



# YOUTH IN URBAN SPACE

DEVELOPMENTS PRE- AND POST COVID-19 PANDEMIC,  
HOW MUNICIPALITIES AND YOUTH WORK CAN ADDRESS THEM



Funded by  
the European Union



# YUS-PROJECT

YOUTH IN URBAN SPACE



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# THE PROJECT

In the years before the Covid-19 pandemic, youth workers in Vienna observed a change in the use of public space by young people. While exposure to male youth in street work and outreach work declined, demographics indicated that numbers in these age groups were stable and even increasing slightly. Contact with girls and women in public places had increased concurrently. One had the impression that the big cliques that had dominated certain places or regions were getting smaller. Expert exchange at international level confirmed that these observations had been a phenomenon in many areas of several cities in Europe

When the Association of Viennese Youth Centres began to develop a Strategic Partnership in the framework of the European Union programme Erasmus+ life changed dramatically. The Covid-19 pandemic hit the world. Despite all adverse circumstances, this project was able finally to start in February 2021.

The partnership included six strong and large organizations from four countries: Verein Wiener Jugendzentren, Stuttgarter Jugendhaus gGmbH, Helsinki Youth Department, Milano Youth Department, the NGO Tempo per L'infanzia from Milano and, as scientific support and coordination, the University for Continuing Education Krems.



Criteria for selecting the partner organizations were clear. They had to be long-standing practitioners in open youth work. The organization was required to be of a substantial size. Furthermore, the big cities in which they operate should represent as many different regions of Europe as possible.

These criteria were certainly fulfilled, because North, South and Central Europe are represented. Youth work has been a recognized part of the educational and social landscape in the participating cities for decades. In total, more than 2,000 people work in various areas in the partner organizations, several hundred of them in the field of open youth work.

Key questions for the project were:

- What changes in young people's usage and perception of public space can be observed?
- What general developments, political decisions and local strategies have an influence on this topic?
- In which way are observations of the recent year influenced by the impact of the Corona crisis?
- What are possible European and local strategic approaches to influence these factors?
- What are the consequences of our lobbying activities for the interest of youth?
- What proper structural and methodological answers can open youth work offer?
- In which way do activities and offerings of open youth work in public urban spaces need to be adapted?

Of course, there were adaptations and shifts in focus during the course of the project, and there were deviations in the individual cities due to the different framework conditions and needs.

## PROJECT STRUCTURE

The project management team, made up of ten persons, met online approximately every two months. The first real meeting, originally planned for spring 2021, had to be postponed to autumn due to the pandemic, which required changes to the entire process. One of those changes was that a separate research team was set up that started planning research details also in online meetings.

In every participating city, the respective organisations implemented local project teams of different size, but always including practitioners, e.g. the Viennese team was made of ten persons, two coordinators and eight youth worker from eight different units.

The international project management and research teams met again in autumn 2022 to analyse the data and in early 2023 to evaluate the project.

## ACTIVITIES

For each city, data profiles were prepared in order to compare them in a structured way (see page 10). Questionnaires for youth and for youth workers were developed in a participatory way and translated into the respective languages. The project developed guidelines for the focus groups and guidelines how to present their results to the research group.

In October 2021, a short-term training event on methods of social research was held, predominantly attended by members of the research group and other youth work practitioners. The aim of the training seminar was to give an introduction of social research methods and also to co-create the approach for this special project giving ownership of the qualitative research to the involved youth workers and make them research-practitioners. Together with a social researcher youth workers developed the qualitative data collection methods implemented. It was agreed to conduct focus groups with young people

and focus groups or interviews with youth workers. The guiding questions for the focus groups and possible interviews were also created in a participatory way to enable the comparability of the results both for young people and for youth workers. Furthermore, the sample of the qualitative youth research was defined by the whole group of youth workers to ensure that the sample could be realistically reached in the four cities. The research practitioners also created an online communication and support group for mutual exchange on approaches. Additional training support for the local groups of researchers was offered upon request.

In spring 2022, the project held four one-week international meetings, one in each city, at which the public space was observed in a structured way and the work of the hosting organisations could be assessed (see p. 14). After these meetings, more than 60 observation logs were created. In a seminar in Helsinki in June 2022, all 24 participating youth workers met with the respective coordinators and academic advisors, analysed and evaluated these experiences together.

## THE USE OF PUBLIC SPACE AND USABILITY OF PUBLIC SPACE WAS ONE OF THE FIRST KEY POINTS IN THE OBSERVATION REPORTS.



The international project team.

The surveys carried out resulted in an impressive database: 2,199 young people took part in the quantitative online questionnaire and in the qualitative survey, and 79 youngsters participated in 16 focus group discussions. Equally impressive are the numbers among youth workers. The project had 394 respondents in the quantitative survey and four focus group discussions with a total of around 40 participants.

Taking account of the approximately 40 youth workers permanently involved via the local project groups and those in the video productions the total of actively participating youth workers reached more than 100.

The results were published in five brochures. In addition to the one presented here, four city brochures with the specific data and in relevant languages are available.

In addition to the brochures, the partnership produced nine videos that present the project and its results. Additional youth workers and youth groups were involved in these video productions in particular. Each city produced two videos, public spaces from the perspective of young people and from the perspective of youth workers. The ninth video is a short documentation of the project.

All of the videos are available on YouTube.



## OUTCOMES

The expectations of the project were far exceeded. The database is – albeit different in the participating cities – much larger than initially expected. Above all, however, the experiences made by the practitioners directly involved and the learnings the participating organisations gained are invaluable and cannot be expressed in numbers.

Moreover, one substantial finding at the end was that “Youth in Urban Space” was not a research project detached from practice but a large practical exchange with scientific support and scientific methodology. The final products, the “Intellectual Output” according to the definition of the funding program, stand up to scrutiny for scientific validity and will be published in relevant scientific journals. The uniqueness and benefits come from the fact that (mostly academically trained) practitioners developed this and thus a direct reference and direct implementation in practice were enabled.

In this brochure we will present the essence of the outcomes. The gained data is tremendous, but it also has to be interpreted carefully and depending on one's focus and point of view, things can look different or have different emphasis.

Therefore, we recommend having a look at the city specific brochures also, as they give more specified information and data. Additionally, you may contact the authors in case you are looking for further details.



PUBLIC SPACE,  
A PLACE TO BE!?

# FOUR CITIES COMPARED\*

| BASICS (2021)                            | VIENNA    | MILANO     | STUTTGART | HELSINKI  |
|--|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| INHABITANTS OF MUNICIPAL AREA            | 1,931,593 | 1,392,502  | 614,599   | 658,864   |
| INHABITANTS OF GREATER METROPOLITAN AREA | 2,900,000 | 3,265,327  | 2,800,000 | 1,524,489 |
| SIZE IN KM²                              | 414.9 km² | 181.76 km² | 207.4 km² | 213.8 km² |

|                             |        |        |        |        |
|-----------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| GDP MUNICIPALITY/PER CAPITA | 50,400 | 50,100 | 90,518 | 59,000 |
| GDP COUNTRY/PER CAPITA      | 42,500 | 26,800 | 41,508 | 42,700 |
| INHABITANTS UNDER 25        | 25.66% | 21.30% | 25.60% | 25.00% |
| INHABITANTS OLDER THAN 65   | 16.53% | 21.50% | 18.00% | 17.40% |

| MIGRATION                  | VIENNA                                   | MILANO                                     | STUTTGART                               | HELSINKI                              |
|----------------------------|--|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| PERSONS OTHER CITIZENSHIP  | 31.50%                                   | 20.00%                                     | 25.60%                                  | 10.30%                                |
| EU CITIZENS                | 13.80%                                   | 3.50%                                      | 13.00%                                  | 3.70%                                 |
| THIRD COUNTRIES            | 17.70%                                   | 16.50%                                     | 12.60%                                  | 6.60%                                 |
| TOP 5 MIGRATIONS COUNTRIES | Serbia, Germany, Turkey, Poland, Romania | Philippines, Egypt, China, Peru, Sri Lanka | Turkey, Greece, Italy, Croatia, Romania | Estonia, Russia, Irak, China, Somalia |

| PUBLIC TRANSPORT (ADULT / YOUTH) | VIENNA          | MILANO        | STUTTGART                             | HELSINKI |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------------------------------|----------|
| ANNUAL TICKET                    | 365 / 79 EUR    | 460 / 345 EUR | 706 – 2.320 EUR / 41.15 EUR per month | 324 EUR  |
| SINGLE DRIVE                     | 2.40 / 1.20 EUR | 2.00 EUR      | 2.56 – 8.55 EUR / 1.30 – 4.17 EUR     | 1.40 EUR |
| NIGHT SERVICE                    | YES             | YES           | YES                                   | YES      |

| HOUSING           | VIENNA   | MILANO        | STUTTGART  | HELSINKI   |
|-------------------|--|---------------|--|--|
| PERSONS/HOUSEHOLD | 2.00   | not available | 2.2  | 1.85   |
| HOUSING SITUATION | 28% Private rent, 24% Municipal Housing, 21% Private ownership, 14% Cooperative Housing, 13% other |               | 38% private rent, 48.5% private ownership + cooperative, 13.5% Municipal Housing | Dwellings, total 367,680; 13.3% in detached or terraced houses, 85.5% in blocks of flats |

\* Data mainly by January 2022

| PUBLIC SPACE (Be aware of different definitions) | VIENNA | MILANO | STUTTGART         | HELSINKI |
|--|--------|--------|-------------------|----------|
| PUBLIC MALLS                                     | 41     | 8 – 10 | 6                 | 33       |
| PUBLIC PARKS                                     | 1,006  | 75     | 35                | 108      |
| PLAYGROUNDS                                      | 1,668  | 662    | 519               | 61       |
| PUBLIC SPORTSGROUNDS                             | 130    | 185    | (included in 519) | 97       |

| YOUTH WORK                               | VIENNA  | MILANO                   | STUTTGART     | HELSINKI |
|--|---------|--------------------------|---------------|----------|
| TARGETGROUP BY AGE                       | 6 – 24  | 11 – 25                  | 6 – 27        | 7 – 28   |
| FOCUSGROUP BY AGE                        | 10 – 19 | 11 – 18                  | 12 – 27       | 13 – 17  |
| YOUTH WORK EMPLOYEES (ESTIMATED)         | 800     | 40                       | 850           | 400      |
| YOUTH WORK UNITS (+ Park Animation)      | 67      | 29                       | 41            | 67       |
| YOUTH CENTRES                            | 54      | 24                       | 30            | 31       |
| MUNICIPAL YOUTH WORK BUDGET (IN MIL EUR) | 54.5    | 1.5 (only youth centres) | not available | 31       |

|                                      |  |                            |  |   |
|--------------------------------------|--|----------------------------|--|---|
| LEGAL BASE AND FUNDING OF YOUTH WORK | No Federal regulation or specific youth work law | No specific youth work law | Federal Law (§ 11 SGB VIII (Child and Youth Welfare Act), Responsibility on Municipalities | Federal Law (“Youth work Act”) is complemented by the Government Decree on youth work and Policy File |
| WHO RUNS YOUTH WORK?                 | Only NPOs  | Mainly NPOs                | Only NPOs  | Almost only municipality  |

\* Data mainly by January 2022

# FOUR CITIES COMPARED\*



|                            | VIENNA   | MILANO   | STUTTGART   | HELSINKI  |
|----------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| DEFINITION OF YOUTH CENTRE | They offer an “Open” environment for low threshold access, like a café but without obligatory consumption and a variety of usually free spare time activities. There is no registration. Additionally you have thematic campaigning and individual support in case young people demand it. | A youth club is a space of at least 50 m <sup>2</sup> with as mandatory activities: Opening hours in the afternoon for at least 3 hours per day. Study activities, Workshop’s activities, Free time activities (de-structured activities with educators). Project activities Creatives, crafts and arts workshops, Sports, Active citizenship’s group activities, Holiday activities, Psychological support. | The youth centres are open to everyone between the ages of 12 and 27 without registration. In addition to after-school education, the focus is primarily on leisure activities: the houses offer a colourful program. Participation in our offers is voluntary and free of costs; our visitors can not only join in the activities, but also take a decisive role in the content and methods of the offers. | Venues with activities for youth, “normal” youth houses, inside skateboarding facilities, Domestic Animal Farm Falkulla and much more. 31 youth centres with open and led activities, each centre with slightly different facilities from music studios to dance halls. |

\* Data mainly by January 2022

|            | VIENNA   | MILANO  | STUTTGART   | HELSINKI  |
|------------|--|---|---|---|
| NETWORKING | On the district level, which is more relevant, it is depending on the district’s policy. Often Youths Worker are leading the networking structures. There are several topic-specific networks on the city level. | There is a Municipal network open to all youth clubs. Other networks are at the city level on different projects (e.g. “Stazione Milano” on active citizenship activities, etc.). At a district level there are local networks connecting youth policies. Furthermore, Milano has a youth Policy Network. | There is a regional controlling model (network) for the networking of service providers (independent providers and public youth welfare). The Youth Welfare Committee has the right to make decisions in all matters of youth welfare and binds the actions of the Youth Welfare Office administration. | All units have their own network in their areas, including shopping malls, security, shops, police, NGOs, schools, social- and other services. Also bigger networks including the entire city or metropolitan many areas. |

\* Data mainly by January 2022

| EDUCATION OF YOUTH WORKERS | No specific youth work education, no nationwide regulation. Often youth workers come from other educational fields, Social Work, Pedagogy, Social Sciences. Vienna offers a specific course. | No specific figure/title of youth educator at national level. There is a wider qualification of „professional educator“. There is a National Agency related to international programs, but there no youth work program at a national level. | No specific training for youth workers. Many of them come from the field of pedagogy, educational sciences or from the training to become an educator or from the training to become a youth and home educator (a three-year training after the middle school leaving certificate). In Baden-Württemberg is the Dual University (DHBW), which offers dual training with a specialisation in youth work. | Vocational level youth worker 3-years.<br><br>Community Educator Applied university apr. 3 years Bachelor Level.<br><br>Community Educator Applied university apr. 1.5 years Master’s Level<br><br>Youth work and youth research apr. 2 years Master’s Level Tampere University. |
|----------------------------|--|---|---|--|
|----------------------------|--|---|---|--|

| YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN THE CITY | Central youth parliament and the “youth million” on city level. Almost all 23 Viennese districts run local youth participation structures, a few with participatory budgeting, often organised by youth centres. | Participatory budgeting program, the “Bilancio partecipativo”, open to all citizens. There was no specific action aimed at young people. No specific youth participation structure. | Youth parliaments in all districts. These are supported by the colleagues of our youth centres and also the district head. | Participatory budgeting for all ages. Divided into a budget allocated to each of four main areas of the city and one budget for ideas concerning the entire city.<br><br>Voice of the Young Editorial Board, Young People’s Initiative System online system for ideas etc. |
|---------------------------------|--|---|--|--|
|---------------------------------|--|---|--|--|



A PLACE  
FOR EVERYONE

# COMPARED IN PRACTICE

## PUBLIC SPACE AND YOUTH WORK IN COMPARISON

In spring 2022 youth work was slowly developing into its usual general conditions. Restrictions were removed piece by piece: Limitations in contact numbers, contact tracing, preconditions of testing and mask requirements. All this had dominated the recent two years. At this point a set of four short-term training events started.

Between March and May every city hosted a week for six colleagues – two coming from every partner city. It was structured to be both a training and learning event, and furthermore another way of gaining data. It was one week to have a look at youth work in the partner city and to assess the situation in public space in a structured way. Participants got an assessment sheet and the task to visit certain spots, which were recommended by the hosts. They were supposed to visit the same spot more than once, at different days and different time of the day. The six-page observation questionnaires was to be filled later, not directly at the spot.

At the end, the 24 youth workers produced more than 60 of those observation sheets, which were both shared with the hosts and the research team.

The hosting in the respective youth work units was structured in different ways, e.g. in Milano the group of six had mainly a common program of visits together, whereas in Vienna every person was attached to a specific unit for some intense days there and only a small part in common. Some individual impressions are taken out of reports the visitors gave in addition to their assessment sheets.

First feedback happened directly at the end of the weeks and directly to the hosts. After coming back home the task was to fill the observations sheets.

Hosts were able to collect this direct feedback and add it to other data gained during the project.

In June 2022, all 24 participants in the exchanges met in Helsinki. Together with the four coordinators and researchers, those 24 visits were reflected and analysed both at international level and at the level of the host cities.



It turned out that this three-day structured reflection was one of the most essential and fruitful for the participants and their organisations. They could connect their own impressions gained abroad with what they heard about their own job approaches. Seeing public spaces through six different lenses was a strong and sustainable tool.

Reflecting on their own work in this form of exchange was considered extremely valuable by all those involved, and for many it was the core of the project. One week was considered a sufficient period, especially as foreign languages are an obstacle in direct communication with target groups.

A particularly valuable new finding was that the subsequent meeting of all and the structured joint reflections significantly increased the lasting effects of this project element.

Obstacles during the visits were language problems and the fact that some youth workers were overstrained with the double task of observing public space and learning from practise – mainly in a foreign language. The youth workers' bias made some focus too much on youth specifically and neglect other topics (such as furniture of public spaces, other users) in the observations.



All in all the approach worked really well and we strongly recommend this methodology for future projects and programs.

Of course, these activities produced some specific outcomes that were triangulated with other data included in the conclusions and recommendations. In these cases, it turned out that those findings were extremely specific to the cities and even more to the youth work organisations. It is challenging to describe them in a comparative way. The general outcome is rather a listing of topics that were identified to be important for youth in public space and youth work in public space:

The use of public space and usability of public space was one of the first key points in the observation reports. Connected to that was a discussion in the meeting a discussion on gender specific parks. It turned out that quite some youth workers had experience with participative gender specific planning, but sustainable change in usage of those places had been very limited.

Not a surprise was that topics of safety and, in often in connection to that alcohol and other drugs, had been observed and discussed multiple times during the visits.

Intensity and approaches of youth work in public space were varied widely in the cities. That was also a huge topic of discussion and for sure the biggest gain in this part of the project. It included discussion of legal questions for youth work, youth work principles, methodology and resources.

Last but not least, cooperation with other organisations present in public space were put on the table as essential. This was both about networking between different types of youth work offerings and with other institutions active in public space such as different municipal departments. A special subtopic was cooperation with police. The topic of networking was deemed to be of exceptional importance. Participants suggested that this topic should be discussed in more detail in another project.

*“IN PUBLIC SPACES, I WAS SURPRISED BY THE OUT-SKIRTS WITH THE BEAUTIFUL SOCCER FIELDS, VOLLEYBALL COURTS, SKATING RINKS AND PLAY-GROUNDS, LIKE THE ONES I SAW AT THE FASANENHOF.”*

*“I think Stuttgart has plenty of green corners, for example in Bad Cannstatt and Untertürkheim. Downtown Stuttgart I personally found gray and dreary. There I found only few places that invites you to linger. Since we were in different places at different times, I found that user groups in the Stuttgart city centre are very different depending on location, time of day and the day of the week. I also had the impression that people compared to Milano tend to use space more individual than mutual.”*

Yonas, youth worker from Milano

*“THE WEEK IN HELSINKI WAS FULL OF NEW AND INTERESTING IMPRESSIONS. THERE WERE SOME DIFFERENCES, BUT ALSO SIMILARITIES TO THE WORK IN VIENNA.”*

*“The target audience of youth work in Helsinki is between 16 and 28 years old. The contact with parents is much more important than it is the case in Vienna. The same applies to working with the police where officers coming from a special youth force have additional training and cooperation with youth workers and young people is usually very professional and at eye level.”*

Maria, youth worker from Vienna





# YOUTH

For the research, the project followed a participatory approach by defining the survey questions and the forms of distribution of the questionnaire through collaboration between representatives – managers and youth workers – of all project partners. The online survey that was conducted in two waves from December 2021 to April 2022 reached more than 2,280 young people aged 10 to 29 in the four cities (2,199 questionnaires were used for the analysis). The distribution between the cities does not allow a detailed comparison, since in Vienna 988 young people were reached, in Stuttgart 737, in Milano 433 and 170 in Helsinki.

The differences in the turn-out are due to the different forms of distribution: In Helsinki youth workers invited young people in their daily work in and outside of youth centres with leaflets, the German partners distributed the code for accessing the survey via leaflets and prints on bottles of soft-drinks in the youth houses, whereas in Milano and in Vienna the youth workers approached young people directly in youth centres and in public areas. Therefore, age distribution was significantly different in the cities too.

The average age for the whole sample was exactly 16 years, the “youngest” sample was the Viennese one with an average of 15.7 years and the “oldest” was in Stuttgart with 16.6 years. By gender the sample was – as expected – male dominated: 58% of the respondents declared themselves as male, 34% as female, 2% as diverse and another 2% did not provide the gender (additional 4% did not answer this question and were removed from further analysis).

The most popular leisure activities for the youngsters are connected to social contacts and to digital media. Seven out of ten young people say they are (almost) daily streaming music, and six of ten are (almost) daily streaming videos. Nevertheless, more than half of the respondents are also meeting friends offline almost daily. Being outside/playing outside is a

common alternative for leisure time for a significantly higher percentage of young people in Vienna and in Stuttgart than in Helsinki or in Milano.

Significant differences between girls and boys can be found in “gaming” and “doing sport” (almost) daily. A non-significant but still quite high difference can be found in the answers to the item “being/playing outside” (almost) daily, where 49% of the male respondents but only 36% of the female ones agree.

Friends are the main partners for spending the free time, followed by parents and – on weekdays – colleagues from school

or work. But for every second respondent it is also common to spend free time alone. Most often the young people claim to be spending free time at home or at a friend’s home, on weekdays youth centres are also very popular.

A clear difference between weekdays and weekends can also be found regarding spending time in organisations like sport clubs or culture centres also – but as strong – regarding fitness centres. We can also observe gender specific differences in the selection of the place to spend the free time. Girls and young women spend a significantly higher proportion of their leisure time at a friend’s

place, whereas skater-parks, playgrounds, soccer-grounds are significantly more often used by boys and young men. But no significant difference can be found regarding spending time at places like streets, squares or parks.

When asked where people meet with their friends, almost three quarters of the respondents say they meet most of the time somewhere in their district, two thirds even close to their place. But, for six out of ten, at home is seldom the meeting place, making home as unattractive as another district.

So we can conclude that being with friends is for the majority of utmost importance, and these meetings are happening outside of the own apartment/house. The latter is even more true for boys and young men than girls and young women.

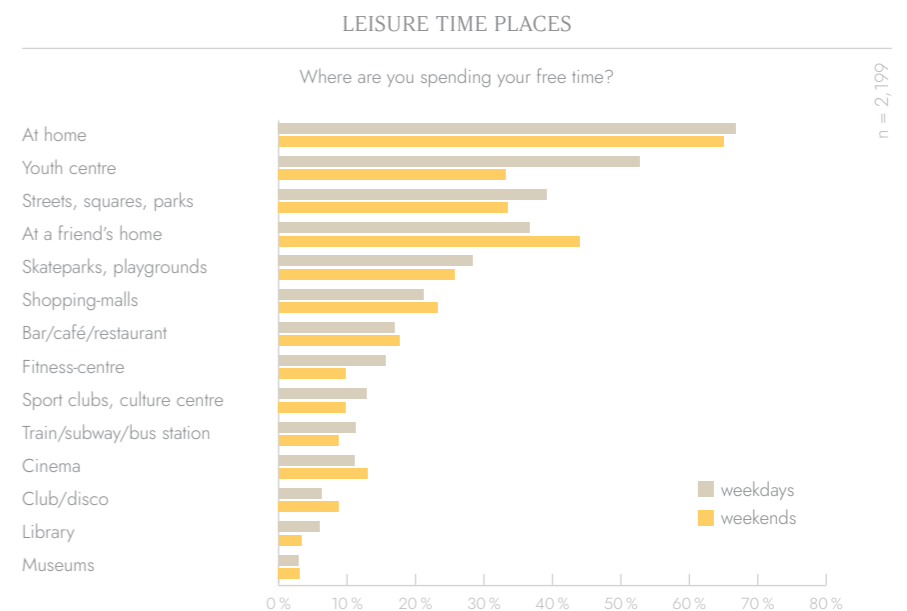
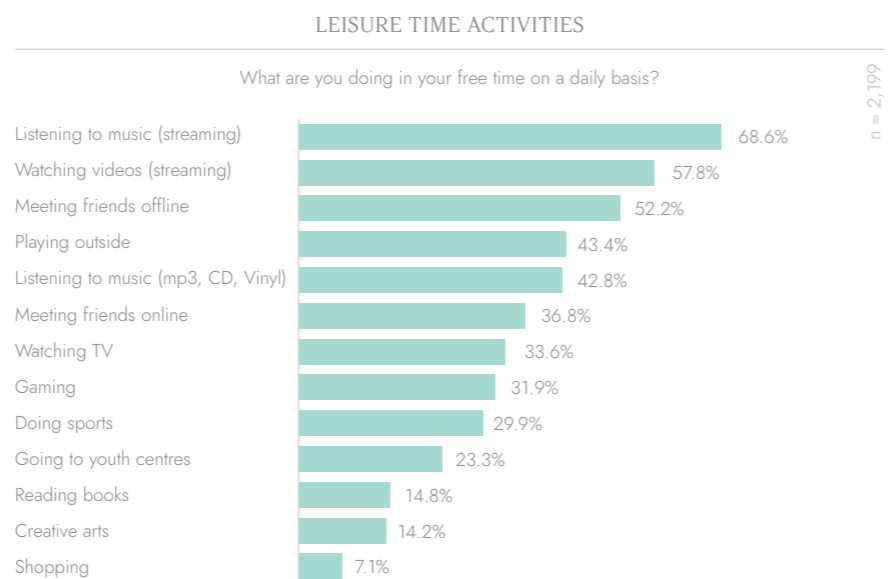
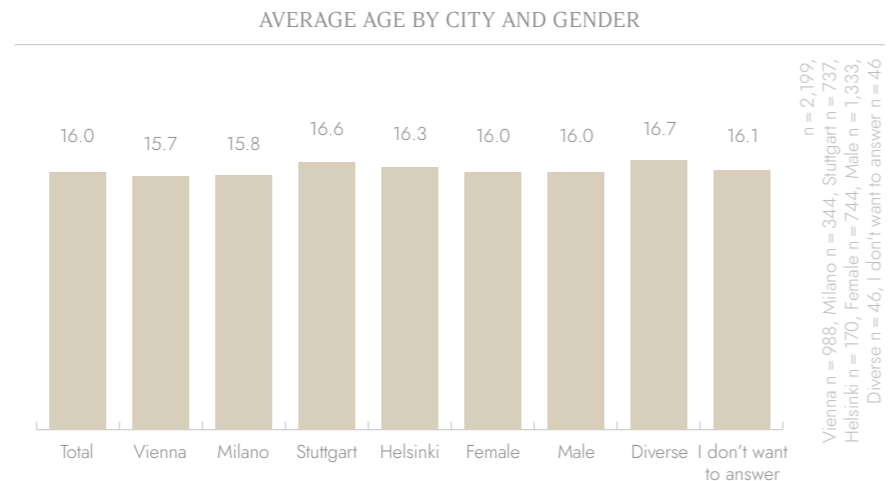
Both public transport and walking by foot are, for the clear majority of young people, the most important ways to get around in the city. But the survey also showed that e-scooter sharing is the new hot thing: almost every sixth respondent says that they rent at least once a week an e-scooter.

The question of whether there are places that young people do generally avoid in the city was answered affirmatively by four out of ten respondents. Slightly more girls say they have places they don’t want to visit in the city. The reasons were very individual and connected to – personal or narrated – experiences in this certain place: “a group of young people that I had a conflict with”, “the surrounding where my ex-partner lives” and very often, “unpleasant people”.

It is very interesting to compare these quantitative results with results from the focus groups. For the research various focus groups and in-depth interviews with young people were conducted. Youth workers that were trained to hold focus groups invited young people to various group settings. A special focus was delivered to female youth and – in Helsinki – one so-called “rainbow” youth.



When meeting with friends many respondents prefer their own district, mostly somewhere close to home.



The question on what makes a public space interesting for young people was answered in a simple way: meeting friends, having space and infrastructure. Public places and spaces are essential for identity building for young people. All participants said they like places where they meet friends and where they can be as they want to be. Male participants talked about conflicts and why and how to avoid them, indicating that these conflicts are not just about available resources but also about defining groups and feelings of belonging. On the other hand, female participants talked

about inappropriate and sexist behaviour of male persons in public places. In general, feelings of insecurity are the main reason to leave or to avoid places – and the way to increase individual feelings of security are to go out in groups. Levelling gender-based power relations is essential for the usability of public space!

*FOR YOUNG PEOPLE  
PUBLIC PLACES  
AND PUBLIC SPACES  
ARE ESSENTIAL  
FOR IDENTITY BUILDING.*

A main factor for an interesting public space is the infrastructure – this includes the basics of seating opportunities that allow to see and be (not) seen. One public space does not fulfil the same function for everyone, and it can also change with the time of day. Sometimes you want to be seen, but sometimes you also want to have the chance to be unnoticed, to not feel controlled and observed by others. Furthermore, it was mentioned that strict rules from parents regarding the time for homecoming were established and there was a tendency that female and LGBTIQ+ youth experience stricter rules and have to be home earlier than male peers.

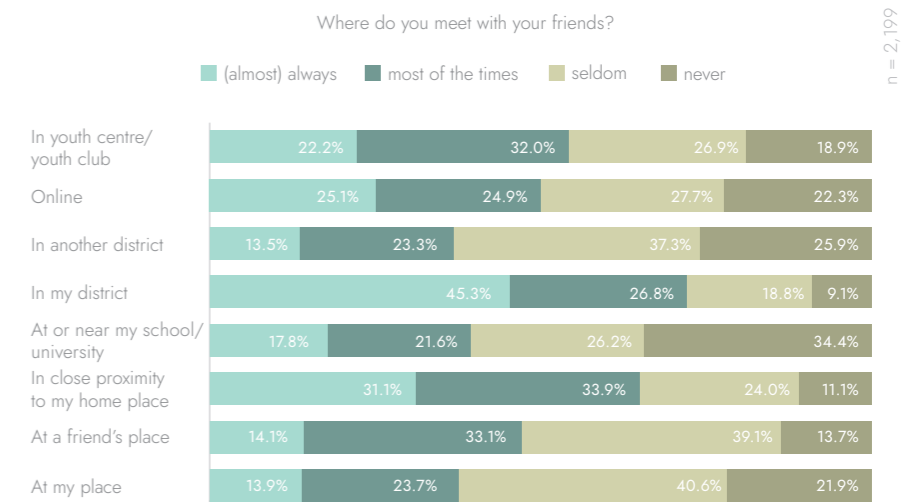
*LEVELLING  
GENDER-BASED  
POWER  
RELATIONS  
IS ESSENTIAL FOR  
THE USABILITY  
OF PUBLIC SPACE!*

Another important component of the infrastructure affecting the quality of a public space are clean public restrooms and drink water dispensers. These factors allow young people to stay longer in the non-commercialised spaces.

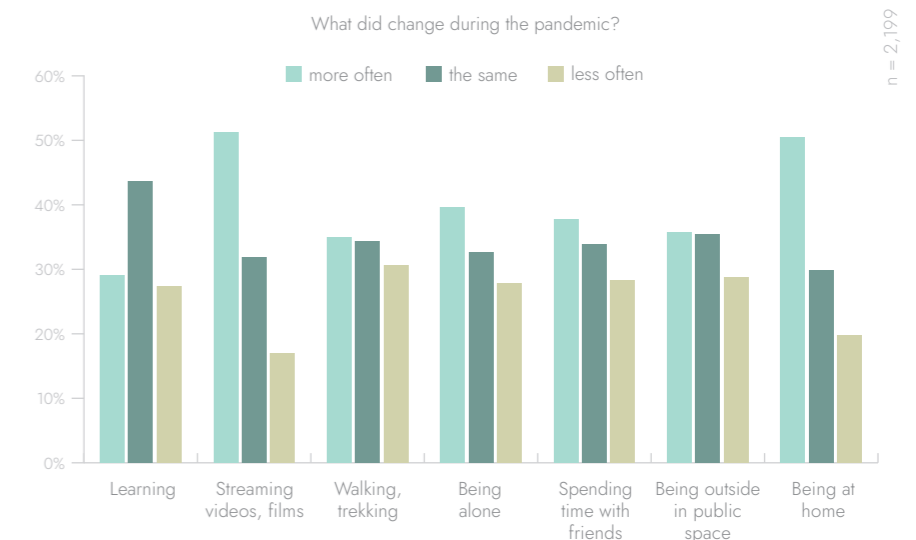
Another topic of the research was the impact of Covid-19 on the use of public spaces. Here it was obvious that the main change was staying at home and using streaming possibilities.

In the qualitative research, the young participants in particular declared that they did not really see a difference in their opportunities – except in meeting their friends. This seems surprising at first glance but makes complete sense when reflecting that their behavioural changes would happen anyway with ageing. Before the pandemic they were children, now they are youth, and therefore, in retrospect they do not feel that Corona had such a big impact. But what became clear as well was the fact that Covid-19 increased social exclusion more strongly for those who already had few friends before.

MEETINGPLACES



CHANGES DURING THE PANDEMIC



Infrastructure in public space has strong influence on practicability and appropriation.

An aerial photograph of a baseball field. The pitcher's mound is a circular area of green grass, surrounded by reddish-brown dirt. Two players are on the mound: one in a red jersey and one in a blue jersey. Long shadows are cast across the field from the right side. The text 'TO BE SEEN OR NOT TO BE SEEN' is overlaid on the right side of the image in a white box.

TO BE SEEN OR

NOT TO BE SEEN

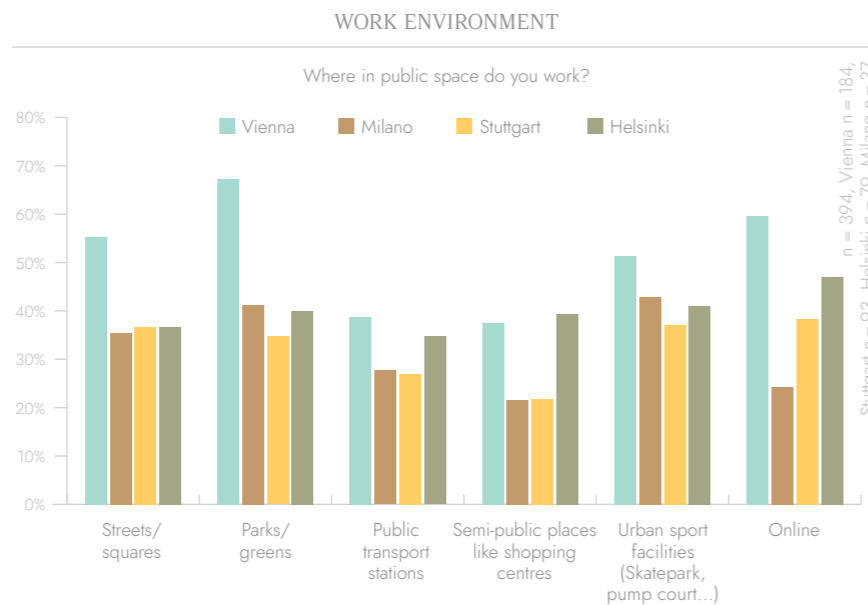
# YOUTH WORKERS

In total, 394 youth workers from the four cities participated in the online survey that was accessible from June to September 2022. In addition to this quantitative part of the research, in each city focus groups or qualitative interviews were conducted with youth workers.

The participation in the survey was quite unequal in the different cities. 37 youth workers in Milano gave an overview of those working on a professional basis in the city, and while 184 in Vienna is also a high percentage of all employed youth workers, there the main participants came from the partner organisation of the project. From Stuttgart 93 questionnaires were analysed, 79 from Helsinki. 55% of the participating youth workers are female, 43% male and 2% diverse. Also the division between genders differed in the cities' participants strongly; both in Stuttgart and in Milano around 63% are female, in Helsinki 50% are female, 41% male and 9% diverse. The work experience of the youth workers ranged from some months up to more than 40 years, with an average of 11.5 years. Almost two thirds of the respondents work in a youth centre, one quarter is working as out-reach youth workers and the rest declares themselves as mobile youth workers.

## THE PUBLIC WORKSPACES OF YOUTH WORKERS DIFFER FROM CITY TO CITY.

The approach to work in public space is also different in the cities. On the one hand Viennese youth workers report to work very often in parks, online and on street; other youth workers are not so clear



about that, and are not putting any area of work in public space above the average (see diagram).

It is also quite surprising which main issues the youth workers in the cities see in the public space. Most youth workers see the functionality of public space as a meeting place for young people. Sport is the second most often named issue in public spaces – except for the Finnish youth workers who see culture and arts as the second most important issue. Conflict is for a larger percentage of Viennese youth workers an issue than for all others. Also an interesting detail: violence and vandalism is perceived by the smallest percentage from Milanese youth workers (even though this is not a significant difference).

The question regarding violence and vandalism was deepened later in the survey to learn that almost two thirds of the youth workers often observe violence in public space. But the majority (51%) of those who reported violence name insults as to seen very often. On the other hand, physical violence is seen only by three percent of the youth workers. It is also of interest that violent behaviour happens between young people and between individuals far more often than between youth and adults or between groups of people.

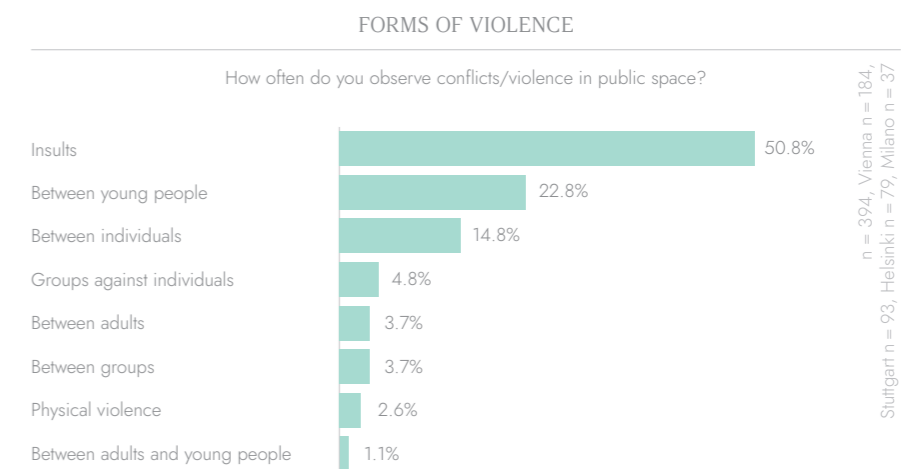
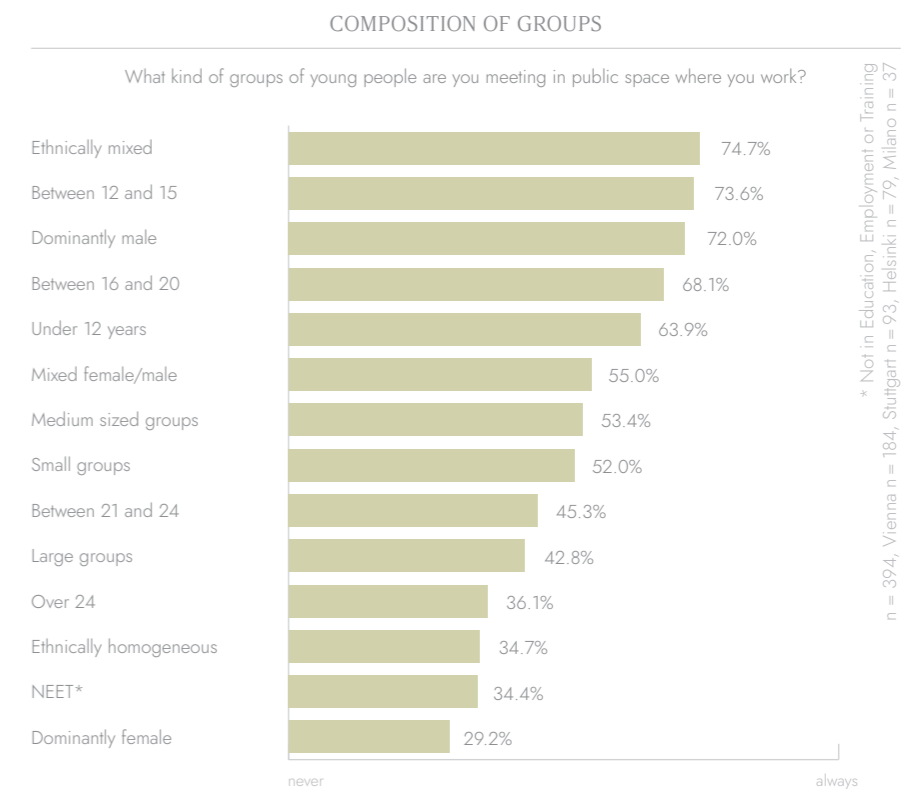
Even more youth workers (76% of all respondents) say they very often see (results of) vandalism in public space, here littering and pollution is the main problem (95% of those having reported vandal-



ism), followed by (offensive) tagging and graffiti (68%) and destroyed public infrastructure (61%). Again, differences between the cities are in some cases significant. Tagging and graffiti is reported a lot less from Helsinki youth workers than from others.

According to the youth workers public places are used by groups that are ethnically mixed, between 12 and 15 years, and dominantly male – this would be the description that youth workers see most often in public space. And the youth workers agree also that groups in public spaces are least dominantly female, NEET, ethnically homogeneous and older than 24 years old. But also here we find differences between the cities: In Vienna groups are more often labelled as dominantly male than in the other cities and therefore significantly less mixed (male/female) groups perceived and significantly less as female groups than in Milano. On the other hand, in Milano groups are described significantly less as groups “under 12 years” than in Vienna or in Stuttgart.

Deviant group behaviour occurs sometimes, but those groups are described by the majority as dominantly male and ethnically mixed. No clear classification was made regarding the size or the age division in groups showing deviant behaviour. Furthermore, it should be noted that in Milano deviant groups are seen significantly less often as ethnically mixed than in the other cities, and in less strictly classified as dominantly male.



Regarding the changes over a longer period of time, the perceptions by the youth workers in the different cities are very heterogeneous in some areas. Consensus exists that public transport infrastructure increased (55% of the youth workers agreed to that) over the last five to ten years as did the number of bicycles and scooters (86%), also that spaces for young people decreased (34%). But in other themes the development was quite different or more accentuated in the four cities. In general youth workers agreed that diversity increased (65%) but in Helsinki the perception that diversity increased, is still a lot stronger (93%) than in the other cities. 43% - and thereby the relative majority - of Viennese youth workers claim the ratio of female youth in public spaces decreased, in Stuttgart (44%) and in Milano (48%) claimed that in their cities the ratio of girls and young women in public space increased, and Helsinki youth workers perceive by majority that there was no change.

**FOR MANY YOUNG PEOPLE THE COMMERCIALISATION OF PUBLIC PLACES LEADS TO A FEELING OF ALIENATION.**

One main topic discussed in the youth workers' focus groups was the commercialisation of public space: more and more places are used for bars, cafés, or restaurants and therefore the free use of public space gets diminished: on the one hand it is not possible for all to use these com-

mercial places for financial reasons, on the other hand, just being there, "hanging around" in the places with commercialised settings is often considered as disturbing. Police and private security sometimes intervene in these settings - according to the youth workers. This leads to a feeling of alienation by the young people.

Furthermore, approximately three quarters of the youth workers say there are places in their respective cities where young people cannot go. In Helsinki it is just half of the youth workers saying this. The reasons for not going to certain places are also quite different - financial restrictions, conflicts with certain groups, long distances or insecurity are mentioned. Here we do see differences of the perception of youth workers on the one hand and of young people on the other hand.

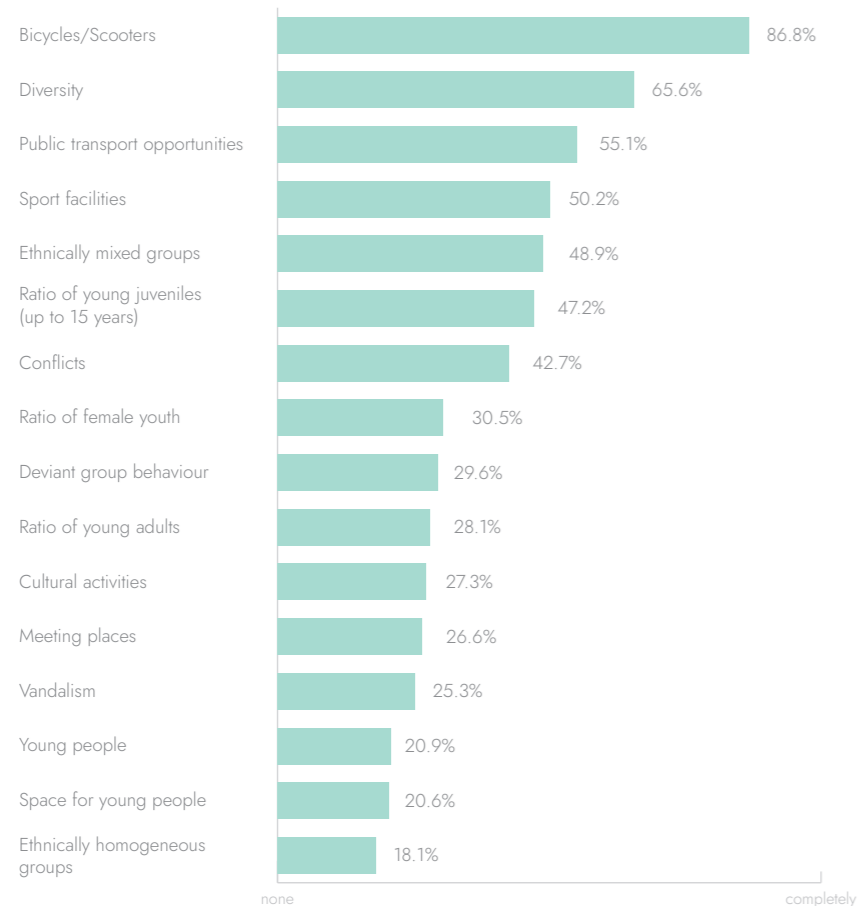
Interesting is that youth workers mentioned quite some changes in their work as well as in the living conditions of young people during the Covid-19 pandemic. For the impact on young people, marked increased loneliness and stress regarding meeting their friends are mentioned. Concerning their own work, the change to online settings was the most challenging approach but also the orientation from youth centres to public spaces without-reach approaches was important.

In the focus groups another impact of Covid-19 on the public space was mentioned: the whole population showed more appreciation of public spaces since many people started using locations like parks, which were used before a lot less. Now the different groups - adults, families, with or without children and youth - have to find ways to come together with each other.

Also the description of what young people are looking for in public places reflects the topic of ownership of the places. According to the youth workers, young people want to be respected in public spaces, they want to have places where they can be themselves, have opportunities to meet, do sports, sit together and feel safe.

CHANGES IN PUBLIC SPACE

What changed in public space in the last 5 to 10 years?



n = 394, Vienna n = 184, Stuttgart n = 93, Helsinki n = 79, Milano n = 37



**INCREASED LONELINESS AND STRESS WITH MEETING FRIENDS AS MAIN EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON YOUTH.**



GET  
INVOLVED!

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The project identified several overarching trends, though they could be observed on a variety of scales due to the different structures of the cities:

- Youth still prefer to meet in real life rather than online.
- However, the internet, specifically social media, is an essential part of their spare time and in structuring activities.
- Public space in general is an important place for young people and their daily life structure.
- The local living surroundings is the most important part of urban space for young people.
- But due to increased mobility more distant specific spots (sport areas, city centres, shopping malls) are getting more attractive.
- Youth groups are getting smaller, the "big clique" of 20+ is rare.
- Specifically in those cities with a large migration population, groups are more ethnically mixed than some years ago.

- Young youth (12–14 years) get more visible, older (16+ years) are comparably less in general. The increased presence of older youth when it comes to specific events leads to misinterpretation.
- "I go there, where my friends are" is the peer group dynamic that is leading young people to certain places.
- The perception of safety in public space differs by gender and age. This was also a very diverse point comparing the cities.
- Certain public spaces (parks but also meeting points in the city centres) are getting more a transition ground than a place to stay permanently.
- The usage of public spaces differs from city centre to living areas significantly.
- The pandemic restrictions had a deep impact in the usage of public space, especially for teenagers. In any analysis it is extremely important to distinguish between "during" and "after" restrictions.

Young people are users of public spaces and they need spaces both in their local environment and in the city centre. They need places to meet, places to retreat, spaces to stage themselves and places where they feel welcomed. They also need places where they can spontaneously get things going. Leisure activities without costs have a high priority in the appropriation of public space by young people and have an impact on the quality of urban spaces. This must be taken into account when planning spaces.

A CITY  
THAT IS SHAPED  
BY YOUNG PEOPLE  
IS A CITY IN  
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OWN FUTURE.

## GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

A proper social mix in public space is healthy – a lack of social control in public space might lead to unwanted conflict, but "social control" must not be more law enforcement. The Viennese model of intense social-pedagogical and structured children and youth offerings is an alternative.

Leisure time activities can be key and entrance door to youngsters' living environment.

Networking with the players and institutions relevant for youth is one of the keys. Youth workers, school, policy makers, police and others need permanent and structured exchange. This has to happen on all relevant levels. Both locally and for respective general managers. It needs to be on equal level, with mutual respect and recognition – including the recognition that all of those have different assignments, rules and methodologies.

Mobility is a key topic. Public transport is by far the most important tool for young people in urban space. Proper networks, schedules and prices are essentials.

Specifically young women reported in the qualitative interviews that they feel unsafe in public spaces. Gender specific urban planning alone cannot solve this problem. It is a general gender issue that needs to be approached in an interdisciplinary way. Open youth work can provide advice and represent the interests of young people in this discussion.

"I want to be seen and I don't want to be seen": Youth are in an ambivalent status about public space. Visible spaces can raise subjective safety but might raise questions on those they do not want to meet there. This might be adults (relatives) or other youth. The "safe space" can have very different definitions in practical terms.

Open youth work can play an active role by mediating between urban planning and young people. The consistent participation of young people can contribute to their use of public space and young people identifying with their city. A city that is shaped by young people is a city in which young people may want to stay in their own future.

## COVID-19-PANDEMIC

- Youth had lost more than other groups in their life structure (school, public space) and had less alternatives, aggravating with the fact that socialising is THE key activity in adolescence. Young people are relying on places outside from home, therefore the restrictions during the lockdowns had a much bigger influence, to generalise from that: Once new rules for public space are introduced it has a huge impact on young people specifically as they have less alternatives than adults.
- During the pandemic most young people were going with the rules though they were not happy with them (e.g. mask requirements) and clearly stated the latter.
- Youth live in different time- and space perceptions – in a different perspective of adults and even youth workers. Most young people emphasised summer 2022 as "post Covid" and did not see any "after effects" themselves. This stands in sharp contradiction to the point of view of experts.

## YOUTH WORK RECOMMENDATIONS

Spaces free to use in all cities are getting more and more precious in general and the usage is increasing permanently. Youth work needs creative and urgent ideas to find sufficient solutions in order to defend young people's interest in city development.

There is a need for outreach leisure activities and a need for adult contact persons in the city to help young people feel safe



and to show them different places and their opportunities. (Open) Youth workers are the gatekeepers that connect youth interests in public spaces to local policy makers and can enhance the appropriation of public space.

City centres got more attractive for young people, other than in their local living environments youth work offerings there need to adapt to temporary use.

Any youth specific offerings need to be orientated to the needs of youth and they deserve professionalism, quality and style, e.g. a "youth café" needs to consist of the furniture, elements and technique that is on a professional café level.

In addition, (open) youth work itself needs to be professional and recognised as a profession. To get there (or strengthen that) it needs a clear and arguable concept, ongoing training and permanent and proper evaluation, a knowledge-based practical outputs of youth work.

On the other hand, to get to that point, it has to be financed properly, equipment must be state of the art, payment of workers must be proper and according the challenges they face (content, working hours etc.).

Significant impact can only be achieved in the long term, continuity is a key and therefore all financing needs to be regular and long-term, institutional approaches beat project approaches.





