



## The “We Hear You’ (WHY) Project

### The participating organisations are:

1. Västerås Stad skolverksamheter, Västerås, Sweden.
2. ERASMUSHOGESCHOOL BRUSSEL, Brussels, Belgium
3. EQUALITY COOPERATIVA SOCIALE, Padua, Italy
4. TOPUNT GENT, Ghent, Belgium
5. European Network of Social Authorities, Veneto region, Italy
6. Double Helix Resources, London, UK
7. GEMEENTE ROTTERDAM, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
8. Anadrasis Initiative Information, Syros, Greece

There is a growing sense of frustration amongst teachers and youth workers within our partner organisations concerning the low level of youth participation in democratic processes, as well as young people's lack of trust in democratic institutions and values. The youth professionals worry about these perceived democratic deficits and the consequences it has for the youngsters and for society in general, which is particularly concerning when it comes to vulnerable youth at risk of being marginalised in society.

All partner organisations have identified organisational shortcomings concerning youth participation on several levels, both structural and cultural. These shortcomings lead to a perception amongst youth of not having a say in the decision making, not even on their own personal level at school or in other situations, which in turn leads to distrust and disinterest in partaking in activities organised by established organisations and in democratic processes. The feeling of being marginalised puts the youngsters at risk of actually becoming excluded, and is conductive to discrimination, racism, political and religious extremism, school absenteeism, and drop-out, from school, work or youth programmes (mainstream services and/or outreach programmes). The professionals working with young persons between 16 and 25, for example teachers and youth workers, can be perceived as carriers of structures and cultures that perpetuate the identified shortcomings of the organisations. They need new methods and tools to improve their capacity to communicate with youth in a more participatory way, and to understand the importance and impact that their attitude has. There is also a need for structures, methods and tools that will support the democratic institutions ability to reach the concerned youth groups.

This project aims to provide a basis for an improved culture amongst professionals as well as structures that will support democratic dialogue and youth involvement in order to promote civic participation, create participatory mechanisms, thus preventing marginalisation and its negative effects on individuals and society.

The objectives are to identify and develop existing methods and tools for youth professionals, design new ones, as well as develop training tools such as on-line

course(s). A further objective is to find possible structural revisions that will facilitate youth participation, such as structures for meetings with decision makers and/or other political arenas.

This project addresses a number of current European issues. A decline in the interest in democratic processes and institutions among young persons is evident, as well as increased discrimination, racism, political and religious extremism. Furthermore the educational systems across Europe have common problems with absenteeism and drop-out. It is also evident that a number of institutions and organisations within different European Union member states are attempting to address these issues with varying degrees of success. There are common problems, as well as a resource of good practice, that is partly known to others and partly not. However the best practice needs to be further developed and new practices need to be created using the experience of different countries, educational systems and youth work.

The WHY project will identify and develop existing methods and tools for teachers and other youth professionals, in order to give them an enhanced ability to engage youth in democratic dialogue. However, the core objective is the design of new methods and tools, as well as the development of teacher/youth professional training tools such as online course(s). The courses are intended to give the professionals both an increased awareness of how their own prejudices and attitudes affect their interaction with youth at risk, and methods and tools to include young people in democratic processes. The partnership, with its internalised know-how and wide experience offers a transnational base of development, as well as a testing ground for innovative practices.

In addition the project aims to change organisational cultures all over Europe as the professionals develop their abilities, skills and competencies. To support this, the project also aims to find possible structural revisions that will facilitate youth participation, such as structures for meetings with decision makers and/or other political arenas.

