



YinT

YOUTH IN
TRANSITION

**Building a Community
of Practice**

EXPERIENCES AND
RECOMMENDATIONS



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YOUTH IN TRANSITION

Building a Community of Practice - experiences and recommendations

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1. Introduction

Working at the intersection of sustainability, arts and creativity and vulnerable youth

This experience catalogue tells about the experiences of a Community of Practice between the environmental organisation NOAH, the Danish Association for Ecovillages LØS, and FGU Østerbro, which was started up in autumn 2021 and has mainly unfolded during 2022.

Its intention is to describe the project, the process and our learnings to other educators, youth leaders, facilitators, artists, and other actors who want to create a broader understanding of the sustainable transition for more inclusiveness. Another hope is to establish and maintain peer learning communities that purposefully promote and cultivate transformation. Here we describe the project and the thinking behind the Community of Practice, what we learned about - and from - the young people from the FGU, and what we learned about creating this kind of Community of Practice across very different fields of working environments.

The experience catalogue was written by NOAH and LØS based on our experiences from the Community of Practice, the FGU young peoples' participation and feedback and, not least, the collaboration and dialogue with the FGU teachers.

The Community of Practice as part of Youth in Transition

The Youth In Transition project (hereafter YinT) was started in March 2021 by six partners from four different European countries: Gaia Education from Scotland, Hochschule für Agrar und Umweltpädagogik and Plattform Footprint from Austria, NOAH - Friends of the Earth Denmark and LØS - The national association of ecovillages from Denmark and Don Bosco 2000 from Sicily, Italy. The project was a European Erasmus+ project funded by the European Commission as a strategic partnership in youth, sustainability and arts - with the extra element of blended learning. The motivation built upon the fact that most organisations working with the sustainability agenda and education for sustainable development lack experience in working with marginalised youth. At the same time, many green organisations want to include more arts and creativity in their work for sustainability. On the other hand, many actors from the arts scene are taking the sustainability agenda into their work, thereby looking for a deeper and broader knowledge of sustainability issues. The aim of YINT was thus to make a valuable contribution to working in this cross field.

The project was born at a moment when face-to-face activities were restricted due to COVID-19 regulations and as a result, the desire to implement blended learning to reach a wider audience became an additional ambition.

As most young migrants and excluded youth have access to mobile phones, the project aimed at providing educational materials accessible through mobile phones and computers, with a strong focus on creativity and arts.

Three outputs have been developed during the project:

1. An educators' handbook with methods and exercises within the four dimensions of sustainability: the ecological, the economical, the social and the world view. A part of the handbook focuses on transforming the existing innovative material into online and blended learning offerings.
2. An e-platform containing this handbook as well as a host of resources from the six partners in the field of sustainability education, arts and creativity and engaging marginalised youth. The e-platform is accompanied by an app where educators can find the handbook, quizzes as well as a forum for both educators and their participants.
3. As a part of the larger project the Danish partners took upon us to create a community of practice (CoP) around exploring how to work within the crossing field of arts & creativity and education for sustainable development specifically targeted at vulnerable youth. Here we could test our methodology as well as selected exercises from the handbook directly with the young participants. It is this work that is the focus of this experience catalogue.

To learn more about the project, its partners, the project website and the app, we invite you to visit www.youthintransition.eu



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2. The community of practice - who, why and how

What is a community of practice?

As the word implies, the concept of a Community of Practice (hereafter CoP) refers to a group of people sharing their knowledge and practical experience about a specific issue in order to develop and enhance their practice. Thus it's a reciprocal process where no one is 'the teacher' or 'the learner' but a peer to peer exchange and sharing of knowledge, challenges, problems, solutions, approaches and news about a specific issue. Originally CoP participants were from the same profession, department or institution, but more and more CoPs are created both within and between organisations. In this project, it was set out to connect the practice and knowledge of quite different groups, both in terms of profession, culture and organisational realities.

The vision of the project was to include more people in the sustainable transition - especially vulnerable young people. The mission was to investigate how art and creativity can be helpful tools for encounters between people, views and methods, and to explore how climate, environment and sustainability can be made more relevant and a resource for vulnerable young people. From NOAH and LØS' side there was very little knowledge of this target group but some knowledge about using arts and creativity in our educational approaches. In the case of the FGU teachers the expertise was clearly on the target group and working with and through arts, but very limited knowledge of sustainability.

Thus, the idea of the CoP was to share and explore some of our existing creative tools and approaches and how arts can combine with ESD and test some of the products made in the partnership, such as methods from the handbook. To do so the CoP was created in order to share, test and adapt selected approaches in the encounter with the young participants through the dialogue and co-work between NOAH, LØS and the teachers and students (hereafter only referred to as young participants) at FGU Østerbro. The process began during autumn 2021 and unfolded the main activities during spring and early summer 2022, closing with an event in October with the invitation to continue the network.



Partners and Participants

It was an enormous pleasure to share this journey with the teachers and young participants from the four areas of theatre, dance, design and upcycling, and music of FGU Østerbro as well as associated partners.

Hence the CoP was shaped by:

- NOAH - an environmental institution with more than fifty years of grassroots work, advocacy and education for environmental and sustainable transition
- The Danish Association for Ecovillages (LØS) - an organisation with a host of resources on holistic approaches to sustainable transition and sustainability education
- FGU - Preparatory Basic Education Centres that offer education and training for young people who finished school but are not ready to continue with higher education, and who do not fit in, for all sorts of reasons, at a "normal" youth education. Specifically, FGU Østerbro offers creative and practical programmes.

- As an associated partner, there were inputs and a visit from Young Energy, a youth network that works to engage young people in climate action and sustainable transition through campaigns, events and educational activities.

- The CoP was cooperating with the Master's student Johanna Paschen from Lund University who researched for her Master's Thesis on the triangle of art, sustainability, and young people experiencing marginalisation. She participated in the dialogues with the teachers and carried out the focus group interviews with young participants from FGU. Her paper 'Can Art in Sustainability Education Challenge Marginalisation? Conversations with Youths and Practitioners in a European Context' can be found in the resources section following the QR code at the end of this publication.



The ambition to involve the target group

One of the ambitions of the project was to have the young people themselves take part in the CoP and the shaping of the discussions and knowledge exchange. The goal was to dissolve the divide between the "target group" and "the educator". To not just deliver some knowledge to our target group, but to invite the participants as part of the process. Since they are the experts. To do so, the original idea was to include "Vi er Modstrøm" which is the FGU young peoples' own association that works to give this group of young people a stronger voice.

This would have given young people a clearer voice in our work. In addition, we could have offered young members the opportunity to become part of a larger European partnership with the possibility of participating in partner meetings, trainings, and workshops. Unfortunately (but fortunately for them), many people want to be engaged with "Vi er Modstrøm" at the moment, so they did not have time for us. It would otherwise have been optimal to have had someone there who both represented our particular target group, AND was resourceful enough to engage in a bit more committed collaboration.

Through conversations with the teachers, we soon found out that this was probably not an option for their students. It is precisely the nature of this target group that they cannot be expected to engage in a committed collaboration for the most part - and especially not on the terms that are normally inherent in a Community of Practice between professional adults. It was enough to get them to turn up for our planned activities during lesson time.

Despite this, we still insisted on referring to the students at FGU-Østerbro as participants in the Community of Practice and treating them as our experts in our activities. We, therefore, shaped our activities according to the motto that it was the young participants who should show and tell us something about themselves, their lifeworld, their experience of sustainability and the methods we presented to them.



The unfolding of our community of practice

The process of the CoP was initiated by Marie Holt Richter from NOAH and Nina Hansen who is teaching theatre at FGU Østerbro. Nina then brought the other teachers from dance, music and design and upcycling into play as well as two teachers of Danish and Maths. The two latter very quickly left the project due to time pressure and tight schedules. This seems symptomatic for these general school subjects, that the more extensive curriculum leaves a much smaller margin for engaging in practical, creative and interdisciplinary projects.

Sharing of knowledge and approaches

The process was started with three preliminary dialogues between October 2021 and February 2022 to explain our idea with the project, balance expectations and draw up a plan for the activities. Another central point was the sharing of who the different partners and facilitators were, where we came from and what we imagined we could bring into the CoP, including how we saw arts and creativity blending with sustainability. We also discussed young people from FGU as a target group and how they could be involved as active participants. Lastly, focus group interviews were conducted with some of the young participants to get their own perspectives on life, school, sustainability and working with arts and creativity.

In these dialogues, we learned a great deal about the young FGU participants, what challenges and strengths they hold, and how the teachers approach the classes and work with the young people. As part of this, we also got a clearer understanding of how the teachers use arts and creativity with the young people to help them create their own identity, engagement, and community. On the other hand, the teachers learned how we, from the organisations, look at education for sustainability and the different dimensions involved in working with the theme of sustainability.

The creative teams at FGU worked on their art projects over an entire semester. As a concrete result of our dialogues, the theatre, dance, and design teachers decided to team up to create a performance about trash. The dance and theatre groups had worked together before to create a performance which was shown at the end of the school year. In this project and with the theme of sustainability, the design and upcycling group was invited along. The two music teachers decided to make a shorter songwriting project with sustainability as a theme. More concretely they took the emotions that they experience relating to this subject as a starting point. Our task was then to create space for the young participants' reflections and creativity.

From needs and expectations to a common plan

Unlike teachers in general academic subjects, teachers in creative subjects have a lot more freedom to organise lessons and take new approaches, such as including a project like this as part of the semester plan. However, it also became clear very quickly that the reality for FGU teachers is a very pressured everyday life without much time or many resources and with a completely fixed schedule that cannot be deviated from.

On the other hand, WE had all the flexibility that the teachers did not have, so the most obvious thing was to organise the activities according to the teachers' reality. So it was on the basis of the school timetable that we designed the workshops that we agreed to do at school. This tied us quite strongly to the school itself, the location, and the times that the teachers could allow. It also required some flexibility on our part when teachers' schedules changed. We had that flexibility. The important thing here is just to design the activities so that they can be changed at the last minute - the concept of 'emergent design' quickly became part of our working slogan.

We had four different teams to juggle: theatre, dance, music and design. As the project was initiated by Nina Hansen from the theatre line, who had invited the others into the process, a very thorough introduction of the other teachers to the thinking behind the collaboration was needed, as well as a great openness to how it should be designed. There were very different ideas about how much it made sense for us from NOAH and LØS to be involved. The teachers from music suggested that we were involved in the teaching and actually took over parts of it throughout the spring semester, but here the teachers from dance and theatre felt that it would interfere too much in their process of creating their performance. In NOAH and LØS we also did not have endless resources to be involved in the teaching on a daily basis, so we landed on a model of four visits spread over the semester, as well as the aforementioned interviews with the students. In retrospect, it would have been much more conducive to the process and to the learning of teachers, students and ourselves if we had been present for a greater part of the teaching. We elaborate on these reflections in Chapter 4. The plan came to look like this:

- February:
 - Visits to the various teams and participation in teaching
 - Focus group interviews with participants about their thoughts on sustainability
 - Focus group interviews with teachers on working with the target group and on art and creativity and their ideas on sustainability
- March:
 - Two workshops with young people from music, dance, theatre and design
 - Evaluation with teachers
- April:
 - Two workshops with young people from music, dance, theatre and design
 - Evaluation with teachers
- May:
 - One-day sustainability festival at FGU with the performance TRASH, concert with the music team's songs, exhibition of the design team's work process etc. We participated with 2 parallel workshops for everyone during the day.
- June:
 - Final workshop with all four teams including reflection groups and evaluation.
 - Final evaluation with the teachers
- October:
 - Two Multiplier Events for teachers from both the formal and non-formal sectors



Learnings about our target group from young participants and teachers

Through the initial visits to the classes and the conversations with the teachers, a picture emerged of a very diverse group of young people with very different reasons for attending FGU. Some had major challenges, which could be family, social, financial, professional, or psychological. Others were just so tired of school that they were unable to continue in upper secondary education. What they all had in common was probably that they had felt very badly in a school system that has come to place more and more emphasis on book learning and achievement. Many had felt neglected and left behind - academically and often socially too. A common feeling was "I'm not good enough".

This is why teachers at FGU-Østerbro work in a completely different way than in the formal school system. In addition to being a school with an emphasis on creative subjects, the work in everyday life and in the classroom is done in an incredibly "organic" way, where teaching is shaped from semester to semester, from week to week and almost from day to day, according to how the teacher feels the young peoples' energy and where their motivation lies.

In general, teachers differentiate a lot between each young person - they see the individual. And then the young people are involved differently depending on how much and how each one can participate. There is no harsh retaliation, but rather a great deal of inclusiveness, and the method for getting young people to show up and stick around is through inclusion, community, and trust in the young people's resources. The following is a selection of the key messages from the initial visits:

Community provides essential foundation for safety and learning

Community is crucial. Many of the young people have had bad experiences at school of not being good enough, but in this new community based on inclusiveness and acceptance and "we are who we are" they can relax and show new sides of themselves.

Here, of course, the joint work with the different art forms is central. When you are together doing something and developing something, you also discover new skills and become "a creative subject". The creative subjects also offer new opportunities to experience oneself as someone who can actually do something, often in contrast to the experience in the book-oriented primary school. Moreover, the joint work and project of creating a performance or a concert gives the experience of being important to the whole and thus strengthens their sense of responsibility.

An important message for us was that if you teach or involve them in a way that is too similar to what they know from the formal school system, they will become demotivated. They simply feel uncomfortable, and so the solution for them is often to leave the room. This meant, of course, avoiding text-heavy elements and complicated information, and keeping the complexity of the subject to a minimum.



Another message was that it is crucial that young people understand the meaning of what you are bringing. Why is this interesting? Why do I need to spend time and energy here? Otherwise, they will quickly disappear.

Because we were working with the creative teams, and because we wanted to explore the potential of art and creativity as an entry point for reflecting on sustainability, we put forward the idea of starting out with bodily and sensory exercises where young people were given very open-ended tasks. This was a clear 'no go' from the teachers. Their explanation was that the young participants need inclusivity but also very clear frameworks and task descriptions from which they can navigate and be creative. We all know the killer 'white paper' or the need for leg-holds to get a process started, but this is absolutely crucial for FGU young people.

Finally, the importance of the teacher-student relationship for both receptivity and motivation was revealed, as was the importance of regularity and rhythm for young participants' ability to navigate the process you want them to go through. We could not, of course, create the same relationship with young participants, but it could tell us something about the position we should strive for in our encounters with young people.

Sustainability was not something that the teachers had worked on and it was clear that they did not expect much from the young participants. A logical point was that the young people have so much on their plate that "having to save the world" is probably pretty low on their list.

Conclusion:

The teachers gave us a sense of the young participants as someone we should not expect so terribly much from. Probably mainly because the teachers had not tried this type of collaboration before and were also unsure how the young people would receive us. Because there is no doubt that the teachers also see their students as cool young people who know a lot and have a lot to offer.

It was also the last of the above that was mostly confirmed by the young participants we held focus group interviews with. There is, of course, the fact that the young people who agree to be involved in something like this - even with young people from other classes whom they do not know so well - are some of the more resourceful.

Nevertheless, it broadened our picture of the people we would meet in our workshops. We unfold this in the third part.



Creating the workshops

The criteria outlined by the teachers to create a workshop probably apply to many young people, but in this target group, it becomes enormously obvious if you forget it. Therefore, the question again became extremely important: Why is it important to learn about the sustainable transition and what can young people do with this knowledge? How can it be made accessible and relevant for them? How can it be made concrete, workable, and personal?

And here we are back to our original goal

To investigate and test our approach and methodology with the help of the participants and teachers at FGU. More precisely the aim was to explore the following:

- how the already available resources of the facilitators help to work with this group of young people,
- how to open up, enhance, and listen to the voice of the young participants,
- how to facilitate a 'WOW' within the participants - and to make them find joy and potential in the conjunction between the sustainability themes and one's situation,
- how to enhance people's abilities to express their individual motivation for life,
- how to create a safe, nourishing, and fun environment through arts and creativity.

Certainly, our aim was also to give the participants an insight into sustainability in a creative, relevant, and engaging way. We wanted to present information and perspectives on problems and solutions with the intention that the concept and perspectives of sustainability could be broadened and become personal, embodied and hopefully feel more relevant to the participants.

We wanted to illustrate and open up to the experience that sustainability is more than waste sorting and recycling. It is also about creating a better, more balanced, and more meaningful life.

Potentials and challenges

First of all, our approach as non-formal actors is very different from the methodologies in the formal school system. The approach is participatory, egalitarian and holistic, drawing on the knowledge and wisdom of the participants and the group. As a consequence, we do not call ourselves 'teachers' but facilitators, trainers, or maybe educators when we emphasise the implementation of the training. Similarly, we do not say 'students' but participants who we engage and engage with. We work with creative and practical activities as well as nature connection and personal encounters, with reflective spaces, social utopias, and even spiritual approaches. In this way, our methods support the development of holistic and personal competences.

But still, the subject of sustainability and sustainable transition involves a great deal of knowledge, analysis, and critical thinking. Numbers, reports, and an extremely high level of complexity.



It involves all spheres of society and hence knowledge, not only because of the interconnectedness of the problems and solutions but also because of the constant presence of dilemmas - practical, emotional, ethical, economical, political, environmental etc. Additionally, it involves personal/emotional challenges such as the knowledge-action gap and the emotional 'numbing' or even stress and depression in face of the lack of power to do something. How to work with this complexity and the practical and emotional challenges? And how to do it with the young people who often are sufficiently challenged by the mere task of going to school every morning?

This was what we set out to investigate through the workshops at FGU. We started to state four very simple working questions.

1. What happens at the workshops?
2. Do people get involved?
3. Which methods move - create empowerment, engagement, visions etc. - and which do not - and why?
4. What dreams, themes, conversations, provocations, and critiques do the participants express?

Our approach in the workshops

It will be far too extensive to describe all the workshops and exercises in this publication. Instead, before we move on to highlight the most important outcomes of the process at FGU, we end this section by pointing out some of the dogma and following approaches that we decided to follow in the workshops.

Security and comfort-zone are key:

- Create a very clear (and narrow) framework for the discussions and exercises
- Find the balance between on the one hand not being too "school-like" and on the other hand still doing something that is recognisable so that they do not get too far out of their comfort zone
- I.e. start with both form and content being recognisable. For example, an interactive presentation on what things are made of, the resource wheel and circular economy. Then we can extend that to emotions, hopes and dreams and more exploratory formats.
- Using the community as a starting point for the conversation

We will explore and unfold engagement:

- Prepare a very clear and tight outline for participants at our first meeting, showing them the point of what we are going to do and why they are there.



- Including letting our workshops contribute concretely to the TRASH performance by providing inspiration to develop it: what will they be baking in the garbage city? What's in the treasure they find at the end?
- Bring out the dreams and make them concrete.
- Create many spaces for reflection.

The body and the senses as an entry point:

- Work through games, ice breakers, role play, etc. (allowing space for the different participants to participate in their own way and at their own level)
- Using physical space to create space for attitudes and positions
- Use a variety of tools to embody the themes
- Use QiGong as a physical grounder and relaxation

The participants are our experts:

- We are curious about participants' realities, dreams and struggles, and work with them in the workshops.
- We focus on participants' resources, interests, own experiences and knowledge
- Social learning as a format through peer-to-peer (mutual) learning
- We end each workshop with a reflection on what we have worked on
- We evaluate with the teachers after each workshop.
- Emergent design: we need to be ready to adjust the exercises both in the run-up to the next workshop and during the workshop itself - the energy and feedback of the participants defines what we do.

Participants are (co)creators of their and the common future:

- In the workshops, participants create small products that can also be used in the other work of the YinT project, such as the website and the app.
- We will work purposefully with the participants' dreams and passions and see how far we can link it to topics under sustainability. Is there a drive for change? How and with whom? How can it be supported?

We had four trainers from LØS and NOAH present at all workshops, both as facilitators of the individual exercises and as regular participants. A couple of teachers from FGU attended each workshop as regular participants. During each workshop one of us took notes and after each workshop we "emptied the collective brain" between us and the teachers. Johanna Paschen conducted interviews and focus groups with us, the teachers, and the young people, which we used to qualify the above dogmas and approaches. In addition, we use parts of both the analysis and quotes from her thesis in the next chapter.

3. What did we as sustainability facilitators learn from our young participants?

In the course of the workshops, interviews, and the young people's work with the theatre show and songs they taught us several things about their experience with our facilitation approaches, sustainability and arts and creativity. The following section will present the most central learnings on these three aspects.

What did we learn about our approach?

In the above, we outlined the central parts of our facilitation dogmas and approach - which were adjusted according to the dialogues with teachers and young participants. Some of it worked well, some of it partly and some did not really come to their potential.

Mutual reflections on a specific subject, yes, but open reflection, big dreams and passions are difficult. As non-formal educators and facilitators within the green movement and ecovillage community, we are experienced with the approaches that mostly appeal to highly reflective people already having an opinion and analysis about many things in life. Of course, we also work with young people within the formal sector, but always in settings of some very well defined premises drawn out by the teacher, the subject, or the learning culture that facilitates and drives forward the reflection.

Hence we work a lot with personal reflections, dreams, utopias and personal passions, and in this project we wanted the participants to be - yes active participants - in a mutual exploration of the subject. The mutual reflection worked well when both the subject and the frame were well defined, such as in games and role plays that allowed us to explore and express opinions and scenarios and work with dilemmas of redistribution and (in)justice. Also, the exercises and the questions based on the participants' own life world, such as one's own actions or attitudes about consumption, enabled exchanges of opinions which will last for a long time. But when it came to more deep reflections about dreams for the world and the future, there was very little feedback and engagement. Concerning sustainability, there was quite a lot of critical knowledge, but our attempts to connect the subject to personal dreams and passions, not to mention a drive for change, did not succeed. This is elaborated further in the following section about the participants' relation to sustainability.

The open-reflection tasks were not successful for the majority, but on the contrary, we found that a reflective conversation with us facilitators could well occur during the break or in smaller groups, where the teacher-student relationship was even more dissolved. When we gave something of ourselves, there was an automatic authenticity to which the participants responded positively, by answering more questions and also giving more of themselves.



The physical space, body approach and QiGong

As with the games and roleplays, any exercise using the physical space and tools in the exploration of the topic was very giving. As an opener to the subject of nature and the interconnectedness of everything, we threw a yarn wrench from one to another, standing in a circle, ending up with a "web of life", with all participants representing a bird, a spider, a leaf, a tree, the sun, rain, wind etc. and showing the connections between everything. This use of physical space enabled participants to experience the subject through embodiment which makes it easier to understand the message compared to verbally communicating about it which is often extremely complex.

In another exercise called 'the human barometer' we used the physical space to find our own position regarding different issues. In this exercise, the facilitator formulates two extreme positions representing the two opposite poles of a barometer. This allows the participants to physically "take a stand" within the spectrum of the two extremes, and, during the discussion, move back and forth on the spectrum if they change their minds. Combined with questions and issues related to the participants' personal life world, this gave a wonderful frame for exploring many different issues within sustainability.

That included the more politically sensitive issues where the possibility to move along the barometer gave the opportunity to be open about uncertainties and doubts based on how their different positions simply made them feel physically.

In all the workshops we included a session of QiGong. In this session, there was a clear framework: The participants were placed in a large circle around the instructor following her instructions. Many more participants than expected joined the exercises and stayed for the whole session, even some very introverted, shy young people joined in and did these 'strange' new exercises together with the rest of us. Learning happens on many levels, and QiGong offered a wordless space to digest the day's information, and time to focus on your feelings and relax. A question like: 'are your actions affected by how you feel physically?' became much easier for the young people to reflect on, when experiencing the body through physical exercises, compared to only asking them to imagine it.

The same applies to "The Journey to Ganymede", where the young participants were also more active and reflective, as they had just "experienced" it themselves by embodying different scenarios in the exercise.

How to relate to sustainability?

First of all 'sustainability' is a watered-down word that has been crammed down the throats of many during school, and we saw powerlessness and deep impatience when we used the word too much.



Contrary, when we angled it more like 'the good life', 'justice and injustice', or 'ideas of system change' we could create a common engagement and a drive for discussion. But, as noted above, the enthusiasm for change did simply not appear.

"I try to be as morally consistent as possible. [...] I try to be as vegan as I can. I'm not that active [in protesting], because I really don't fucking care. [...] But I care about it. I think I'm trying to do my part and I can be happy with that - Youth" (Paschen, 2022, p.26).

This quite contradictory expression from a young participant frames very well the experience of what we call the 'knowledge-action gap' and the feeling of personal inadequacy in face of the complexity of the sustainability issues. In fact, we experienced a great deal of knowledge of the state of the world and a recognition of that change must happen. Many were aware that the 'Western dream' is not working - perhaps because it is not working especially well for them. *I have a lot of expensive things, but I'm depressed anyway*, as a participant said during a workshop.

Yet, these recognitions are met with much discouragement and paralysis to action. It was often talked about as if "we can't do anything ourselves" until the system or mainstream culture has changed.

This matches somehow the picture that we got about the young people from their teachers. The unpredictability of life is very present for this target group. Who am I? Where do I belong? Do I have any place in this society? Many are going through their life with big existential confusion close under their skin and tongue. In light of this, it is naturally difficult for some of them to relate to the state of the world and the issues of sustainable transition. For many of them, it is most of all about finding their own place in life: to succeed in a youth life; to reach a valuable social life; to live out some personal present dreams. The sustainable transition, on the other hand, though it may be angled to a personal cause, a creative expression etc., is much about the common good and the longer perspective. And it may conflict with the horizon that naturally occupies young people, who first and foremost need to make their own lives work.

But, as the above quote illustrated, the encounters with the participants in the workshops also provided an additional perspective to their teachers' experience of them as young people with no interest in sustainability issues. Maybe, the teachers assumed that the young participants express disinterest, but it is rather because they are missing tools for talking about it. Thus, the workshop helped in providing tools through the exercises.

The overall, and quite universal conclusion from this is that, as Paschen (2022, p.26) writes, *'[...] Youth have to be provided with tools to be able to discuss sustainability issues. [...] That is important to acknowledge because as the [...] quote [...] shows, youth voice their disinterest while simultaneously expressing their caring. This seemingly contradictory expression might only be due to the described missing tools'*. Similar to this, it is crucial to connect sustainability topics to the youth's interests, whether this might be to find one's own place in life and society, creating valuable social lives, or having the possibility and space to be creative and so on.

The role of arts and creativity in connecting empowerment and sustainability

Arts and creativity are at the centre of the project. Both in our pedagogical approach and as a “study object”: what role it plays in opening up the issues and challenges of sustainability and making it relevant. For youth in general but especially for a group of young people who experience marginalisation, and who in this project are represented by the young FGU participants. However, it could indeed also entail many other different groups in society.

Nonetheless, as described above, what especially applies to the young people is maybe their own feeling of inadequacy and lack of orientation in life. So what role can art play in connecting sustainability to the journey away from this experience and position?

This section is partly based on Johanna Paschen’s findings in her thesis in which she investigated which role art plays for youths and practitioners in youth sustainability education, and its potential to reduce marginalisation, being in this context, the above-described experiences of inadequacy, disorientation, and lack of motivation. Interestingly, these feelings are at the same time also very central in the general discussion of emotional challenges and barriers regarding sustainability.

Through Johanna’s interviews with the facilitators from NOAH and LØS, the teachers and young participants at FGU, as well as other sustainability actors and a diversity consultant, she created this thematic map showing the different roles of art and creativity in youth sustainability education.

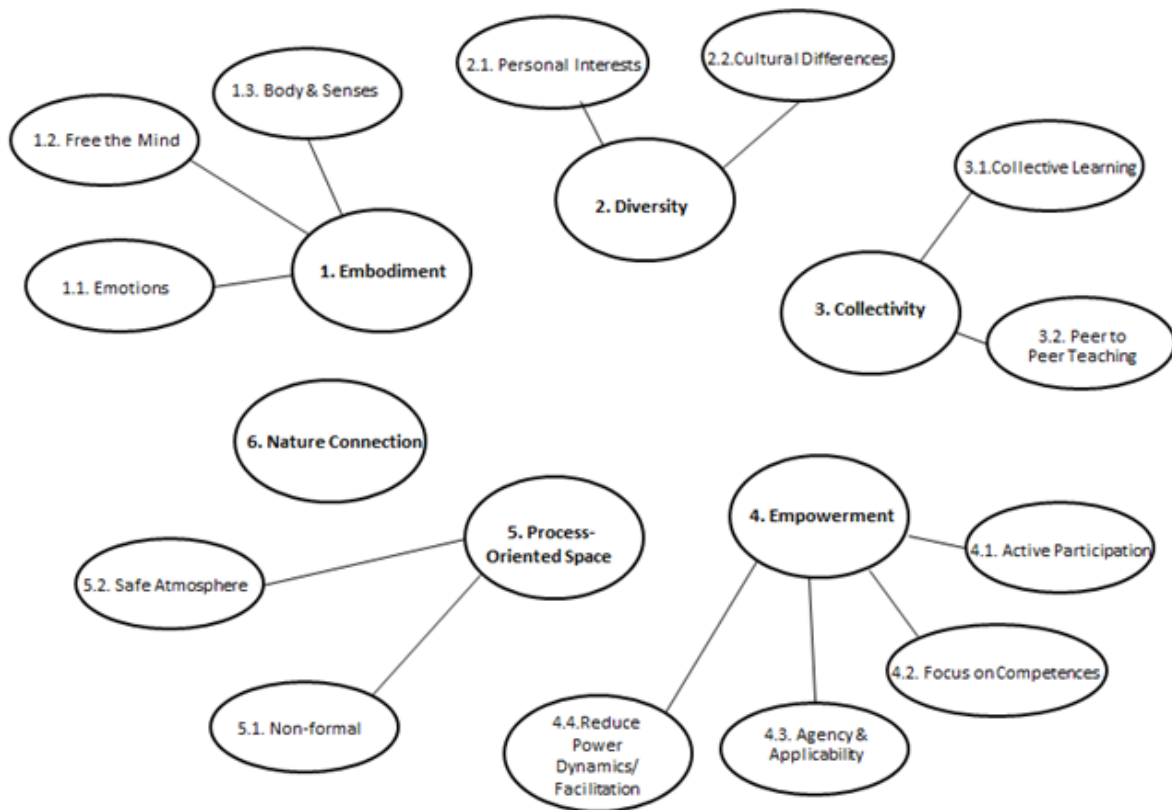


Figure 1: Thematic map, showing the six themes and their codes regarding which role art plays in youth sustainability education (Paschen, 2022, p.31).

Summarising her findings she writes:

'The findings suggest that the role of art is a tool for embodiment, diversity, collectivity, empowerment, process-oriented space, and nature connection. This suggests that the interconnectedness of the themes in transforming youth education for sustainability is crucial. Furthermore, these themes revealed that art in youth sustainability education can transform the dominant cultural assumptions of scientism, ethnocentrism, individualism, top-down approach, progress and result-oriented space, as well as anthropocentrism and human-nature superiority. This research shows that using art as an approach in youth sustainability education transforms the dominant cultural assumptions and thus reduces marginalisation' (Paschen, 2022, p.11).

Let's break it down to three perspectives (which of course overlap): 1. Art as something people experience, 2. Art as something (young) people do, and 3. The work with art as a pedagogical approach.

Art as something the young people experience

“You can see all these numbers, [...] facts [about sustainability] but that might not make you want to do something about it [...]. But if you see a piece of art, a play, hear a song or you see a strange sculpture made of old textiles [...] you might start feeling, I got to do something - Art Teacher” (Paschen, 2022, p.19).

This reflection from an art teacher shows that art has the potential to facilitate emotions in the participants. In Johanna's interviews *'participants elaborated that evoking emotions such as care and love for nature but also anger and anxiety through art is crucial to creating interest in sustainability'* (Paschen, 2022, p.19).

In this way, art is a bridge to the senses, and thus to emotions and at the end to the intellect, but in a way that it defies scientism, i.e. the idea that the problem can only be captured and solved by intellectual and rational calculations. A sustainable being in the world indeed depends on the emotional connection to the things that we want to protect; on the ability to feel, acknowledge and hold difficult emotions such as anger or fear; and on the ability to embrace beauty, joy and wonder. This is quite difficult to facilitate without art.

Art as something the young people do

When young people work with an art form, whether it is dance, theatre, music or design, they are creators. This is at the core of the creative study programmes at FGU Østerbro, where the teachers use the creative subjects to create awareness and pride in the young people of both their abilities and their individual expressions and bring them to the front. This is also at the core of creating action competence: the experience of one's own creative power.

Furthermore, art and creative work is process oriented. The young people train themselves in being explorative, working in a field of many unknowns, and putting pieces together to end up with a result. All the phases and elements of the creative process are conducive to a state of mind which is more capable of navigating in the field of sustainability which is by essence characterised by uncertainty, being in the unknown, navigating complexity etc.

A third element of art work is embodiment, both as working and understanding through the body and senses, freeing the mind and working with emotions. As an artist in Johanna's interviews said: *“We don't differentiate between artistic method and sustainability discussion. [...] But we try to use the art methods to gain some insights and feel experiences that we can then talk about [...] in connection to some concepts - Artist” (Paschen, 2022, p.25).*

When the young people were working with their creative processes, they were able to give expression to some of the more complex aspects of the things about sustainability that we had shared with them. Also, the art work made it possible for the young people to think differently and come up with very unexpected answers. For example, the theatre class started with the idea of making a show about some people living in a trash city in a dystopian future, and at some point finding a treasure. But not what this treasure was going to be.

In the process, they came to the idea that it was an old walkman with the song Come Together by the Beatles, and when they played it, everybody started to reject the trash and leave this city in which they had been living under the spell of a corrupt demagogue! This idea combined the stories of trash and suppression, a people's emancipation and the message of togetherness and community. A very strong message, indeed even perfect for a political campaign which, as such, would have been quite inaccessible for young people from the FGU.

The work with art as a pedagogical approach

"First of all, you have to give a safe space to be without any restriction and without starting with speculation about environment and sustainability -Sustainability Educator." [...] 'Art can create a safe, trustful space, and a feeling of home which is crucial before content-related actions are taken' (Paschen, 2022, p.29).

It is obvious how arts and creativity work as a pedagogical approach to learn about sustainability. It is an entrance to open up for reflections and discussions; it is supporting action competence and the belief in one's own contribution; and it increases the fun in learning and hence the motivation to go into the subject. Combining artwork with reflection can help break down and discuss complex sustainability topics. As Johanna's interviews concluded, this leads to more active participation, whereas *'in contrast, participants mentioned that in formal educational settings there are often much passive learning'* (Paschen, 2022, p. 25).

Furthermore, working through art and creativity gives the possibility to create a safe space for the participants with less demands and restrictions to limit their individual interests and expression, and it has the potential to enhance community feeling. Very importantly, the artwork has the potential to reduce the conventional power dynamics in the group, both between the educator and participants and between participants who are intellectually stronger or weaker. Simply because it gives other conditions of communication, expression and talent. As Johanna points out, *actively participating youth can influence and co-create the educational setting which also increases learning efficiency* (Paschen, 2022, p.25).

When the subject is embodied in material, a host of learning possibilities show. The young participants from the theatre class were offered a big load of used cardboard boxes and plastic waste to make something for their show. For days and weeks, the theatre hall was a chaos of boxes, plastic etc. while they tried out ideas, but slowly concepts formed of how to build a scenography which made sense both aesthetically, practically, and dramaturgically. This creative work not only gave the experience of creative power and finding ways through chaos as aforementioned but also a concrete and embodied learning about resources and recycling and about what waste is, when it is waste, and how it can be turned into something useful and meaningful.

4. Lessons learned about creating a community of practice of this kind

This was the very first time creating a Community of Practice (CoP) for both NOAH, LØS and FGU. It has been a rich experience with many lessons learned, both what worked and what did not work so well. In the following section, the lessons learned will be described as well as what is important to consider in making a CoP in the future.

Presence and time enough for NOAH and LØS

First of all, it is clear that creating a CoP requires a lot of time, energy, and continuity from the participants.

An essential lesson learned was that in order to make real change and impactful cooperation, NOAH and LØS would need to be even more present with the young participants and teachers from the very beginning and throughout a longer period of time. This is essential in order to make the young participants feel safe around us - and it is a crucial factor that would have allowed NOAH and LØS to be able to design the workshops better and based on the young participants' needs, perspectives, knowledge and what makes them feel engaged in the CoP and in the topic.

It would have been ideal if NOAH and LØS could have directly participated in the young participants' classes over a longer period in order to get to know the young people better and to experience exactly how they work. It would have given all participants stronger ties and thus also deeper reflections with the young people - and it could have provided greater insight into what we could learn from the young people and their way of being in the world.

The presence and cooperation with the FGU teachers

What worked really well for the CoP was the personal contact between one representative from NOAH/LØS and one representative from FGU, who had a personal motivation and had the ability to move things forward in terms of both communication and progress.

However, the CoP was clearly influenced by some of the lived realities of being a teacher at FGU. Despite the teachers' big motivation for participating in the CoP, their reality was still influenced by being part of a formal institutional framework which means a lack of time and a generally big workload throughout the week.

This resulted in the teachers not being fully present in the provided workshops, as they took the chance to use this time on other work tasks. If they would have been more present, they would have had the chance to deepen their understanding of NOAH' and LØS' approaches and knowledge as well as to get an experience and understanding of how the young participants received it.



Furthermore, it would have allowed the teachers to give NOAH and LØS deeper feedback after the workshops and provide inputs on what they would personally do in concrete situations to reach and engage the young participants. This would have deepened NOAH's and LØS's knowledge of working with this target group even more.

On the other hand, the lesser participation in the classes affected the relevance of what the people from NOAH and LØS could offer, as there was not enough knowledge of what the teachers were presently working with in class.

As a result of the lesser participation of both sides in each other's activities, the organisations experienced the teachers not being completely aligned with our concept of the CoP and sustainability: that our respective work with the young participants and the topic must be intertwined and worked together very closely. But the experiences showed that the workshops did not become part of the young participant's ongoing creative process in their respective classes. Instead, the workshops could only work as a detached input. This was evident in how the theatre plot was developed: there was mostly a dialogue and process between the young participants and the FGU teachers. Thus, a more interwoven cooperation with NOAH and LØS would be great for improvement.

If we have had more time together, the CoP's different approaches and professional knowledge would have been spread and shared even better, and that would have made the CoP even more mutually beneficial. But all this depends on funding and the acknowledgement of the teachers' need for extra time.

Difference in approaches

In a CoP you experience diversity at all levels: different approaches, teacher views, young participant views, personalities, resources, etc. It requires openness and willingness to fully learn from each others' organisations and differences.

Evidently, this requires a lot of time: it requires time for shared exploration and reflections to become conscious of how the organisations differ from each other in terms of approaches, agendas, and focus points despite their many similarities. This is an important learning in order to find out how to use the different approaches consciously in an enriching way.

Alongside this, an important lesson learned is to make sure that the expectations are clear and aligned for all involved when creating a CoP. Especially for the young participants, but also for all those engaging in the CoP, making sure that everyone's best talents and knowledge can come into play in a meaningful way.

Engaging the young participants

It is evident from the experience that it is important to create a CoP which is built and centred around the young people's interests. It is essential to make it clear how the gained knowledge provided by the organisations through the workshops is applicable in real life - and in their personal lives. In this way, they have an understanding of the point of the CoP, and perhaps even feel motivated to engage in the common learning process.



Circumstances

Finally, the CoP was created during Covid-19, which made it difficult to create a physical CoP during the first year. We could not meet, the teachers and the school were quite exhausted and still behind schedule, and several potential CoP participants, like the FGU young people's organisation 'Vi er Modstrøm', were too busy resuming their work. As mentioned, many different circumstances have influenced the CoP, and we have learned the lesson of staying flexible in the process and adjusting accordingly.

Future ideas for a future CoP

From integrating the lessons learned from the CoP, ideas for a future CoP start to emerge. Firstly, it would have been enriching to engage different external artists as well as 'Vi er Modstrøm' in the CoP, which this time was not possible due to lack of time, funding etc.

Furthermore, in a possible future cooperation, it would be ideal to engage in more nature-based practices in the workshops and to generally spend more time with the young participants in nature. This did not happen in the YINT CoP with FGU Østerbro due to the fact that this school is situated in the middle of the city centre and going to nature requires a lot of travelling time in order to get outside the city. Even going to a park seemed too much based on teachers' experiences, believing that the young people would not participate or take the chance to leave the activities, once being outside. This was a new experience for us as nature-based and holistic educators, who are normally doing a great part of our activities within nature.

Finally, a dream scenario would be to have the young participants for a longer time. This could be a theme week or being with the young participants (and teachers) once a week. This would provide time to slowly unfold the topic, with few repetitive exercises, with a starting point in their lives and interests. And it would have allowed us to learn a great deal more from the young people. This would of course require more funding.

Leading questions in creating a future CoP could be:

- What motivates us and gives meaning and value to the collaboration?
- How can we lead from this motivation/meaning in the collaboration?
- Which tasks and roles should be covered and by whom?
- Hvordan kan alle involverede bidrage til at formålet med CoPen bliver opretholdt (tidsperspektiv, evaluering, aftaler)?
- What strengths are present in the collaboration? How can they come into play in the most beneficial way, so we ensure that we learn from them?
- What is most important for us to give young participants an experience/feeling of?

Ressources

Learn more about the Youth in Transition project on: www.youthintransition.eu

Here you can find:

- A teacher training handbook with offline and blended learning approaches to teaching sustainability in the four dimensions, economy, ecology, social and world view.
- An app with the handbook "to go" as well as educational quizzes and a forum for educators as well as for their youth participants.

Johanna Paschen's master's thesis on art, sustainability and marginalisation

Paschen, J. (2022). Can Art in Sustainability Education Challenge Marginalisation? Conversations with Youths and Practitioners in a European Context. 1–56.
<https://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/search/publication/9097261>

