



Engaging Youth in Sustainable Energy Planning (EYES)

Recommendations Report

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The main objective of the EYES project (*Engaging Youth in Sustainable Energy Planning*) financed by the European educational program Erasmus+, is to engage young people in the local climate- and energy-planning process. The project strives to create, implement and evaluate an innovative way for youngsters to get more involved in their local municipality. Climate change is a global threat and often the young people feel that they find themselves irrelevant in the public debate. Therefore, the project has focused on empowering the youngsters and create a safe space to learn and develop, while getting more engaged. The EYES project chose the focus group 18-29, but since the local youth definition in Sønderborg is 15-25, the age group has been redefined in Denmark to fit the criteria of Sønderborg Municipality.

Engaging youth in local strategic climate and energy planning also offers many benefits to the municipality. In addition to improved plans especially regarding the needs and issues most relevant to youth this includes developing habits of participation and good citizenship and better use of youth-serving resources.

The first step in creating the YIT team and getting the youngsters involved was making sure that the YIT had a good dynamic. The project strives to engage young people from various backgrounds, and therefore the Danish YIT is also made up of young people with various different backgrounds and experiences. The project also tries to reach out and include hard to reach groups that includes youngsters with socio-economic problems. The following output is the culmination of the EYES survey, that both the YIT team and the AB members have validated. The validation has led to the YIT team creating a set of recommendations for Sønderborg City Council on how engage the local youth group in climate related issues. The recommendations include specific actions, while also commenting on specific barriers that needs to be put more into focus. The Recommendation report was written in collaboration with the YIT team and is based on the survey results as well as discussions during YIT meetings. The AB members have contributed to the recommendation report by commenting on the YIT teams' thoughts and they have expressed how they see the young people making a difference locally. The recommendation document was created on the YIT validation session on the 24th of September, and validated by the AB members on the 26th of October at the AB validation session.



1.2 Objectives

The main objectives of the report are to gather the opinions and different point-of-views from the youngsters participating in the project activities as a part of the YIT team. This will be the foundation for the recommendation paper that will be handed over to the local city council. The paper will consist of recommendations on specific actions aimed at creating youth engagement. The paper also identifies specific barriers for youth engagement/involvement in the Municipality. This should serve as a starting point for getting more young people involved in the local climate- and energy-planning.

This document reflects on opinions and topics from the EYES survey (described in O3.1), along with problems/ topics identified by the YIT team. Based on the survey and the chosen case studies the following topics was put into focus: Youth engagement in the local municipality and communication between the Municipality and the youth group on climate issues and climate action.

1.3 Approach

The peer to peer validation workshop was structured into three co-creation sessions, that were facilitated by one youth worker from EC Network, having experience with climate activism and just finished a bachelor's degree in anthropology. 15 youth participated in the workshop, of which 12 of them are members of the YIT.

The methodological idea behind the workshop structure was to create a safe space for debate by having peer-to-peer conversations and brainstorm sessions in smaller groups. The case studies had been presented to the YITs prior to the workshop, but this session was the perfect opportunity to deepen the discussion around the chosen topics. Methodologically, the aim was to create a space where every participant could articulate his or her thoughts and ideas safe and creatively.

The first session started with a presentation of the survey data, with a focus on the following two research questions: **1. Topics that youth cares about** and **2. Barriers to youth engagement** - as this was pre-determined focus areas set by YIT teams discussions and the survey data. The second session opened with a brainstorm on how the communication of climate and energy initiatives can become sharper and more effective for the young population in Sønderborg. The third session was focused on youth engagement in climate and energy planning, where the participants generated ideas on how to involve more youth in the decision-making process. The participants wrote their ideas on post-its and put them on a blackboard, collecting all



the given answers. After the co-creation sessions, the blackboard was mapped with innovate ideas and reflections. This idea-mapping made the base for outlining recommendations for the Municipality. The methodology proved useful as the discussion and idea sharing, made good grounds for developing recommendations.

The Validation session made with the Advisory Board (AB) members followed a similar structure but was more inactive. The AB members got the opportunity to see the recommendations made by the YIT, and this was the base of the AB member discussion. They were also showed more detailed data from the survey.

This recommendation report will be delivered online, and offline to Sønderborg Municipality, the local city council and actors of interest in Sønderborg Municipality. The recommendations will be divided into 3 topics: Youth engagement, Communication and Transport. Furthermore, in the 3 topics barriers found in the survey data and topics discussed with the YITs will also be included and specific actions will be included aiming at diminishing those barriers.

2 Guiding principles for improving youth engagement

From the work carried out in collaboration with the AB members and the YITs during the last year, it has become clearer how to effectively work with youth and climate issues. In particular the informal meetings with the YITs, the workshops with AB members and YITs combined along with the survey have revealed two specific barriers: communication between the Municipality and the local younger generation and how to make engagement more approachable for the youngsters.

The work with the Danish YIT group has showed that there are several ways of diminishing those barriers and making it easier for a bigger number of the local youth to get involved in local climate- and energy planning.

Put youth in position of influence: Peer to peer communication works great, and lets the young people see that their interest and perspective are being heard and respected.

Long term and short-term: Giving the young people a chance to be involved in both long-term and short-term diminished the age barriers and showcases a room were everyone is welcome – and it does not require a big commitment. Hereby both parties can see a quick but also a systematic change on climate action in the Municipality.



Meeting the youth on their turf: Sønderborg have a great youth house making it easy and accessible for youth with different backgrounds to meet and create climate related projects. The youth house is a safe space, creating the opportunity for the youth to express themselves freely. We quickly discovered that virtual communication is an important tool.

Partnerships: Creating partnership and building bridges across ages, the Municipality and youth, companies, schools etc. provides a huge amount of learning capacity for the youngsters. The partnerships can strengthen the projects created by the youth.

Let the youngsters be independent and create by themselves: Encouraging the youngsters to create events, campaigns etc. themselves is important for them to take ownership and learning by doing.

A learning space: Being a part of the climate change debate can seem intimidation, if you do not feel you are knowledgeable enough on the subject. Therefore, it is crucial that such a youth community must portray a safe learning space. A space to develop and broaden your knowledge on climate issues.

More than climate action: Youngsters want to be a part of a community. Make climate action about more than saving the planet. Make it a place where you can meet friends, inspire each other and make a difference together.

3 Focus Areas

Based on the workshops with the YIT and the AB members, as well as the findings from the survey conducted by the YIT, this section will present a list of recommendations related to the main focus areas in the project. The focus areas have been translated into case studies, that have resulted in research data, on these topics:

1) topics that youth care about and 2) barriers for youth engagement. Based on these case studies, the YIT members have shared their perspectives on the findings and worked out their ideas for improvement in the two areas: **communication and engagement.** The outcomes, reflected in the recommendations below, are therefore focused on the educational and communicative aspects of the climate work.

First, there is a short identification of the main conclusions on the case studies:

Topics that youth care about:

- Climate Change as a security threat



- Transportation and mobility
- Sustainable Lifestyle
- Waste Management

Barriers to youth engagement:

- Uncertainty and unclarity on how to engage oneself in the climate work.
- Intimidation: Many young people experience a hierarchy between themselves and climate experts and/or policymakers that often hinder their involvement in climate planning.
- Unfocused promotion of climate initiatives. The lack of a strong appeal to youth.
- Lack of relevance from the youth position. Many young people express how they experience a great gap between their everyday reality and abstract climate messages.
- Intergenerational misunderstandings and/or unspoken expectations between age groups. There is a tendency of adult groups expecting the youngsters to behave in a noisy and rebellious way, that challenge the established political structures. But simultaneously, many youngsters are tired of being categorised and perceived as “climate troublemakers”. They prefer to be approached as a serious source of influence and inspiration in the political decision-process.

3.1 Focus Area 1: Sharp and Targeted Communication

This focus area aims at improving communication from the Municipality to the youth of Sønderborg in relation to the local Climate and Energy Planning process.

Specific objectives include:

- Improve communication channels and messages between the municipal authorities and young people.
- Improve the perception and understanding by young people of the information they receive from the municipality.

The general recommendations given by the Youth include:

- Continue and expand the peer-to-peer methodology. Use the young people’s own language and media. The research data and the YIT members emphasise how the dissemination of climate issues is significantly more successful when it



is taking place in relational settings and networks (eg: group of friends, school, self-selected pages on social media).

- The communication needs to be fun, short and concrete, but must be well seasoned with factual knowledge. The language and visual outlook should often be humorous and ironical, to create a strong appeal to the youngsters.
- Make sure to have a balance between young actors and experts with great professional insight as providers of information on the climate issues.
- Focus on tangible initiatives and actions that are close to young people's everyday experience. When presenting the impact of a particular climate initiative, the communication effort needs to be precise on describing both the consequences (if we do nothing) as well as the concrete benefits (how do our initiatives contribute in a positive way).

Specific actions proposed by the youth to implement these recommendations are described below.

Action 1.1 Design a Youth Newsletter

Design a Youth Newsletter that could be distributed on educational institutions, leisure clubs etc. each month. The newsletter should give a clear overview of current activities and participatory events, and a summary of the newest political decisions on the climate and energy issue in the Municipality. It should contain hip features and event features that encourage young individuals to take action in their local setting.

Action 1.2 Integrate climate in the educational curriculum

Integrate the climate issue in a greater extent and with higher ambition in the educational curriculum. Students should not only learn about climate issues in science classes, but it is also important to integrate learning on climate related subjects in humanities classes and arts classes.

The teachers should create more space for creative teaching and exploratory methodology to engage the young students in the climate topics.

It is evident from the results in THE survey that many students in Sønderborg is not familiar with House of Science and there is a huge need and demand for more climate related learning on all levels.



Action 1.3: Develop an independent Youth Information Hub

Develop a forum where youth can connect with and learn from each other in places—both physical and digital—that are run specifically for them, and by them. This should be places where youth can connect socially with their peers, develop new interests and become engaged in local issues on climate planning in the municipality.

The climate and energy planning authorities should collaborate with this forum to support their work and connect youth to planning engagement processes. This could be an integrated part of the youth climate council in Sønderborg. And it is important to stress that the Municipality a very supporting actor in this process. Help facilitate, develop a strategy and main the channels used to communicate with.

Web platform - website and SoMe

Continue using/developing a website and SOMEs (Facebook, Instagram) to inform youth on various thematic climate issues through online news, articles, competitions, chat forums and other online events.

Offline events

Arrange various forms of physical events on various climate issues (social and fun events)

Develop recommendations

Generate and develop new ideas from the youth e.g. recommendations from the Youth on the cycle infrastructure.

3.2 Focus area 2: Increased youth engagement

Overall, this action aims to create concrete structures for young people to get sufficiently engaged in the local energy and planning process, e.g. in relation to the already established Youth Climate Council.

Only 10% of the 516 respondents in the EYES research believe that youth should not be involved in the local climate and energy planning process. 50% suggest that the involvement should be based on direct requests from the municipality and approx. 70% that the involvement should be based on an independent Youth Climate Council representing the views and the interests of the youth.



Action 2.1: Establish a permanent Youth Climate Council

The youth support a continuation of the Youth Climate Council and invite the Municipality into a dialogue of developing a permanent setup.

The recommendations from the youth is summarized below:

- Acknowledge the Youth Climate Council as a political actor and a resource base in the Municipality. The youth council should be invited into the decision-making process, by asking the young members to give their perspectives and critique on the respective proposals.
- It is important to acknowledge a need for financial support to support the workings of a local youth climate council. This for example means providing professionals to help coordinate the council and the youth.
- Strengthen the collaboration and dialogue between the Youth Climate Council and the policymakers by implementing a long-term strategy for supporting youth involvement. It is crucial to create fixed structures for consulting the youth council, that are accessible and inclusive for all the young members.
- Approach the Youth Climate Council as a community, where the social relations and encounters are important for maintaining a strong and active youth participation.
- Facilitate consultation and/or fundraising about event-planning and organization for young actors. When young people host self-organized events (eg: plant-based cooking, waste collection, flea market, presentations, documentary nights), there is a larger chance to engage other youngsters in the climate issue.
- Provide more accessible information on the great options for meet-ups, workshops etc. in the Municipality. When young people know about the free access to venues, platforms and funds in their local setting, they are more likely to involve themselves in the climate and energy planning.
- Set up youth working groups that focus on specific issues related to the climate. These working groups could be invited once a year to a joint happening, where they exchange their perspectives and insights from their work.



Action 2.2: Involve youth in volunteering activities (Volunteering for impact)

There are many benefits for young people by being involved and connected to the municipality through volunteering. This will help creating good habits of citizenship and help youth gaining new skills necessary for the job market such as leadership, communication skills and decision making.

The municipality could benefit from involving youth in various volunteer services in relation to the local climate and energy planning process. This may include:

- Climate Ambassadors representing various age groups
- Youth involved in planning and implementing sustainable logistics for events (including making a guide for this).
- Engaging vulnerable youth in various volunteer services and green job creation

Volunteer services could be managed through the Youth Climate Council. Thus, youth can apply to the Youth Climate Council that they would like to take part in voluntary work - which is then organized by the Youth Climate Council in collaboration with the municipality (and possibly other youth organizations).

3.3 Focus Area 3 – Sustainable Transport

From the very beginning it was important to establish the importance of the YITs and their voice within the EYES-project, making sure they felt ownership and appreciated as an important actor, especially when designing the survey, due to it already being heavily influenced by the set project form and by unknown 'adults'.

The YITs was from the beginning very interested in sustainable transport and specifically wanted to focus on their own age group (15-25 years of age), feeling a lack of focus on this group from the Municipality and other local actors. The YITs themselves mentioned that they wanted to ask their peers about their transportation habits and so it was decided to add a section in the survey about transportation habits, designed by a working group with the YIT. The questions specifically focused on identifying what factors are present when choosing a transportation form. The YITs are currently working on ideas to enhance the use of sustainable transport within their age group.



Action 3.1 Develop an idea catalogue on improving sustainable transport for youth in Sønderborg

This will include analysing the data from the EYES research on transport and develop a catalogue of ideas from youth on how to improve the use of sustainable transport forms in relation to the age group 15 – 25 years.

- One example is a competition between classrooms in the local high schools and youth educations, creating a fun incentive to choose the bicycle to and from your school. The competition would involve other local actors, helping shape the competition, creating a website to help register the participants and an online measuring how each team doing and e.g. showcasing how much CO2 has been saved.

4. Permanent structure proposed

The topic of a permanent Youth Climate Council in Sønderborg is currently being discussed by the project partners, the YIT and AB-members. The aim is to create a permanent youth team focusing solely on climate-, environmental-, and sustainability issues. The group should prioritise two main tasks: **1) represent their peers on the mentioned subjects within the Municipality, 2) engage and stimulate active citizenship among their age group.**

The following description reflects an ongoing discussion within Sønderborg Youth Climate Council.

A permanent structure called, *Sønderborg Youth Climate Council*, will be proposed to the mayor and the local city council. The recommendation is that Sønderborg Municipality should help establish Sønderborg Youth Climate Council. The task of the council is to deliver events, campaigns and other activities focusing on engagement and information. Other tasks would be to produce documents and proposals to be submitted to the relevant administrative municipal department on youth and climate issues. We also recommend that relevant municipal departments seek council with Sønderborg Youth Climate Council on relevant topics, this would provide the members with key knowledge on the local policy process, knowledge they can share with their peers, and inspire to stimulate active citizenship. The aim is also for this recommended collaboration to stimulate Sønderborg Municipality and making sure they listen to and take the youth seriously, thus creating a positive incentive for the youth.



The age group is set to be between 15-25 years of age. The eligible representatives are:

- 1) Residents in Sønderborg Municipality. There is no requirement of a Danish citizenship.

We recommend that the council consist of several working groups focusing on their own areas. It could be valuable to help identify the strength of each member, helping them choose the right topics to work with. It is also important that there is some flexibility and freedom for the members to decide what topics they want to work with. Some topics can also be decided by the current administrative work in the Municipality, when it is relevant for the institution to include a young local voice.

Practicalities

The council can meet at the new youth house in Sønderborg, free to use for all youth in the Municipality and specifically designed for youth initiatives and organisations to host meetings.

Another recommendation is based on the current meeting structure. The Danish YITs are currently attending two types of meetings: 1) Coordination meetings: Also called board meeting, due to the similarities. Here the members decide on strategies and the overall direction of the council. 2) Activity meetings: Here each working group meet up to work on their project, event, to produce a document on a proposal etc. Each meeting should be held once a month. The members are free to decide what meetings they want to attend and when. This creates a space for a more diverse group of youngsters, because they can decide on their own workload, responsibility, and subject area.

It is very important to attach a key person to the council – a coordinator, having experience with youth engagement and facilitating meetings, projects, local contacts, networking etc. The coordinator must help the youngsters facilitate their meetings – writing an agenda and taking minutes. Also help them supervise their projects, helping them contact relevant local actors or persons, while making sure the majority of the workload is being done by the young members.

Online platforms are an important tool to summon for meetings, sharing agenda and minutes, inform about events etc. Facebook-group have been used to share all relevant information to the YIT and google docs. It is important to create a relaxed tone



on the online forums, making sure the youngsters feel safe communicating and sharing inspiring articles, ideas etc.

5 Conclusions

Overall it can be concluded that there is a need and a desire for a youth climate council in Sønderborg, with 67% of the respondents to the EYES survey answering that they want to be represented by a local youth climate council – a council that would inform, raise awareness amongst their peers about active citizenship and expand opportunities for youngsters in the Municipality to take part in the local policy making processes, specifically in climate- and energy planning.

To ensure the existence of Sønderborg Youth Climate Council, it is important for the project partners, the YIT and the AB-members to lobby this proposal to the local policy makers. The first step is to contact the municipal youth coordinator, climate coordinator and the mayor, asking them how Sønderborg Youth Climate Council can become a permanent structure within the Municipality. It is important to ensure personal meetings with the involved parties and explain the result of the EYES-project and argue how this specific permanent structure can inspire early active citizenship in regard to the pressing matter of climate action.