

The Functions of Urban Space in Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps Projects

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Abstract

Urban space plays an important role in Erasmus+ or European Solidarity Corps projects, be it youth exchanges, cooperation partnerships, or volunteer work. Urban spaces can be viewed as places of encounter and exchange, but also places of interaction between those involved. One of the characteristics of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects in the youth sector is the use of non-formal methods in an informal learning environment. For example, methods of dialogue to foster reflection are used in various project activities so that project participants can learn skills that are not taught in formal settings such as schools. Hence, urban space plays a central role, be it in the choice of location or in the use of public space for the project implementation itself. This article examines the functions and uses of urban space in selected Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps projects that took place in Austria in 2021-2023. In this context, seven completed projects by Austrian organisations from the current Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programme period serve as case studies.

Keywords

urban space; Erasmus+; European Solidarity Corps; projects; youth.

1. Introduction

The Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps constitute the learning mobility programme of the European Union for young people, youth workers, youthwork organisations, institutions, and professionals working in the youth sector. As the programme promotes intercultural dialogue, equity, inclusion, and diversity, urban spaces can play an important role in Erasmus+ Youth projects or European Solidarity Corps activities. Whether youth exchanges, cooperation partnerships, or voluntary work, urban spaces can be viewed as places of encounter and cultural exchange, but also as places of interaction between those involved. One of the characteristics of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects in the youth field is the use and implementation of informal¹ and

non-formal² learning methods. These include, for example, methods of dialogue to foster reflection, which are used in project activities so that participants learn skills that are not taught in formal settings such as schools. Informal learning is rarely recorded nor certified, even though it happens daily. In the projects funded by Erasmus+ or the European Solidarity Corps, participants learn new skills such as time management or a deeper understanding of diversity and inclusion. Thus, urban spaces are given a major role, be it the selection of the location (i.e., where the project activity takes place) or the use of public space for the project, and these factors are all taken into account in the project implementation. In this article, I examine the function of urban spaces in selected Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps projects in Austria (OeAD,

1 - Informal learning implies learning from daily activities and everyday experiences which are not organised or structured by immediate objectives, time schedules, or learning support. Learning may occur unintentionally from a learner's perspective (Erasmus+, 2023a, p.430).

2 - Non-formal learning takes place in planned learning activities, where some form of learning support is given, without being part of formal education and training systems (Erasmus+, 2023a, p.430).

2023c). The questions to be addressed are: How is urban space used in the implementation of these projects? What role does urban space play in realising these projects? For analysis, I refer to completed projects of youth exchanges, youth participation activities, a small-scale project, and a solidarity project by Austrian organisations from the current Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programme period (i.e., from 2021) as case studies.

2. Funding Schemes by the European Commission

2.1. What Is Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps Funding Scheme?

Whereas Erasmus+ (2023a) is the European Union's funding programme for the period 2021-2027 supporting education, training, youth, and sports mobility as well as projects in the above-mentioned areas in Europe, the European Solidarity Corps (2023b) is an international volunteer programme funded by the European Commission, intended for young people who wish to visit another country individually or in teams to work for a charitable purpose.

2.2. Erasmus+ Youth in Action

Erasmus+ Youth is the successor programme to Erasmus+ Youth in Action (which ran from 2013 to 2020). The aim of the previous programme was to promote and empower participation, active citizenship, and skills development of young people, youth workers, and youth leaders through non-formal education towards acquiring the skills to counter the challenges of their respective societies. The said programme intended to contribute to the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities as well as to the development of youth organisations, youth centres, and youth groups. Overall, it contributed to the democratisation of society with young people as active citizens in Europe and beyond (SALTO-YOUTH South East Europe Resource Centre, 2018; European Commission, 2020).

2.3. Erasmus+ Youth

The current programme, Erasmus+ Youth, has an estimated annual budget of 26.2 billion Euros. It supports projects in the areas of higher education, vocational training, school education (including early childhood education and care), and adult education, as well as in the youth and sports sectors.

Additionally, it finances mobilities and projects across Europe. Erasmus+ Youth offers funding opportunities for national and transnational projects, mobilities of individual young people or youth workers, as well as innovative and cross-sectoral cooperation between organisations in the youth sector. It provides opportunities: in youth exchanges, young people from different countries for example exchange ideas on socially relevant topics in a country other than their own. Youth Participation Activities anchor the participation of young people in social and democratic life. DiscoverEU Inclusion, which is a European Union initiative, offers young people the opportunity to travel across Europe by train. Erasmus+ also offers opportunities for youth workers. Mobility projects for youth workers are projects that create training opportunities for youth workers and enable exchange and contact between people working in the youth sector. Organisations in the youth sector can also benefit from Erasmus+. Cooperation partnerships and small-scale partnerships aim at contributing to the implementation of the EU youth strategy 2019 – 2027 (European Union, 2018), which enable the participation, exchange, and empowerment of young people, especially those affected by social exclusion. Cooperation partnerships support the development, transfer, and implementation of innovative practices in the youth sector and ensure joint initiatives to promote collaboration and exchange of experiences at the European level. A particular focus of small-scale partnerships lies on strengthening cross-sector collaboration, creating greater synergies between different areas of action (see also Table 1: Characteristics of the Key Actions in Erasmus+ Youth) that are important to young people (Erasmus+, 2023; European Commission, 2023a; European Commission, 2023b; European Solidarity Corps, 2023).

Ultimately, there are several goals for Erasmus+ Youth funding:

- With an Erasmus+ mobility or project, the key skills (i.e., multilingual, personal, or social skills, entrepreneurship competence, competence in cultural awareness and expression, and digital as well as literacy competence, etc.) of young people should improve, especially those of young people with fewer opportunities (SALTO Training and Co-

operation Resource Centre, 2023).

- The programme aims at promoting participation of young people in democratic life and the labour market in Europe.
- Projects and trainings are conceived to promote active citizenship and intercultural dialogue as well as social integration and solidarity, particularly by increasing offers to support the learning mobility of young people, those working in youth work or in youth organizations, and by strengthening links between the youth sector and the labour market.
- Furthermore, the activities should inspire quality improvements in youth work, particularly through increased collaboration between organisations working in the youth sector and/or other stakeholders.
- Erasmus+ complements youth policy reforms at local, regional, and national levels and promotes the development of knowledge and evidence-based youth policies as well as the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, through improved policy cooperation, better use of EU transparency and recognition instruments, and the dissemination of best practices.
- Moreover, the programme should strengthen the international dimension of youth activities and improve the capacities of youth work professionals and youth organisations in supporting young people, complementing the external actions of the EU and other international organisations by promoting mobility and cooperation of actors from programme and partner countries (European Commission, 2023a, p.12).

In each funding period, the programme sets different priorities. For 2021-2027, a strong focus lies on social inclusion and diversity, green transformation and digital transition, as well as on promoting the participation of young people in democratic life. It supports priorities and activities set out in the European Education Area (European Commission, 2023c), the Digital Education Action Plan (European Commission, 2023d), and the European Skills Agenda (European Commission 2023e). The programme

also supports the European Pillar of Social Rights (European Commission 2023f), implements the EU Youth Strategy 2019 - 2027 (European Union, 2018), and develops a European dimension in youth. Each country can furthermore choose national priorities, which are then given great importance in the projects, training, and mobilities. In Austria, for example, there are four additional national priorities for the youth sector (OeAD, 2023a, 2023b) that are to be specifically addressed in cooperation partnerships and small-scale partnership projects: promoting quality, innovation, and recognition of youth work; strengthening young people's civic engagement, initiative, and entrepreneurial thinking; strengthening the employability of young people; and strengthening the connections between research, policy, and practice (European Commission, 2023a, p.7pp).

Erasmus+ offers different options for projects and activities for organisations or institutions. For example, Erasmus+ Youth finances mobilities for young people and young adults aged 13 to 30 who are interested in intercultural exchange. It furthermore offers training courses for youthwork professionals and promotes transnational cooperation between youth organisations. There are several actions, but only two are applicable to the Erasmus+ youth sector on a national level: *Key Action 1: Learning Mobility of Individuals* (European Commission, 2023a, p.39pp) and *Key Action 2: Cooperation among organisations and institutions* (European Commission, 2023a, p.213pp) (see also Table 1: Characteristics of the Key Actions in Erasmus+ Youth). In both *Key Actions*, mobilities and learning, training, and teaching activities in the projects should bring positive and long-lasting impacts for participants and participating organisations. In addition, there are other programs not included in this list that are centrally managed by the European Executive Agency for Education and Culture, based in Brussels.

Table 1: Characteristics of Key Actions in Erasmus+ Youth (European Commission, 2023a)

Key Action 1: Learning Mobility of Individuals	Key Action 2: Cooperation among organisations and institutions
<p>In youth exchanges, young people should be engaged and encouraged to become active citizens with a connection to the European project. Furthermore, youth exchanges promote intercultural dialogue and the reduction of stereotypes, create a space for the development of competencies and skills, and raise awareness of socially relevant topics and participation. The advantages of youth exchanges include, for example, the relatively short duration of projects and mobilities with a focus on non-formal education and the inclusion of participants with fewer opportunities, who can gain their first international experience in Erasmus+.</p>	<p>Small-scale partnerships projects in the youth sector are intended to make it easier for smaller organisations and hard-to-reach target groups to access the Erasmus+ programme. With a low entry threshold, small-scale partnership projects are aimed at less experienced institutions and programme newcomers with limited organisational capacity. The action supports flexible formats, combining activities of a transnational and national nature, but always with a European dimension. This means that institutions should have more resources available to reach people with increased support needs. Small-scale partnership projects can build transnational networks and exploit synergies with or between local, regional, national, and international measures.</p>
<p>Mobility projects for youth workers support youth workers in their professional development. Youth workers' participation in mobility of professional activities should have a comprehensible impact both on their organisations and on their daily work with young people, as the quality of youth work at local, regional, national, and European level will be strengthened by non-formal and informal learning experiences. Professional mobility contributes to the goals of the EU Youth Strategy (European Union, 2018), and the European Youth Work Agenda (2023). Another goal is to promote the quality, innovation, and recognition of youth work.</p>	<p>Cooperation partnerships projects in the youth sector support the development, transfer, and implementation of innovative practices in the youth sector, as well as joint initiatives to promote collaboration, peer learning, and exchange of experiences at a European level. The aim of cooperation partnership projects is to increase the quality and relevance of the institutions' activities, to build and strengthen partner networks, to increase capacities for cross-border cooperation and internationalisation of activities as well as to develop or exchange new practices, methods, and ideas.</p>

<p>Youth Participation Activities are intended to create opportunities for young people to participate in social life and to anchor the idea of participation among them. Disadvantaged young people should be increasingly involved in projects in order to strengthen their awareness of European values, including respect for democratic principles, human dignity, unity and diversity, to enter intercultural dialogue, to contribute to integration processes and the implementation of European youth goals (European Union, 2023), and to foster young people’s digital and media skills. Critical thinking, along with the handling of information and the recognition of misinformation, should be promoted. The activities aim to help young people and decision-makers at local, regional, national, and transnational levels to enter a comprehensive conversation and contribute to the EU youth dialogue (European Union, 2023).</p>	
<p>DiscoverEU is an initiative of the European Union that offers young people aged 18+ the opportunity to travel around Europe by train. The project aims to connect Europe’s youth with their European identity and to strengthen their personal development and self-perception as European citizens through travel. There are application rounds twice a year, in which at least 35,000 travel tickets are awarded directly by the European Commission. The winners can choose between a flexible and a fixed travel booking. Young people can travel through Europe for free for a maximum of one month.</p>	
<p>With DiscoverEU Inclusion, young people aged 18 who cannot travel (or only with considerable effort) due to social, economic, geographical, health, or other hurdles have the opportunity to discover Europe by train. At DiscoverEU Inclusion, the project is implemented by an organisation or informal group of young people who accompany young participants in the planning, organisation, and implementation of such a learning trip. In addition to travel tickets, costs for accommodation and meals as well as a travel companion and personal assistance are also supported.</p>	

Table 2: Characteristics of the Key Actions in the European Solidarity Corps (European Commission, 2023b)

<p>Solidarity projects are bottom-up activities developed and implemented by a group of young people to address key challenges in their communities. Young people reflect about what is needed in their social environment (in their town, in their district, or in their region) and on how their project can contribute to these specific goals (to address these specific issues).</p>	<p>In Volunteering projects, young people can contribute to the daily work of organisations specialised in solidarity activities for the benefit of communities. The activities can take place either abroad or in the country of residence of the participants. Organisations can include one or more volunteers in their team. The locations are diverse, and they range from youth and cultural centres, after-school care centres, kindergartens, and care facilities to senior citizens' homes. Any young person can apply for such a volunteer project. No certificates or expert knowledge are required. The focus is set equally on learning experiences for volunteers and on benefits for the organisations, their clients, and the local community.</p>
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2.4. European Solidarity Corps

The European Solidarity Corps (see also Table 2: Characteristics of the Key Actions in European Solidarity Corps) is another funding programme that creates opportunities for young people who want to volunteer or work on projects in their own country or abroad that benefit communities and people across Europe. In addition, there are other programs not included in this list that are centrally managed by the European Executive Agency for Education and Culture, based in Brussels. The European Solidarity Corps is a funding programme of the European Commission that has existed since 1996 and has been developed from the previous programme, the so-called European Voluntary Service (EVS), which in turn was part of the previous Youth in Action programme. Organisations and young people alike benefit from this project type. Organisations and companies can recruit young people from all over Europe as volunteers. The programme enables non-profit organisations and companies who are active in the social sector to recruit young, committed people to their team. Various formats offer the opportunity to realise projects that equally benefit local communities and people

across Europe. Young people (in general 18 to 30 years old) can get involved in charitable projects in their own country or abroad. With this involvement of young people, the programme promotes a wide range of activities and projects that have a positive impact on the community. These can range from helping the disadvantaged, to humanitarian assistance, to contributing to health and environmental actions across the EU and beyond. The European Solidarity Corps funds volunteer work (including humanitarian aid) and solidarity projects. This solidarity commitment ranges from supporting disadvantaged people to humanitarian aid to participation in health and environmental activities within and outside the EU. The programme not only offers young people the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to society, but also to gain valuable experience and develop new skills. They can take part in solidarity activities to overcome social challenges. To participate in the European Solidarity Corps, organisations must obtain a quality seal, certifying their ability to carry out high-quality solidarity activities in line with the principles, objectives, and performance requirements of the programme (European Commission, 2023b).

3. Selected Case Studies of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps

The descriptions or characteristics of the Key Actions described above have shown that the activities can be carried out in the different Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps project types. Over the last 15 years, the impact and the long-term effects of European youth programmes (Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps) in Austria and Europe have been analysed at the national and transnational levels by the Research-based analysis of European Youth programmes (RAY) network (2023). The RAY network is an open and self-governing European research network that includes national agencies³ of the Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps programmes and their research partners. The network carries out joint transnational and individual national research activities related to Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps to contribute to quality assurance and quality development in the implementation of the European youth programmes, evidence-based and research-based development of youth policies in the youth sector in Europe, the recognition of non-formal education and learning in the youth sector, and in particular to a better understanding of the interplay between international youth work, learning mobility and the dialogue between research, policy and practice in the youth sector. The RAY network has produced reports, fact sheets, and presentations, which play an important role in fostering mutual understanding and knowledge management for the programme.

National contextualisation is required in order to understand why the various projects were selected and examined in greater detail in this article. The national RAY report, written by Gadinger, Mayerl and Fennes (2020) presented the key results of the monitoring of the European Union youth programme Erasmus+ Youth in Action (from 2014-2020) in Austria. The focus was placed on a comparison

of data that was collected at regular intervals throughout the programme period, using standardised online surveys: project participants and project managers partook in surveys in 2015/2016, 2017/2018, and 2019/2020 on the effects of Erasmus+ Youth in Action projects, using largely consistent questionnaires. In this study, the authors reported that 30% of project participants at the time took part in youth exchanges, 18% in mobility of professionals programmes and 20% in the European Voluntary Service (today European Solidarity Corps). Before participating in the project, 49% of participants had already taken part in a project that was funded by Erasmus+ Youth in Action or a predecessor programme, 17% had been participating in a similar youth project that was funded by another EU programme. 40% had never taken part in a youth project run by the EU or other sponsors. Study participants indicated that they had learned something new on a range of topics in youth exchanges, while 'cultural diversity' (82%) and 'personal development' (61%) were the most important topics. In *European Voluntary Service*, the most important topics were 'personal development' (83%), 'cultural diversity', 'non-formal education, non-formal learning, informal learning' (69%), 'solidarity with people facing difficulties' (54%), and 'social inclusion/inclusion of disadvantaged or excluded people' (50%). For *mobility of professionals*, the following topics stood out: 'cultural diversity' (69%), 'social inclusion/inclusion of disadvantaged or excluded people' (62%), 'solidarity with people facing difficulties' (59%), 'active citizenship and participation in civil society and democratic life' (52%), and 'non-formal education, non-formal learning, informal learning' (52%).

These figures are statistics from the previous generation of the programme. Nevertheless, they show that Erasmus+ activities have a significant impact on the lives of many participants. The positive impact of Erasmus+ is also evident in relation to urban space. This can be proven, for example,

3 - The EU works with national agencies to bring the Erasmus+ programme as close to participants as possible. The national agencies are based in EU Member States and third countries associated with the programme. Their roles can vary from providing information on Erasmus+, selecting projects to be funded, monitoring and evaluating Erasmus+, supporting applicants and participants, cooperating with other national agencies and the EU, to promoting the Erasmus+ exchange of success stories and best practices. In Austria, Erasmus+ is managed by the OeAD GmbH – an agency promoting education and internationalisation.

by the Erasmus+ project entitled 'Youth in Urban Space'⁴, which was implemented by the Association of Viennese Youth Centres. Within their project, the project consortium developed recommendations for the city administration and youth work in urban areas. The project results show that urban space is an important part of young people's lives. Urban space is used by young people particularly for their mobility needs but is also considered an important space for interacting with other people. Urban space, likewise, is one of the most important environments for young people. As the project mentioned and the case studies selected for this article make clear, urban space plays an important role in project implementation as well as in the project activities, which is not evident in the statistics mentioned above.

3.1. Erasmus+ Youth Projects

The projects were selected through the central and publicly accessible dissemination platform "Erasmus+ Project Results Platform"⁵, which provides a comprehensive overview of the projects supported by the programme in all key actions of Erasmus+. The platform contains the project descriptions and project results as well as a link to project websites. It furthermore provides access to success stories about outstanding results in terms of political relevance, communication potential, impact, or project design. It includes a wealth of good-practice examples and presents well-managed projects that have brought very good results. For European Solidarity Corps Projects, the European Youth Portal⁶ is used. On this portal, projects are listed that take into account the need for solidarity, intercultural and interpersonal understanding, and active participation of young people in solving social problems.

The selected project examples are briefly summarised in the respective boxes below. The exact project description is listed underneath the boxes. Six project examples were selected for Erasmus+. These contain a total of three youth exchange mobilities, two youth participation activities, and one small-scale project.

3.1.1. Youth Exchanges

The following three projects **Jezik prez granic** and **Eco-Logic** were both youth exchanges and were selected as case studies because in both of these projects, the project beneficiaries promoted intercultural dialogue and the reduction of stereotypes, a space for the development of competencies and skills, as well as awareness of socially relevant topics and participation. In **Jezik prez granic**, for example, the topic of borders was addressed. The project emphasized that boundaries are not only physical in nature but can also exist in our minds. Physical space, thus, became a learning space. At the **Eco:Logic** project used public space in an urban environment to promote positive examples of sustainable living, responsibility towards the planet, and sustainable development.

The aim of the project **Jezik prez granic** (Language without borders)⁷ was to make participants aware of the importance of languages as a means of communication across borders. Special attention was paid to regional and micro languages, the necessity of which is often questioned. The youth exchange addressed issues such as prejudices and racism experiences, and it worked with the project participants on these topics. Borders not only refer to national (physical) borders but are often formed in people's minds: Borders between cultures, between people of different mother tongues or even between members of different minorities. During the youth exchange, participants were encouraged to get to know other cultures, to appreciate their value and, subsequently, to realise the importance of their own identity. They used informal learning methods, such as organising and holding a workshop that focused on the issue of the importance of minority languages. Another point of focus was the use of different media as channels of information. In addition, various activities and an excursion were organised. An 'exchange market' was also on the agenda, where all participants could present their club as well as their homeland and traditions using various presentation

4 - <https://www.jugendzentren.at/themen-projekte/youth-in-urban-space/>

5 - <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects>

6 - https://youth.europa.eu/home_en

7 - <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2022-1-AT01-KA152-YOU-000071605>

methods. The youth exchange offered a good opportunity for personal development and for gathering new ideas through intercultural exchange on a selected location in urban space. The aim was that participants should bring new insights to their home countries and try to introduce them into society.

Another youth exchange was **Eco:Logic**⁸, which promoted positive examples of sustainable living, responsibility towards the planet, and sustainable development. Throughout the project, participants had the opportunity to reflect about the importance of sustainable living and to get to know some sustainable living practices related to fair investments, local production, and other topics. Participants were enabled to reflect on their personal lifestyles and consider how to apply environmentally friendly practices such as separating waste, reusing and recycling, using public transport, or buying second-hand clothes in their daily urban environments.

3.1.2. Youth Participation Activities

Two projects from the Youth Participation Activity programme were selected because they demonstrated how urban or public space can be used to provide young people with opportunities to participate in social and political life. The two projects have strengthened European awareness of the participants, while they entered a comprehensive conversation and contributed to the EU youth dialogue. Both in Salzburg Youth Parliament 2021 and in Connecting EU with Youth, public space was used for simulating a federal-state council assembly. Young people were shown what it means to participate socially and politically in social and everyday life. They have been given an active role and helped to change public space, while making it their own.

In the youth-participation activity **Salzburg Youth Parliament 2021**⁹, the Salzburg Youth Parliament invited young people aged 16 – 20 from throughout the federal state of Salzburg to play the role of state council assembly members. Technical committees were simulated. This project

was both a participation project and a project to implement EU Youth Dialogue at the regional level. Young people were involved in the first planning and implementation steps in the form of a steering group and thus they were enabled to deal intensively with the European Youth Goals too. The project contributed to the further development of youth dialogue and its implementation at the regional level. Experts from the state administration explained how the different political levels interact and where the legislative competences lie. In the course of the project, young people had the opportunity to experience directly how political decisions are made. Political decision-makers and state administration experts who met with the young participants were informed directly about the concerns of young people and the young people in turn were given the opportunity to put new skills into practice in various activities.

The project **Connecting EU with Youth**¹⁰ aimed at ensuring the necessary translation of the main topics of the 9th EU Youth Dialogue participation round into an Austrian context. In accordance with the objectives of the EU Youth Dialogue, the project aimed at sparking participation and creating open spaces for young people and decision-makers to meet. Different dialogue activities and a national youth conference facilitated the exchange between high-level decision-makers and young people. The training for trainers gave young people tools to create spaces for participation. Through the workshops, the project furthermore aimed to contribute to the broad, qualitative consultation phase of the EU Youth Dialogue. The close connection to the Austrian National Working Group on Youth Participation and Youth Dialogue ensures the sustainable use of project results and innovative methods developed within the project.

8 - <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2021-2-AT01-KA152-YOU-000039292>

9 - <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2021-1-AT01-KA154-YOU-000020379>

10 - <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2021-2-AT01-KA154-YOU-000039103>

3.1.3. Small-Scale Project

The following small-scale project was selected because it demonstrates that urban space is important not only for mobilities in the context of youth exchanges and youth-participation activities, but also for project activities. In the EU Drug Policy Training & Strategy Series for Young People, the project beneficiary used urban space to organise a training series that would equip young people with the necessary knowledge, skills, connections, and strategies to participate in the EU drug policy process.

In contrast to the other projects highlighted above, the project **EU Drug Policy Training & Strategy Series for Young People**¹¹ was a small-scale project that intended to increase the capacity of youth-led organisations to engage in drug policy reform and of young people to take an active role in advocacy at the European Union level. They used urban space to organise a training series that would equip young people with the necessary knowledge, skills, connections, and strategies to engage with the EU Drug Policy Creation process. The training had the dual outcome of increasing the capacity of both individuals and organisations to meaningfully engage with the EU Drug Policy.

3.2. European Solidarity Corps Projects

According to the report *4Thought for Solidarity* (Bacliija Knoch and Nicodemi, 2020), published by the SALTO European Solidarity Corps, there is no common definition for or understanding of the concept of solidarity at the European level, neither in official documents, in research or in practical manuals and publications, nor in direct conversations with young people, practitioners, researchers, and policy makers. The understanding of solidarity largely depends on a person's personal and professional background and the context(s) in which he or she has lived. Any concept that relates to personal experiences and views, therefore, makes it very difficult to gain a common understanding of solidarity and find common ground with others. "What solidarity makes, is culture-specific, and each culture can

shape a different understanding of what solidarity means – and this not only applies to the 'national culture', which refers to countries, nations and languages, but also to subcultures and cultures of communities of people and their values. What solidarity highlights is the diversity of 'European culture' by the different areas of life brought together by shared values and a common approach to the concept" (Bacliija Knoch and Nicodemi, 2020, p.57). Unity in diversity seems to underpin the concept of solidarity. The selected project created and used urban space to give an opportunity to promote solidarity.

In the European solidarity project **Music4Everyone**, urban space was used as a space of learning how to become solidaristic. In the Music4Everyone project, children's self-esteem was strengthened through learning musical instruments and through other non-formal educational activities. The project participants who worked on a voluntary basis in the European Solidarity Project had the opportunity to take part in all activities related to music and extracurricular education and to help shape public space.

Music4Everyone¹² offered a wide range of activities for Romani children in Kosovo. Through learning music instruments and through other non-formal educational activities, children experienced how to gain more self-esteem and how to become an engaged member of society. The project included other activities such as an after-school youth club, learning by doing, raising awareness about the importance of education, and other activities relevant to improving Romani children's access to education, self-empowerment, and becoming a productive member of Kosovan society, while countering prejudices and discrimination. Volunteers had an opportunity to participate in every activity related to music and non-formal education. Additionally, interested volunteers received the opportunity to learn about human rights, solidarity, and non-discrimination.

11 - <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2021-2-AT01-KA210-YOU-000050146>

12 - https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity/placement/31957_en

4. What We Learned and What We Can Learn from Non-formal Education Practices in Urban Spaces

Urban space is an important spatial environment in which young people meet each other and spend much time. For youth workers, urban spaces are also an important source for their daily work, especially for those who do street youth work in public spaces. The objectives of this article were to discover the functions that urban spaces fulfilled in Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects and to find out how they were implemented in the projects as elements of non-formal / informal learning activities. The article was divided into two parts. The first part described what Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps are, in order to understand the differences between different project types. The second part examined different case studies in greater detail to answer questions regarding the perception of public space in the projects and the role it played in project implementation. This latter part is now addressed below.

In the context of this article, different projects from Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps were examined in greater detail. Two youth exchanges, **Jezik prez granic** and **Eco:Logic**, (see 3.1.1.) were selected as case studies because all three projects promoted intercultural dialogue and the elimination of stereotypes, created a space for the development of competences and skills, and promoted awareness and knowledge exchange for socially relevant issues and participation. In the project activities, urban space thus became a learning space. The two youth participation activities **Salzburg Youth Parliament 2021** and in **Connecting EU with Youth** (see 3.1.2.) were selected because they demonstrated how urban or public space can be used to encourage young people to participate in social and political life. The two projects have increased young people's European awareness by engaging in a broad dialogue and have contributed to the EU Youth Dialogue. Young people have been given an active role and have actively helped to shape urban space. Furthermore, one small-scale project and one solidarity project were selected. The small-scale project was selected to demonstrate that urban space is important not only for mobilities but also for physical project activities. In the project **EU Drug Policy Training & Strategy Series for Young People** (see 3.1.3.), the project beneficiary used urban

space to organise a training series to equip young people with the necessary knowledge, skills, connections, and strategies to participate in the EU drug policy discussion and process. To conclude, the solidarity project **Music4Everyone** (see 3.2.) was highlighted, as this project used urban space as a learning space for solidarity. In this project, children's self-esteem was strengthened through learning to play musical instruments and other non-formal educational activities. The project participants in the European Solidarity Corps Project had the opportunity to participate in all activities related to music and extracurricular education and to shape the public space with their activity.

The analysis of the case studies showed that urban space has different functions for the respective project activities in the different Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes. For the youth exchanges **Jezik prez granic**, and **Eco:Logic**, for example, urban space was primarily a space that promoted intercultural dialogue and helped to break down stereotypes. It was a space to develop competencies and skills, while raising awareness of socially relevant issues and promoting active participation of young people and those working in the youth sector. Based on the example of the youth participation activities of the **Salzburg Youth Parliament 2021** and in **Connecting EU with Youth**, it was demonstrated that public space can be used to offer young people the opportunity to take part in social and political life. In contrast to the other projects, the small-scale project **EU Drug Policy Training & Strategy Series for Young People** illustrated that public space is important not only for youth mobilities, but also for project activities such as the development and organisation of training activities. In the European solidarity project **Music4Everyone**, urban space was understood as a place to learn how to act in solidarity with other people, the community, but also in solidarity with public space. The case studies indicate that urban space can be used in a variety of ways for dealing with mobilities but also in designing projects and project activities. Depending on the nature of the project and the implementation of the project activities, the function of urban space changes. Physical space can become a space for learning or even for participation. In other projects, urban space is understood as a physical space for activities, a space where training takes

place, or a space where solidarity is learned and practiced.

Further research in this area would therefore be desirable and could be more scientifically and theoretically contextualised, while referring to up-to-date figures. This was not possible in this article, as new data will only be collected in the course of the programme period. Finally, an international comparison with other EU countries could provide an extensive understanding of the different functions of urban spaces. In this context, it would be interesting to understand how the functions of urban space in Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects differ in European countries.

This article aimed to describe, in seven case studies, that urban space is an important part of the project implementation of youth exchanges, youth participation activities, small-scale projects, and solidarity projects and that it must be taken into account when designing projects or planning project activities. Urban space provides an environment for encounter, exchange, and knowledge generation, but also for social interaction and implementation in spatial practice between different people and stakeholders involved in Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects. The projects cited above have shown that urban space can be understood as an environment where socially relevant topics are raised, questions of identity or LGBTQIA can be discussed, and other pressing issues can be negotiated. Urban space furthermore served as a frame of reference for a better understanding of political processes and democratic procedures as well as for the creation of voluntary services and solidaristic activities. Urban spaces can have different functions, as the case studies have shown, and through the financial support provided by the European Union through Erasmus+ or European Solidarity Corps funding, the projects that were discussed can help young people or youth workers to recognise urban spaces as an important tool for youth work.

Conflict of Interests and Ethics

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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