



HOW TO... PHOTOVOICE

EXPLAINING THE PHOTOVOICE METHOD AS
USED IN THE EUROPE3E PROJECT



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1 | PHOTOVOICE & EUROPE3E: AN INTRODUCTION

1 | Introduction

With this guide, we aim to support youth workers who would be interested to realise participatory peer research with the goal of engaging young people in the European project. We want to show how young people can be motivated to get involved with a topic, reflect, share & come together in an empowering experience through the power of participatory photography.

Photovoice is a method of reflection and reporting that gets messages across by using photographs. It helps everybody, regardless of their knowledge and skills on any topic, to express themselves by relying on their creativity, and harnessing it through a step-by-step method. Photovoice has been used as a tool for participatory needs assessment in different settings, e.g. woman’s health (cf. Burris/Wang 1997). Transferring the photovoice method to the European setting is something that has not been done before but which we consider as a key idea for the future of the European Union.

Using the photovoice method, marginalised young people are able to explore their perceptions of Europe in a way not possible through tradition social science methods, as photovoice is “accessible to anyone who can learn to handle (..) [a] camera; and, what is more, it does not presume the ability to read or write” (ibid., p. 372).

The photos and captions produced during the project will give unique insights into the role of the European Union in the everyday lives of the participants involved and provide starting points for discussions in their communities as well as implying policy recommendations.

Therefore, the photovoice method enables not only the young people’s perspective and voice to be brought forward, it is also a starting point for discussions about the EU within the young people’s communities and beyond, thereby engaging many people with the European project for the very first time.

In this document we will sum up the experiences during the implementation of the photovoice method in the European context of the “Europe3E” project. This ensures that not only the youth workers involved have learned how to use the photovoice method and thereby a new way to engage young people in the European project, this knowledge will be available to a much larger group of stakeholders. The present guide encompasses a “how to” part as well as showing the resulting images taken by the young participants.

“Photovoice is a good communication method in transnational projects, especially if you work, like us, with disadvantaged young people who do not dare to speak” Youth worker from Sankt Johannis Bernburg Germany

“The method can encourage young people to become political citizens” Youth worker from ÖJAB, Austria

Acknowledgment

Many thanks to all the young people, who have worked together on this project over the past two years. We very much appreciate your contributions, your effort and your commitment. The results show how project partners successfully managed the many obstacles caused by the pandemic.

2 | Focus: The Europe3E Project

Europe3E is an Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership for Youth running from 2019 to 2021. To reach its objectives, it involves experienced youth workers, accompanying small groups of young people with fewer opportunities, from 5 EU countries.



Youth work is all about **inclusion**, especially at the YES Forum. And although the past few years – even decades – have shown **political education** is more urgent than ever, it is an area in which inclusion remains a challenge. To guarantee the durability of modern democracies through their social cohesion, how can we build bridges between fragmented people, especially among youth?

This is the main concern behind the “Europe through young Eyes: Exchange, Explore, Exhibit” project. Europe3E therefore experimented innovative methods to open political education to all youth. That is, ways to help young people engaging in the public debate, regardless of their difficulties.

With the involvement of youth workers and young people with fewer opportunities from different EU countries, Europe3E especially **explored the benefits of combining two youth work approaches**. In the last few years, they were successfully – but independently – applied in two other projects:

- ❖ **Creativity as an obstacle-free channel for youth expression:** “[Our Life. Our Voice](#)” used creative peer-research methods to let young people in a situation of poverty express themselves about this issue. Europe3E focused on a different topic, EU politics, through the Photovoice method!
- ❖ **Accessible & Inclusive Political Education through games:** “[YourEP](#)” designed a political simulation of the European Parliament with young disadvantaged people to better fit their specific needs. Europe3E built upon this method to make it even more accessible by combining “mock politics” with Photovoice!

To put it shortly, Europe3E focused on a more personal level to engage those young people who we could not reach in earlier projects, and opened the doors of political education even wider!



2 | THE PHOTOVOICE METHOD ...

...TO MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE,

ADAPTED TO YOUR PARTICIPANTS' SPECIFIC NEEDS



Photovoice

= Photos Voicing Our Individual and Collective Experience

= Photovoice is about telling a personal story supported by pictures and sharing it

Photovoice is a method of reflection and reporting that gets messages across by using photographs. Participants take pictures: they use the camera to answer a research question, combining pictures with their own individual stories. They formulate answers from their own perspective. They discuss the messages they want to present, and based on that the group

makes a final selection of pictures representing the groups opinion and answer to the research questions. In this way the results (i.e. the pictures) of Photovoice are not one individual's story, but rather a group's message. The results of the exercise can be used for evaluation, in data collection for research, or for advocacy purposes. You can read more in the Reuter's Manual on page 33.

1 | Photovoice: Definition, Strengths and Challenges

The visual and participative method of photovoice usually has three main objectives:

1. To makes voices heard and enable participants to raise awareness on the issues they face, advocate for their rights and exchange information. Participants use Photovoice to tell their stories thanks to the power of participatory photography.
2. Empowering participants with power and critical dialogue, to help them gain confidence in their capabilities and their role in society to bring change.
3. Reach policymakers and influence political decisions by raising awareness on specific issues.

Images and visuals have great power and allow for a certain interpretation of our surrounding environment. They can also act as a way to transmit emotions and feelings caused by the economic and social conditions affecting individuals and their communities. Photovoice creates the space for awareness raising so that people living in a different environment can see the world with the eyes of the photographer. Through this process, participants are acting towards social change.

Strengths and benefits of the Photovoice method

- ❖ The methodology can be flexible and adapted to different contexts, objectives and target groups
- ❖ Usual photography and visuals can facilitate self-expression
- ❖ Empowers participants to reflect about the challenges present in their environment and community and can lead to a change in self-perception and on the way participants engage with their surroundings
- ❖ Fosters the creativity of participants
- ❖ Allows freedom of speech: comments and be positive or critical

- ❖ Fosters interaction between participants through storytelling and a collective production of knowledge
- ❖ Method adapted to marginalised and vulnerable groups
- ❖ Participants can gain technical as well as communication and problem-solving skills
- ❖ Contributes to a feeling of belonging and value in the community
- ❖ Helps to reflect on the importance of images and media today
- ❖ Lastly, it is a fun and interactive method, allowing cross cultural exchanges!

Challenges

- ❖ It needs an important preparation, as well as technical material
- ❖ Experienced and trained staff and youth workers
- ❖ Be careful that participants exchange and share ideas but not cancel other people’s opinions
- ❖ In an international context, translation to ensure all participants are able to share and make their voices heard
- ❖ Learning how to take photographs can be difficult
- ❖ The topics tackled can only be limited in number
- ❖ The method aims to make a change but does not always lead to this change

2 | A Participative Method

Photovoice is usually presented as a participatory action research method, but it can also be used as a qualitative research method or as a data collection tool for planning and evaluation (White et al., 2009). The method is community-based, flexible and can serve different purposes (community mobilisation, needs assessment, process and outcome evaluation from a participatory perspective) (Catalani and Minkler 2010; Wang and Burris 1997). The photovoice

process involves the community in order to better understand their realities, particularly through the perspective of people who are not in positions of power or authority. It is a form of legitimising community knowledge (Mayfield-Johnson, Rachal and Butler 2014; Strack, Lovelace, Jordan and Holmes 2010).

When used as a participatory assessment method, photovoice provides access to concrete and useful information about the target group (Goo-Kuratani and Lai 2011). Usually, based on discussions between participants and members of the research team, an issue is identified. Participants then take their cameras and go take pictures to answer the question (Wang and Burris 1997). Photovoice is all the more powerful when implemented in collaboration with vulnerable or marginalised populations such as women, young people, people with a particular illness, homeless people (Valiquette-Tessier et al. 2015) or sex workers (Desyllas, 2014).

3 | Why using Photovoice in a youth project

Photovoice was chosen enable young people to voice their opinions and raise awareness on topic that are important for them and for their future. **The participatory peer research by using photovoice aimed at connecting the young people and enabling them to voice their understanding of Europe and the EU.** The method had the advantage of being flexible and adaptable to different context, for young people facing different challenges in different European countries. The Europe3E photovoice had three main objectives:

- 1) To share the participants' views on Europe and the EU, to expose preconceived ideas, to identify stereotypes and to go beyond them by giving voice to the personal experience of each individual.
- 2) To allow participants to express themselves, individually and in groups, on the topic of interest while critically reflecting on the solutions to be considered.
- 3) To give youth workers and practitioners the chance to broaden their knowledge concerning new methods and tools to raise young people's political awareness and knowledge by learning the participatory research method photovoice and applying it in a peer-learning context with their local youth.



... BUILDING ON THE EUROPE3E EXPERIENCE

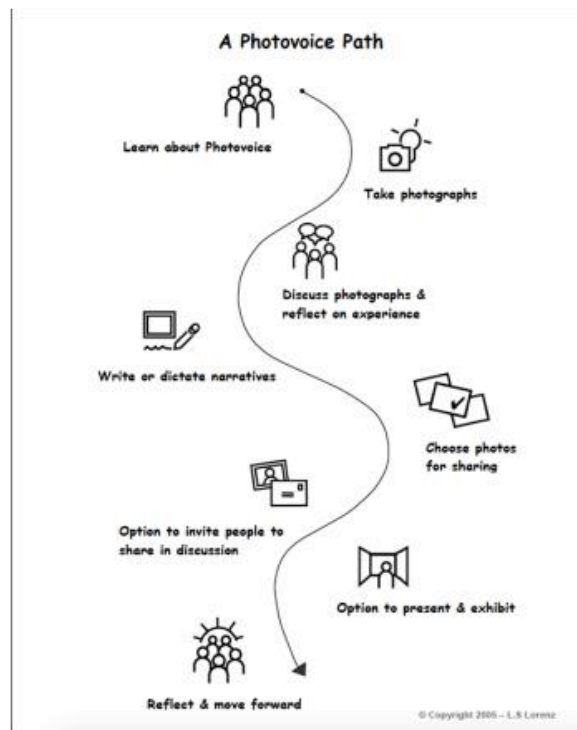


Figure 1: The photovoice path, Lorenz, L.S.(2010)

1 | First steps

Reflect before you start:

- ❖ Adapt the method to your target group
 - ✓ It is essential for facilitators to think about the possible challenges that their target groups could face when working with photovoice. This could influence the set-up of workshops, group size, materials used, etc. Think of your target group. Where might there challenges lie? What might you need to adapt to their needs?
- ❖ Get to know your role as a facilitator
 - ✓ The aim is to enable participants to discover the power of photography as a tool of communication & to encourage participants to believe in their voice and their value.
 - ✓ Lead facilitators or project managers will be responsible for providing team members with an adequate understanding and training them in the basic concepts of participatory photography. (PhotoVoice, 2014: 62 & 79-85)
 - ✓ Reflect on how you can involve your participants right from the very beginning of the project in the planning process.
- ❖ Set a timeframe
 - ✓ How much time will you have for the photovoice project? Photovoice projects can take from 6 hours to several months, with very different amounts of meetings in between.

Technical equipment

- ❖ There are several options such as using a smartphone camera, using cameras the organisation might have, borrowing cameras or using one-way cameras.

2| Learn about Photovoice and start of project

“Lead facilitators or project managers will be responsible for providing team members with an adequate understanding and training them in the basic concepts of participatory photography.” (PhotoVoice, 2014: 62 & 79-85)

The Photovoice process requires preparations that involve time and human resources. To ensure a smooth implementation of the method with groups from five different countries in the Europe3E project, youth workers were appointed in each youth organisations, which would be responsible for the recruitment of youngsters and for conducting the Photovoice research with them. Their overall role will be to prepare, accompany and support the participating youngsters. This way, they will empower the participants so that they can be the main actors of this project exploring, exchanging and exhibiting their views of Europe and how it can become engaging for young people.

As part of this project, each youth organisation chose one youth worker to become Photovoice facilitator. The aim was to capitalise on the trust and complicity that existed between them and the young people, and to encourage their active participation. Indeed, the proximity of the youth worker to the young people helped to create a climate of trust, so that the young people felt comfortable expressing themselves freely.

The youth workers who were involved in the project received a specific training on the method, combining on-site and online activities to ensure they could accompany the youngsters in the best way possible.



Figure 2: Youth workers leaning about the Photovoice method

3| Selection of participants

The Europe3E project aimed to engage young people who are furthest away from political awareness with the political sphere, promote active citizenship and support social inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities.

Our project partners work with young people facing different difficulties every day. They were in charge of identifying and motivating young people to participate in the project. Each project partner identify between 2-5 young people that are facing multiple challenges in life to participate in the project as these youth were likely to benefit the most from the Europe3E project.

As youth work professionals, our partners have the methods and tools needed to recruit young participants who would usually not participate in such activities. They are experienced in the personal contact and motivational techniques needed to encourage disadvantaged youth to take part.

That is why each partner is responsible of the selection of its own young participants by using open, inclusive and low-threshold methods that suites best for their organisation.

4| The introductory workshop and local activities

❖ *Set ground rules*

These provide a basis for everyone's expectations throughout the project, and setting them can be a useful group-building exercise (PhotoVoice, 2014: 77). People participate best in a safe environment where they are able to let their defences down (PhotoVoice, 2014: 102).

- ❖ You can use ice-breaker exercises to boost group interaction
- ❖ Introduce the participants to:
 - ✓ The aims of photovoice
 - ✓ Photography in general (artistically, what is possible, what have others done); also the legal aspects of e.g. photographing people (data protection, social media, etc.) and the ways around it too
 - ✓ How to handle their camera / what options their cameras allow

- ✓ The topic of the photovoice project, e.g. through brain-storming, games, stories, ... to start their reflection processes

In our Europe3E project, the facilitator was in charge of explaining and detailing in a clear and precise manner the steps of the process to be followed, the methods used (especially the importance of listening and the possibility of expressing oneself freely) and the time constraints. The aim is to ensure that each participant understood the process and methodology, and felt confident to participate actively in the activity. This introduction also included the presentation of the different participants



Figure 3: Presentation of the Photovoice method during an online meeting

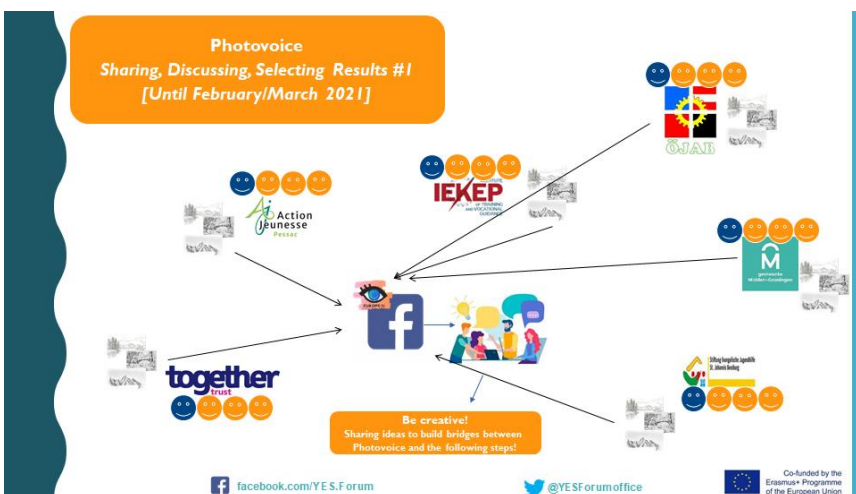


Figure 4: Presentation of the Photovoice method during the first training with young participants

Local activities

Having participants feel at ease together and comfortable joining a bigger, international group later on is the top priority. Which can mean:

- ❖ Building trust between youth worker(s) and participants, as well as between participants, so that they know they can rely on you and on each other during the project should they need it.
- ❖ Developing participants’ self-confidence, especially in regard to taking part and speaking in front of an international group. No worries for those who’d have difficulties though: it will never be mandatory and we will make sure everybody can engage in activities, comfortable with group speaking or not!
- ❖ Language: Gaining awareness that a flawless English is not necessary (being understood and understanding main messages is perfect); Thinking of tips & “coping strategies” (non-verbal communication etc).
- ❖ Self-evaluating knowledge and skills at project’s start, to foster the “learning awareness” of participants: one learns faster with clear starting and finishing points.

Complementary: Online Activities

In addition to local meetings, online activities were carried out in Europe3E. They were be organised through a Facebook group.

Activities were focused on letting participants get to know each other, supporting partners’ preparations through online material, and giving an opportunity to participants to contribute to the project’s design.

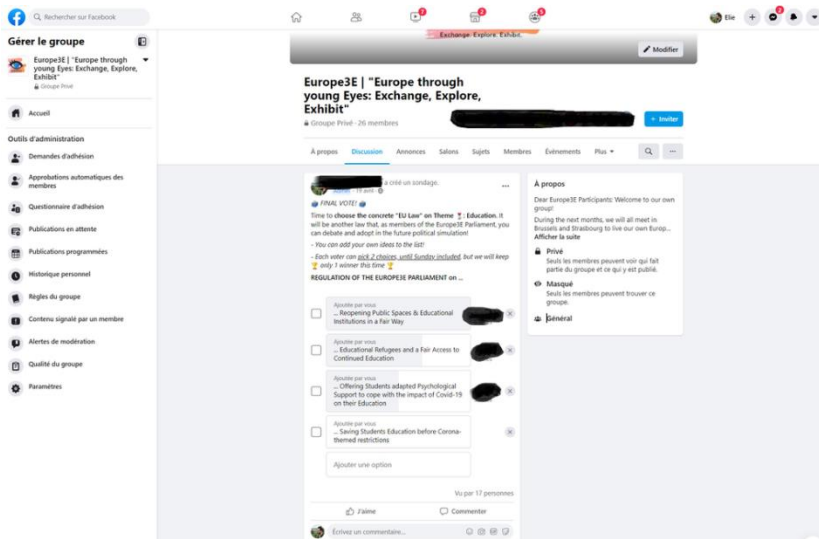


Figure 5: The Facebook group for participants to exchange about their results and share their photos

The research question

Decide on research questions and practical formalia of the project, e.g. how many pictures to take, which changes are allowed to pictures (e.g. are filters allowed?), which forms to use when photographing people, etc.

The photovoice research question:

- ❖ Is personal (it includes the word you in the question)
- ❖ Is open (cannot be answered with just “yes” or “no”)
- ❖ Is clear and specific, not open to misinterpretation
- ❖ Is directly related to the lives of the participants
- ❖ Results in answers that can be conveyed through pictures

(Rutgers, 2016:14)

Our research question throughout the project was:

“What does the EU means to you?”

5 | Take photographs

Any type of camera can be used in participatory photographic training (PhotoVoice, 2014: 56). Aim for shots at a resolution that will allow an exhibition print to be reproduced (depending on your project’s aim). (PhotoVoice, 2014: 57).

- ❖ Until the participants gain confidence and experience, most groups will need supervision and guidance when they go out to take photographs. At the beginning of a project, it is useful for participants to go out as a group to practise technical skills through specific exercises and to explore various themes through producing images. (PhotoVoice, 2014: 89)
- ❖ On outshoots participants must have a concrete idea of what they want to capture with their photographs. Encourage them to carry a notebook and pen to write down a few words about what each photograph is of, why they took it and what it is intended to communicate. In this way, the students think more carefully before taking pictures. (PhotoVoice, 2014: 90)
- ❖ Hold briefing and debriefing sessions at the start and end of the project or individual workshops to discuss the emotional issues or challenges that arise during the project for team members (PhotoVoice, 2014: 63)
- ❖ Allow time for writing notes after each workshop, and record participants’ interactions and any emotional changes going on (PhotoVoice, 2014: 63)

In the Europe3E project, our project partners held local meetings where the young people went and took photos together.

However, progress was slowed down by the lock-downs and ever-changing Covid-19 restrictions in all partner countries. In the end all were successful: young participants expressed themselves through the Photovoice method! It allows them to voice their opinions, concerns, ideas, questions etc on the European Union as young people: it is not a surprise at this point, the Covid-19 appears in many pictures.



Figure 6: Young participants from IEKEP, Greece, meeting to discuss their Photovoice

6 | Discuss photographs and reflect on experiences

- ❖ It is a vital part of the project: important opportunity for participants to share their work and to learn from each other (PhotoVoice, 2014: 92)
- ❖ Participants are central as it is they who can best define what impact the project has had on their lives. (PhotoVoice, 2014: 70)
- ❖ Create exercises to generate discussion with the whole group! Get participants talking not only about photographic technique but also about how images communicate and to start considering what it is that they want to communicate with their own photographs. (PhotoVoice, 2014: 93)

- ✓ This can be done with the help of questions often used in photovoice activities that enable a reflection of the picture beyond the personal level, e.g. the following:
 - Why did you choose this photo?
 - What do you want to tell?
 - What does it show about you're your research question?
 - Do you want to change anything about this? If yes, what and how? Discuss.
- ✓ Be aware of cultural differences
- ❖ It is possible to move away from initial personal views to explore issues at the heart of the project. Brainstorm on what they would like to change (PhotoVoice, 2014: 88) (PhotoVoice, 2014: 88)

Write or dictate narratives:

- ❖ Text is a powerful tool to contextualise images, and producing it encourages participants to focus → helps the audience understand the photographer's message more clearly. (PhotoVoice, 2014: 94)
- ❖ For some groups, creating and focusing on advocacy messages comes naturally, whereas others will require more structured support, brainstorming and discussion sessions to generate key messages they feel comfortable with. (PhotoVoice, 2014: 88)
- ❖ this can be done as part of a group meeting or individually
- ❖ Participants should choose the photos they think are best (a maximum number may be given) to write about

In Europe3E, each participant was given time to speak and all expressed a desire to communicate about their choice of photo. There was no reluctance or unwillingness on the part of the young people to express themselves. Each participant was free to speak in their mother tongue or English. Depending on the language chosen, the words were translated in real time.

When appropriate, the facilitator asked additional questions during the exchanges in order to push the reflection of each young person further.

Unsurprisingly, prominent themes among the youngsters’ pictures include “Restrictions”, “Covid-19” and such. Most other themes remain “tainted” by the Covid-19: “Education” is about how young students are being deprived of it, “Environment” is about how face masks are a “new waste” to be managed.

“The exchange between the young people was very rich” youth worker from France

Language: a key factor for participation and involvement

The Europe3E project was implemented in participants having four different mother tongues (French, German, Dutch and Greek). In this context, local activities were conducted in the participants’ own languages. However, group activities had to take into account the complexity of communication. All activities requiring the collection of people's perceptions, comments or suggestions were therefore carried out in the native languages. This allowed for greater fluidity and gave the participants confidence.

During the photovoice, the choice was left to the participants to express themselves in their mother tongue or in English. Wang and Burris (1997) suggest that photovoice should be adapted to the needs of the participants in a flexible way. The issue of the language of communication chosen to conduct the activity was therefore central to the photovoice. In order for the participants to understand the exercise and participate fully, being able to express themselves easily, it is essential to create an environment that is conducive to their involvement. This means taking into account the language in which the participants are most comfortable expressing themselves and planning for a system of translation if necessary to facilitate interaction. Being able to speak one's own language increases the quality of the data collected. Opinions are more easily expressed in the mother tongue, and therefore the information collected is more reliable.

“The photovoice method helped the young people think about the problems we face as a society”, youth worker from the Netherlands

“It opens their eyes to new possibilities.” youth worker from the Netherlands

7| Choose photos for sharing

- The selection process consists of several separate activities, in which participants have to work individually as well as all together (Rutgers, 2016: 86)
- This selection process is needed to make a thorough analysis of which pictures best reflect the group's opinion. (Rutgers, 2016: 86)
- For this, the photos should be printed and looked at together. They can then be mindmapped and connected by common themes or similar.

8| Exhibiting and disseminating the work produced

Often the local exhibition is the most important means of raising awareness and undermining stereotyped perceptions. (PhotoVoice, 2014: 50)

- ❖ The results (i.e. the pictures) of Photovoice are not one individual's story, but rather a group's message.
- ❖ It is an integral part of the project to share the results with the community and relevant stakeholders to promote discussion and empower the participants to speak out about what they think with the help of their photographs
- ❖ If the project has a stronger advocacy objective, this will affect both the venue and the audience. (PhotoVoice, 2014: 50)
- ❖ Factors to consider when preparing for an exhibition: How the images will be mounted, who is attending, where it will take place (PhotoVoice, 2014: 116-119)

In the Europe3E project, the “Grand Finale” was turned into an online exhibition following health regulations and lockdown restrictions: <https://europe3e.yes-forum.eu/>. You can find some of the pictures taken by the young participants in Part 5 of this guide.



4 | CONCLUSION

The photovoice made it possible to meet the objectives of better understanding the participants' perceptions on Europe and the European Union. Participatory, playful and dialogue-oriented, this approach was adapted to the participants.

The image elicited spontaneous reactions before encouraging reflection and discussion. The voice was given to the young participants through photography, adapted channels for sharing experiences and expressing their perceptions, emotions and opinions often not taken into account by external stakeholders.

To complete their learning experience on EU politics and guide young participants towards becoming their own youth advocates, Photovoice results were complemented by a political simulation of the European Parliament.

Building upon the accessible & inclusive method developed through the previous YourEP project, Europe3E opened it to an even wider group thanks to the Photovoice method. For instance, Photovoice results allowed participants to explore themes for mock debates, while facilitating the learning of the basic knowledge which helped them stepping into the shoes of MEPs.

Thanks to Photovoice, the simulation of the European Parliament therefore built upon themes broadly explored in a first phase to discuss and debate them in more details. This helped participants starting from a “vague idea” reflecting their interests and concerns, and formulating real policy recommendations reflecting their wishes for the future. Their future in the EU!

As a result of this experience, the YES Forum has decided to go further and to bring together future and current youth workers, young people and creative organisations (eg. photographers and graphic designers). The VOICE project will aim at promoting the method of Photovoice in youth work, to make it more recognized as a creative tool that future and current youth workers can use to promote social inclusion, engagement and active citizenship of young people.

Finally, this activity also generated products (photos, guides and recommendations) and provided more general information on the social dynamics within the targeted groups. The results were disseminated to the project partners, the local, national and European level.

“We would totally like to try it again when the pandemic stops affecting so much our life and for sure we would keep the whole experiential part of the whole process.”
Youth worker from Greece



5 | RESULTING PHOTOS FROM EUROPE3E

All pictures are available in the Europe3E online exhibition: <https://europe3e.yes-forum.eu/>

Education *(Credits: Photo and comment by young participants from IEKEP)*



Young people are interested in learning and education. Knowledge and a deep understanding of things are important in the day of constant information.

At the moment, the operation of all the educational institutions such as universities has been suspended because of the pandemic causing barriers to the desire of young people to contact face to face

educators and students and exchange knowledge and point of views.

Balance *(Credits: Photo and comment by young participants from Sankt Johannis Bernburg)*



In this photo, you can see a person trying to balance on a high edge and trying not to fall. To prevent this, another person supports him by giving him security. This can also be applied to Europe: countries support each other and cooperate when there are problems in one country. For the system not to get out of balance in these situations, it needs the security

of other members, like the person in this photo.

I think cooperation between the countries of Europe is very important because I believe it is the basis for ensuring that we can all live in peace and freedom. But mutual support should not only take place at the European level but also at the interpersonal level because that is the basis for a happy coexistence of us all.



Educational pathways (Credits: Photo and comment by young participants from Action Jeunesse Pessac)

It represents all the orientation choices/educational pathways, the system shows some sectors but it hides others to us.

Distance (Credits: Photo and comment by young participants from Jongerenwerk)



Education (Credits: Photo and comment by young participants from ÖJAB)



Education and vocational training are key to our youngsters

Closed borders (Credits: Photo and comment by young participants from YES Forum)



The photo shows a closed barrier in bright red and next to it two signs: Do not pass and an arrow leading to the right side. For me it stands for the closed borders around Europe. For us European citizens it's easy to travel the world with our privileges like our passport. The other way round it's hard to get a fair asylum procedure. Therefore I look forward to strong European

decisions focussing on humanity and solidarity. There are already some small countries going the right direction allowing a symbolic number of refugees to stay. In this metaphor it's an arrow showing a way to get inside. This can be the beginning of future politics, when European countries stand together to help people independent of their nationality. Hopefully in the future there won't be a bright red border, any more border deaths and fair procedures with asylum seeker.

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