CHAPTER 4

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN EVALUATING PROJECTS AIMED AT YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 15-24

IV. CONSIDERATIONS WHEN EVALUATING PROJECTS AIMED AT YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 15-24

When undertaking the evaluation of projects aimed at young people aged 15-24, you should take into account that people of that age are different from adults, mostly because of their legal situation, living and technological conditions, and psychological and social needs related to intensive development processes on the verge of adulthood.

4.1. What are the standards of conducting research on young people

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and many additional provisions in individual countries guarantee special legal protection for persons under the age of 18. According to the law, a person under the age of 18 is a child. Although in most countries one acquires certain rights at the age of 15 (for example the right to choose one's school, the right to take up work), a minor's participation in YEEAs projects as well as in various types of research requires the consent of their parent or legal guardian.

4.1.1. Consent for a minor's participation in evaluation research

1. Consent for participation in evaluation studies from both the minor and his/her parent or legal guardian must refer to the specific research (name of the research or evaluated project and the entity or entities conducting it).
2. The person giving consent for a minor's participation in the research should receive all the necessary information, such as:
3. The purpose of the research and how the findings will be used,
4. The scope and method of collecting information to be obtained from the research participant, including whether the research requires multiple contact with the participant, especially a long time after the first round of research,
5. Assurance of anonymity and protection of confidentiality of data obtained about the participant in the research,
6. Information about the right to refuse to participate in the research and to withdraw from participation at any stage.
7. It should also be remembered that in EU countries it is necessary to obtain consent for the processing and storage of personal data.
8. If it is planned to use sound and video recording devices – also explicit consent must be given.
9. Examples of documents used to obtain consent for a minor's participation in research are included in the Annexes (Annexes 1 and 2).

It is worth obtaining such consent at the beginning of the evaluated project because it can be obtained with more general consent for a minor's participation in the project (e.g. in the same document).

4.1.2. Protection of minors in the ethical codes of professional researchers

The basic guidelines for conducting research among people under 18 are:

- Obtaining informed consent (described above) from the minor and their legal guardian,

- Providing a sense of security to those examined by the research staff (*e.g. the researcher does not attempt to make first contact with minors without the presence of the adult responsible for the child (teacher, guardian, parent); the person collecting the information has documents confirming their status as a researcher; the training and experience of the people conducting the research guarantee the safety and the way of carrying out the research appropriate to the specificity of young people*),

- Ensuring that all the information provided, including the questions put to the interviewees / respondents, can be understood (it is helpful in this respect to test quantitative tools on a small scale before applying them and to discuss the tools with specialists),

- Ensuring that the scope or method of obtaining information from young people will not directly cause any material or non-material harm, including harm related to mental well-being and social relations; this applies in particular to such issues as:

  - Sensitive issues that lower the sense of autonomy or self-esteem,
  - Relationships with their peer group and other important people.

If you have any doubts, it is worth consulting specialists.

- Compliance with the general principles of social research, including in particular:
  - Guaranteeing the confidentiality of information obtained from the research participants both at the stage of data collection (no participation of other people apart from the researchers and the respondents during data processing (anonymisation/pseudonymisation), as well as in publishing the findings (collective presentation of quantitative data, pseudonymisation of qualitative data),
  - Ensuring the anonymity of the research participants,
  - Ensuring the safety and undisturbed work of the researchers.

- Standards for conducting research on minors are included in the codes of ethics in force in the communities of professionals conducting social and market research.

4.2. How to adjust the methodology of evaluation research to a young person's way of life?

4.2.1. Major activity - formal education

Studying is the dominant activity in the life of young people aged 15-24. For instance, in Poland, until the age of 18, participation in formal education is compulsory, although training in the form of "vocational preparation" combined with paid work is also allowed. However, the findings of the Labour Force Survey show that the vast majority of those aged 18-24 still participate in organised forms of education. Young people study full-time in schools or colleges, but often also part-time, attending courses or training. Also, many of the YEEAs activities are conducted in the form of group learning activities. Grouping the beneficiaries of the evaluated project in one place and time allows you to carry out various types of activities related to evaluation, primarily to collect data through observation, central location, focus group interviews, etc.

However, you should bear in mind that when conducting research in educational institutions, you should ensure there are appropriate conditions for collecting data, such as: an isolated room, dedicated time (respondents should not be under time pressure).

When asking young people about work, you need to precisely define what kind of activity you consider to be work and / or what features are decisive for you (legality, type and amount of remuneration, time dimension, stability, linkage with educational obligations, legal form).

4.2.2. Weak position on the labour market

One of the basic elements of the situation of young people, which is also the main area of influence of YEEAs projects, is their situation on the labour market. In studies devoted to this subject, in relation to young people it should be taken into account that:

- In the 15-24 age group, only about every third person performs any paid work (including free help for a family member's paid work) – so you should never ask questions with the assumption that a particular person is working or has income from work,

- Work by young people, especially those under the age of 18, occurs in highly diversified, often atypical forms, e.g. as free help in the paid work of a close family member, as a one-time job, occasional work, holiday work, part-time work, replacement, "trial" work, various types of internships, apprenticeships and vocational preparation, in which the proportion of study to work and earnings vary widely and may or may not be considered work, providing work in exchange for accommodation, food and "pocket money", promoting products or services on social media in exchange for the goods or services received, voluntary work with various levels of covering own costs, work performed under various contracts, ranging from regular employment contracts to specific contracts, undeclared work such as tutoring, income for illegal activities.

4.2.3. Increased mobility

People aged 15-24 change their place of residence much more often than older people. They also exhibit higher than average daily mobility. As a result, traditional methods of collecting quantitative data based on a home address in the case of young people do not work – a postal questionnaire is often sent to an address that no longer applies, the interviewer comes when no one is there.

Therefore, in the case of young people, it is particularly important to obtain their mobile contact details, such as a phone number or the name of an individual profile on a messaging app, and then base a data collection strategy using electronic tools on these contact details. The findings of studies using both ae postal questionnaire and the CAWI method show that the response rate in the case of the latter is much higher and it increases the lower the respondent's age.

4.2.4. Dominance of smartphones in everyday communication

Young people are more willing than older people to use electronic technologies than paper. They are also much more efficient at this and are more willing to deal with all matters of everyday life using a smartphone than a computer. Therefore, in research among young people it is worth using electronic research tools, and best to adapt them to smartphones (one simple question per screen, simple and legible form, not too long a list of answers). One example of such an application that can be used for working with young people is Kahoot.

4.2.5. Busy and overstimulated life

A characteristic feature of modern youth is their openness to many stimuli delivered via smartphones, which young people never let out of their sight. Moreover, learning, developing one's own interests, and above all social life, often result in stimulating how young people function by forgetting about unusual or less important obligations, such as filling out a questionnaire. To counteract this, it is important to regularly send messages reminding participants about the dates of scheduled interviews, their promises to complete a survey, etc.

4.2.6. Widespread use of social media

The widespread use of social media by young people, including their presence in numerous social media groups, is increasingly being used for research purposes. It is possible to find groups of young people from a particular locality or school, as well as those with specific musical and ideological interests, etc. After entering the group, the possibilities of recruiting research participants (e.g. to the comparative group) open up. You may consider asking individual group members a question as a researcher, or (if the group moderator agrees) publicly posting a link to the online survey or request for contact. It is better not to open a public discussion at the Internet group level as this prevents the research from being confidential, exposes the participants to being assessed by other group members, and the public nature of statements lowers their credibility.

Following the example of market research agencies, you could also consider establishing a special community group (MROC method – Market Research Online Communities), in which young project beneficiaries would agree to participate. However, such activities require a precise definition of the group's goal. If the purpose is research – then it should be a short-term group (MROC), and during this period it should be professionally moderated, similarly to Focus Group Interviews (FGI).

Difficulties characteristic for research among young people intensify when the evaluated project is aimed at young people who are not studying or working, who are not covered by any form of education, support or institutional supervision that groups them (NEETs). Reaching young people who are in such a situation is a serious challenge, especially when you need data for comparisons with NEETs who participate in the project.
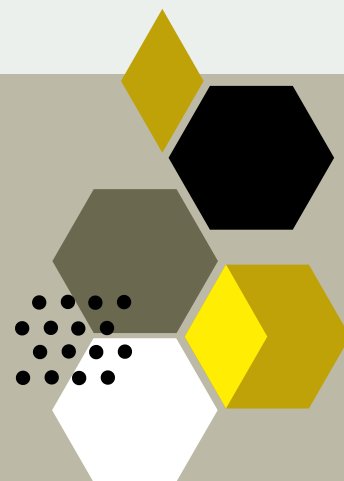
Often, the only solution to this type of problem is to compare groups participating in different projects from the same programme, or to compare the results obtained in the group covered by the project with the group of candidates who did not become its beneficiaries (taking into account the impact of the reasons for not qualifying for the project).

4.3. How to deal with the psychological and social needs of young people

4.3.1. Increased need for confidentiality of the provided information

The key psycho-social factors that should be taken into account when planning and conducting research involving young people is their particular susceptibility to influences. This results both from their emerging personality as well as from a fear of judgement and even sanctions that may befall a young person both on the part of the peer group and adults, on whom the young person depends mentally and financially. The latter include project staff. Taking this into account, one should:

- Inform the research participant about the confidentiality of the information provided and the measures taken for this purpose, both by means of data collection ensuring confidentiality, as well as their anonymization at the stage of data analysis and use of the findings,

- Complete complex assurances, including by conducting interviews (IDI, FGI) without the participation of third parties, creating conditions for completing the questionnaires that guarantee anonymity and confidentiality, including throwing auditorium questionnaires into a collection box,

4.3.2. Increased need for autonomy and emancipation

According to the findings of developmental psychology, people aged 15-24 are - due to shaping their identity - particularly sensitive to issues related to respect for their freedom. Consequently, their right to participate or not to participate in research should be clearly communicated and the reasons and consequences of each of the choices available should be clearly explained. This is a necessary condition.

On the other hand, positive motivation for young people to participate in evaluation research can be created by responding to their needs to move from subordinate and executive positions to the role of co-decision makers and co-creators. In order for young people to be really involved in evaluation research you have to treat them as partners with different roles, including decision-making and consultative roles, in addition to the roles of the classic examined object. This can be achieved by involving them in the various stages of the evaluation process, from reporting information needs, through co-deciding on priorities, planning, participating in implementation, and finally consulting the findings (see section 2.2).