel that they are the ones that pollute the most, as they have less money, less power, less ownership and fewer options, compared to leaders of industry for example, that have more of all of these.



“Those that created the problem are less affected. Those most affected are less represented in policy and solution discussions”.

Participant, seminar

8. FOCUS ON ECONOMY AND GROWTH

Having GDP as the development measurement for a country restricts the frame and perspective to act within. Well-being is not (yet) considered the appropriate index by which to measure progress. Many policies are aimed towards economic growth, and skilled labour force to make that happen, to the detriment of other areas of progress that could be supported, such as those relating to care. That needs to change.

Many current policies and institutions limit the freedom and creativity of solutions in the field of *green inclusion* and its complexity, depending on the territory.

'Development' and 'Economy' have different meanings and applications. Countries vary according to cultural heritage, fertile land, industry or cultural diversity (and more). National and regional approaches have the potential to be more realistic and more closely linked to the resident young people and the communities in which they live, while enhancing the assets of the territory. Some people think that doing without these policies would be even better – building their own projects with more space and freedom.

9. LACK OF COMPETENCE

The competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes and values) of the people involved in *green inclusion* need to be developed. Some organisations are involved in both issues and link them. However, they are not necessarily aware of this. There is no framework for articulating these competences in a way that would allow them to be understood, applied and passed on further. Instruments such as Youthpass in the European Programmes help with recognition in other ways, but do not (yet) include *green inclusion* as a topic. There is insecurity about the skill level they have, or the lack of knowledge about topics which can seem wide and complicated. The ability to build skills that allow for empowerment and action against environmentally unfriendly practices, or how to implement visions green and inclusion, are not (yet) supported by enough sharing of practice or training development.



"To reach both able-bodied and those with disabilities, we need to understand the other side better"

Participant, seminar



GREEN INCLUSION



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