

MOVE IT KANAL

AN URBAN PROJECT
(2015-2021) ABOUT
THE CULTURAL

PARTICIPATION OF
YOUNG PEOPLE FROM
THE BRUSSELS CANAL
ZONE



RESEARCH ON THE CULTURAL EXPERIENCE OF YOUNG PEOPLE FROM THE BRUSSELS CANAL ZONE

FIRST RESEARCH PHASE

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CONTEXT

Move It Kanal is an urban project (2015-2021) about the cultural participation of young people from the Brussels Canal Zone. Its goal is to stimulate the cultural participation of young people (12-18) from the Brussels Canal Zone through more collaboration between organizations from various fields and communities.

The project is receives support from the Brussels-Capital Region and the European Union in the framework of ERDF Brussels (European Regional Development Fund).

For this project, Lasso collaborates with the following partners: Erasmus University College Brussels – Social Work, JES vzw, D'Broej, Brussels Kunstenoverleg/Réseau des Arts à Bruxelles, LES Molenbeek and IHECS.

Move It Kanal started with a research component, focusing on the cultural experience of young people from the Brussels Canal Zone. Their interests, needs and wants regarding art and culture were mapped. In addition, cultural organizations, youth centers and educational institutions that are active in the Canal Zone, are encouraged to get to know each other better and join forces.

The ultimate goal is to further cross-link young people and culture, to set up cultural projects for and by young people, all of which are done by a broad network of youth, education and cultural professionals.

NETWORKING

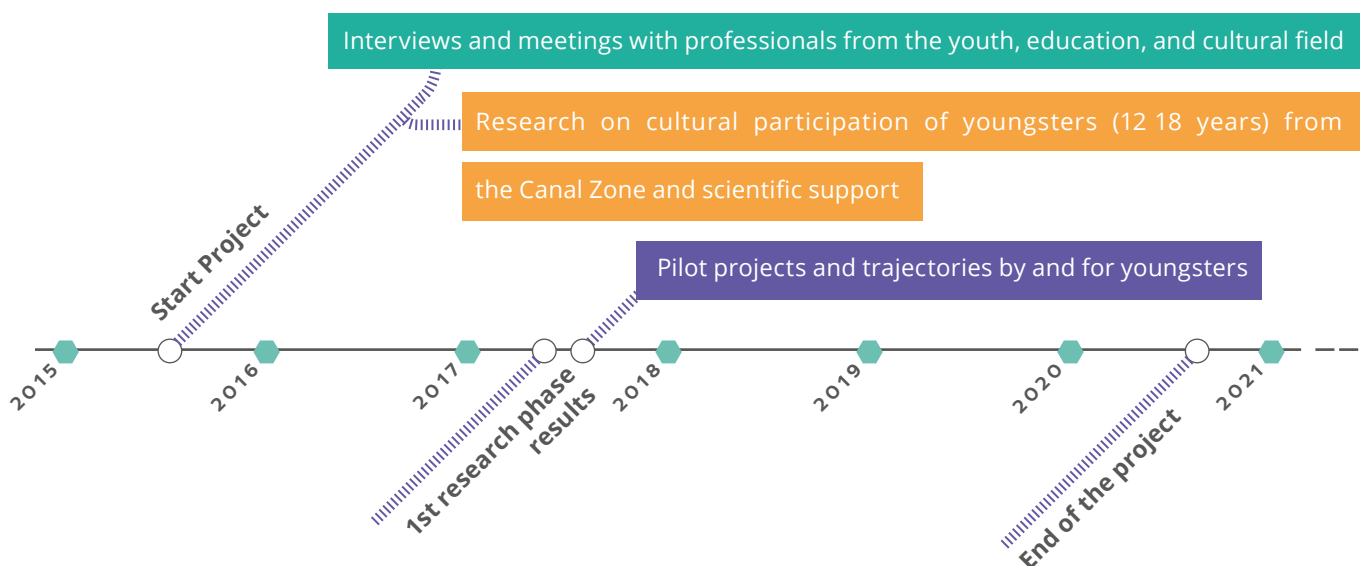
A broad and sustainable network of professionals from the youth, educational and cultural fields, via numerous interpersonal meetings, networking events and training activities is the main objective of Move It Kanal. The goals is that the network helps tightening the connection between the Brussels youth and the cultural sector.

RESEARCH

To measure is to know. During the initial phase of the research, the cultural experience of youngsters from the Brussels Canal Zone is mapped. Youth workers, teachers and cultural practitioners are also surveyed. The research helps shape the actions and pilot projects developed within Move It Kanal to strengthen the connection between youngsters and culture. The pilot projects and trajectories resulting from the research findings will be scientifically backed by the Erasmus University College Brussels - Social Work.

PROJECTS

From the end of 2017 onwards, concrete cultural projects and trajectories will be established by and for youngsters from the Brussels Canal Zone, based on the findings of our research and the first networking conversations with different players.



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INTRODUCTION

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This qualitative research project was conducted by the Erasmus University College Brussels, and is part of the bilingual urban project Move It Kanal*, which focusses on the cultural participation of young people from the Brussels Canal Zone. It focusses primarily on young people between 12 and 18 from vulnerable neighbourhoods in Molenbeek, Anderlecht and the city of Brussels.**

The results of the first phase of the research will be implemented in the conception of the pilot projects, which will take shape at the beginning of 2018. The project will receive continuous scientific guidance by the Erasmus University College Brussels - Social Work, during the entire duration of the project.

In the first research phase, **55 young people aged between 11 and 22** who live in the Brussels Canal Zone or spend a great deal of their time there, were interviewed in the autumn of 2016 and spring 2017. Different qualitative research methods were used such as observation, focus-group interviews and in-depth interviews, both in the street, at school and in culture and youth work organizations. To reach young people, **youth workers, teachers and cultural workers** were contacted who in turn contacted young people. Most of the young people interviewed had a different ethnic origin, and came from a household with only one or no parent employed. Only thirteen of the young people interviewed spoke French or Dutch at home. All the other young people spoke another language at home, such as Arabic, Berber or Rif-language.

We wanted to know **how these young people experience culture**, both active participation (meaning young people creating art themselves) and passive participation (meaning consuming culture created by others). Active cul-

tural participation includes for example dancing, whereas attending a dance performance would be defined as passive cultural participation.

Secondly, also cultural workers, youth workers and teachers were interviewed by means of **individual in-depth interviews** (7 cultural workers) and **focus groups** (2 with 13 youth workers and teachers). We wanted to know how they introduce culture in their work with young people. Finally, we asked all of them about the **opportunities and difficulties** regarding cultural participation by young people.

In part 1 'Young people and cultural participation' the most important results from the interviews with the young people from the Brussels Canal Zone are highlighted. In particular, **we call on the voice of the young people themselves**. Qualitative research into cultural participation by young people is very scarce, and we don't know much about how young people themselves speak about this topic.

In part 2 'Looking at the cultural offer' the most essential findings from the interviews with the cultural workers, youth workers and teachers are highlighted. Again, **we call on the voice of the professionals** and we also formulate some recommendations.

We conclude with concrete tips and tricks for professionals who want to introduce culture in their work with young people (from the Brussels Canal Zone).

* For more information on the entire Move It Kanal-project: www.move-it-kanal.be.

** As defined in the regional plan for endurable development Gewestelijk Plan voor Duurzame Ontwikkeling: (http://www.gpdo.brussels/sites/default/files/prdd_cdc_web_0.pdf).

PART 1

YOUNG PEOPLE AND CULTURAL PARTICIPATION



1 YOUNG PEOPLE AND ACTIVE CULTURAL PARTICIPATION

1.1 TYPES OF PARTICIPATION AND CONTEXT

Most of the young people interviewed are involved in **active cultural participation**, i.e. creating art themselves (singing, drawing, photography). In most cases they do this on an **informal** base: alone or with friends, at home or in semi-public spaces. None of the young people had enrolled in formal arts education in leisure time. A few young people did take a class however, organized by an association, a community center or a cultural organization. Some of them organize themselves in **informal interdisciplinary collectives**. Those collectives often focus on urban arts and share information about or provide support for cultural initiatives organized by other young people.

Part of the young people interviewed are engaged in photography, film, dance and music in the urban scene, but visual arts and theatre remain popular as well. Many of them often like to switch from one activity to another: they like to combine for example dance and theatre.

1.2 REASONS FOR CULTURAL PARTICIPATION

For several interviewees, cultural participation is just a way to **spend their time**, resist boredom and **express themselves** in a positive way. Others point out that cultural participation enables them to communicate, enter into dialogue with others and convey a message.

Another group of interviewees thinks culture offers an opportunity for **learning and enriching themselves**. They develop self-confidence, and cultural participation becomes a vital element of self development. To them cultural participation is a key catalyst of identity building: it is a part of who they really are.

A last reason for being involved in cultural participation is the social aspect: they can meet new people, gather new experiences and share knowledge and experience with others.



1.3 IMPACT OF ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Culture generates a **good feeling** for culturally active young people. The reasons for this vary. Some feel good because of the activity itself or because of the creative process and results, whereas others feel good because cultural participation makes them feel relaxed or makes them think that they are doing something worthwhile.

Freedom is also a very important aspect, regardless of the nature of the cultural activity: young people feel free when practicing their cultural activity. Not only because **they master the creative process themselves**, but also because they can **enjoy themselves**, be themselves to the fullest, or can be whatever they like to be, without being judged.

1.4 TOTALLY DIGITAL?

Arts and digital media seem to be inextricably linked. In addition to digital media as a **learning school**, whereby Youtube acts as a popular vehicle to master techniques or learn choreographies and get ideas, digital media are also being used in other ways.

Social media such as Facebook are mainly used to **share and disseminate their own cultural content such as video clips**. Through social media, the young people try to reach an audience that goes beyond their own circle of friends. Almost all young people make frequent use of the internet and computers as **carriers for their cultural content**. They watch movies on their laptops and read books on their smartphones on the subway.

Finally, digital media also serve as **tools**, and different young people experiment for example with digital photography and graphic arts.

1.5 THRESHOLDS FOR ACTIVE CULTURAL PARTICIPATION

Lack of time is most often considered the **biggest problem** for not being involved in active cultural participation. A number of young people already combine several activities in their free time and therefore cannot add an additional activity. Others are simply too busy with **school**. In addition, a **lack of motivation** is often mentioned. On the one hand, some young people are not interested in active cultural participation and on the other hand they are **not prepared to invest in longer term**.

Information thresholds also seem to play a role. Regularly, young people have a wrong image of a certain activity, causing them not to want to participate. Often, they don't seem to find a suitable offer, and do not know where to look for it.

Social thresholds are also involved. Sometimes young people drop out because of poor group atmosphere or because they simply don't feel at ease. Gender and ethnicity seem to play a role in this regard. Several girls indicated that the presence of boys hindered them from participating or to be hindered for the same reason by their parents. **Financial thresholds** seem to have less impact on cultural participation according to the interviewees. Finally, **geographical thresholds** are also relevant to a small number of young people and the distance to certain activities is considered a potential obstacle.

2 YOUNG PEOPLE AND PASSIVE CULTURAL PARTICIPATION

2.1 LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION

To a lesser extent, young people consume already created culture (**passive participation**). Going to the cinema appears as the most popular cultural activity among young people. A large part of the interviewees attends the cinema about once a month. They do so with their friends, but sometimes also with family.

While the majority of the interviewees never attend a dance performance, they do attend theatre performances regularly. We see a **clear influence of the school** on this participation, since a lot of young people go to the theatre through/with school.

Most of the interviewees visit a **museum or an exhibition** on a regular base. Here as well, the school context is of importance. In their spare time however, young people hardly visit a museum or exhibition. Almost half of the interviewees **don't go to the library or not very often**. Whoever goes, mainly goes to borrow books for school, or to study there. Only a handful of interviewees enjoy reading in their spare time and read a lot. Furthermore, the preference of the younger interviewees goes to **comics**.

More than half of the interviewees don't or hardly attend concerts and festivals. If they do, they prefer **local events and neighbourhood parties with their friends**.

2.2 INTEREST IN AND MOTIVATION FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE CULTURAL OFFER

When young people participate in a certain offer, they are primarily looking for **relaxation and fun**. The social aspect of an activity, such as with cinema and performing arts, also plays a role. Young people like to spend time with friends or family. The **experience economy** also applies to the choice of a cultural activity. Young people are looking for **experiences and adventures**. The cinema, for example, offers them a total experience thanks to the big screens, the excellent sound and a general atmosphere in which they can immerse themselves with friends or family.

In any case, **the offer must match the interests and way of life of young people as much as possible**. In cinema and performing arts, youth-oriented story lines, dance and music styles they know, or actors serving as a role model, can provide youngsters the necessary motivation to be attracted to a particular offer.

Interaction is also an important factor. Young people don't like one-way traffic when participating in a cultural activity. They prefer **interaction, exchange and dialogue**. In performing arts, for example, they are impressed with the interaction between the actors on the one hand and the actors and audience on the other hand. Interaction can also be realized by putting them to work actively in a museum, through a quest, or by using interactive technology and digital media.

Young people also attach importance to **meaning that is created by themselves**. They want to make meaning themselves, **want to embark on a creative process**. They prefer to figure out themselves what a work of art is about, rather than someone else telling them the meaning. They are open to discovery when they can formulate their own interpretations or relate the story lines to their own lives.



2.3 OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE CULTURAL SECTOR

When the cultural offer matches **their interests and way of life**, the interviewees are more likely to participate in this. For example, they prefer hiphop rather than classical ballet and theatre plays that revolve around **contemporary themes** such as social media may appeal to them. Also, young people indicate that they don't always have enough background knowledge about the cultural offer and, in most cases, **they don't look for that knowledge themselves either**. They want to be given more information on **what to expect** when they attend a particular theatre performance for example.

Some young people **don't feel comfortable enough to participate** in a particular cultural offer. Several of them don't feel immediately at home in the the cultural field, because they can't recognize themselves in that field. **The rules** of certain cultural institutions **are not always known** and young people don't always know how to behave. A lot of young people are interested in attending concerts and going to festivals, but they can't participate because **their parents have a negative perception** about it, or because the parents don't want their children to go out at night.

Although the cost of the cultural offer does not immediately constitute the biggest obstacle for participation, young people are **not always willing to pay a certain price** for the cultural offer.

3 NEEDS AND WISHES OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN TERMS OF CULTURAL PARTICIPATION (ACTIVE AND/OR PASSIVE)

Young people (mainly from the age of 15) have the feeling of **not having enough opportunities to develop their talents**. This becomes evident in both not discovering talents and not stimulating that talent development. In addition, young people **want to be accompanied by professionals** and want to **be offered the space** and a stage to develop and demonstrate their talent.

Young people are in need of more participatory projects and trajectories. Now, they too often have the feeling that **cultural providers insufficiently take the experience of young people as a starting point** and that they talk too often about them, instead of with them. Young people **want to become more involved** and gain more participation. They also consider it important to be listened to and they want to express their views on (social) themes that concern them. Projects which enable them to **convey a message** are therefore labeled as good practices.

Other interviewees (mainly up to the age of 15) stress the importance of **creative and innovative methods** that enable a better understanding of cultural activities. They want to discover new things and new cultural activities, but it is important for them that the **offer remains fun**.

For example, they would focus on quests in a museum. Games and other new technologies are also very popular with these youngsters.

Young people indicate that they expect from cultural workers an **open attitude, confidence and encouragement**. In addition, they must ensure a positive climate and a good group atmosphere.

Young people are looking for a place where they can feel at home and be themselves. Projects or initiatives that **promote encounters and enable exchange** are considered, by some young people, as good practices. By getting in contact with the other, young people get to know and understand the other better.

Finally, some young people are looking for **their own space or place** where they can do their thing. According to the young people (rehearsal) spaces are scarce and expensive in Brussels. As a result, they are often to be found in the public space, which may be disturbing to other users of that space. They therefore call for the creation of a place for young people or for the **wider accessibility of available spaces** in existing cultural institutions.



PART 2

LOOKING AT THE CULTURAL OFFER



1 CULTURAL WORKERS, YOUTH WORKERS AND TEACHERS

1.1 PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Several cultural workers work in a **participatory way** and allow young people to have a voice. Some cultural workers not only engage in participatory work with a group of young people, but also in **peer-to-peer work**. The young people are offered autonomy to get started together and to involve other young people.

In addition, youth workers and teachers think that the **involvement of young people also affects their motivation**. When young people feel they have a voice, their motivation grows.

Furthermore, by using the questions and interests of young people as a starting point, cultural workers can **more closely align themselves with the lives of the young people**. A participatory approach and stimulating ownership however is not evident.

An initial crucial phase in stimulating active participation of young people is building a **relationship of trust**. Youth workers and teachers point out that is essential to take your **time** to do so. According to them, it is crucial to invest time in building a relationship of trust, because trust is an important factor contributing to the success or failure of the project.

1.2 RESPONDING TO THE INTERESTS AND WAYS OF LIFE OF YOUNG PEOPLE

For several cultural workers, **responding to the interests of young people** is an important prerequisite for a good practice. Many organizations try to respond to what's going on in the lives of young people. For example, some experiment with **urban arts** projects and others focus on **audiovisual and digital media**.

According to various cultural workers, the cultural offer can be connected more to the interests and ways of life of young people. Young people and cultural workers could link more with each other, and thus gain **better insight into each other's needs and interests**. Youth workers and teachers advise cultural workers to immerse themselves in the way of life of the young people by, for example, **exploring their neighbourhoods**.





1.3 STIMULATING TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Several cultural workers develop projects or processes where young people are **encouraged in self-development and artistic (talent) development**. Young people are given the opportunity to develop themselves in one or more artistic disciplines. According to several cultural workers, **more space should be created for young people to “do their thing”**.

In that way, young people could experiment and develop their own (artistic) identity. In addition to space, more project could be created in which young people get **empowered** and get support to unfurl their talents.

1.4 INVESTING IN MORE DIVERSITY

Cultural workers argue that it is important to **integrate Brussels’ diversity into their own organizations**. This can be achieved by, for example, developing projects for **specific target groups** or focused on certain niches. Cultural workers are struggling to attract a different and more diverse audience.

Several organizations have difficulty reaching the **age range 12 to 16**, or young people of different ethnic-cultural backgrounds and social classes. Socially vulnerable young people who participate in the cultural offer remain scarce.

According to cultural and youth workers and teachers, it could be useful **to make more use of role models**: young adults from Brussels who connect to the youngsters from their own background, experience and history.

Additionally, this would also lead to a **greater diversity within the group of cultural workers**, the strengthening of accessibility and an increase in attracting a diverse audience. They also indicate that the **cultural offer will become more diverse**, which can further strengthen the above elements.

1.5 CROSS-SECTORAL COLLABORATION

Both cultural, youth workers and teachers indicate that it is important for the cultural offer towards young people, to **collaborate cross-sectorally** amongst the cultural, youth and education sector. That way, an offer can be developed together, or expertise can be shared. They can also **spread information about their offer** through a wide network of partners. Collaborating with partners from other sectors allows them to address **other or new target groups**. This means that there is a need for better coordination between the various sectors, organizations and projects. Youth workers and teachers also ask to be more involved in the projects of cultural workers.

1.6 COMMUNICATING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

To communicate with young people, cultural workers use a **mix of communication channels**. They have a website that includes, amongst others, information about the cultural offer and the general functioning of the organization. In addition, brochures and flyers in which the offer is described, are also used, or they rely on **social media and personal communication**. Both via personal messages via Whatsapp, Snapchat and Facebook, or simply via posts on their Facebook page, cultural workers inform young people about activities.

Some cultural workers indicate that **part of the communication is managed by young people**. The youngsters that are already involved in the organization, take up part of the **communication responsibility**. They manage the Facebook page for example, or serve as an 'ambassador'. By deploying young people as ambassadors, they can not only reach new young people easier, but they also tighten the connection with the already achieved target group. After all, giving young people responsibility, gives them a sense of ownership that leads to **more connections with the cultural workers** and the offer.

Youth workers and teachers also emphasize the importance of engaging in **dialogue, personal and informal communication with youngsters**. By going to meet young people, by exploring the neighbourhood, more connection between young people and professionals can be realized.



2 TIPS & TRICKS FOR PROFESSIONALS

The interviews of the cultural and youth workers and the teachers result in several tips that can strengthen professionals wanting to work with culture and young people (from the Brussels Canal Zone).

- **Provide space:** Offer space to young people who want to be creative. Invest in accessible talent development programs for young people who are not connected to the existing (training) offer. Give them a stage to showcase their talents.
- **Participate more:** Give young people the opportunity to raise their voice and to participate, for example by co-developing an offer. A participatory approach enables projects to be based on young people's experiences and interests and enhances their motivation.
- **Listen:** Give them the opportunity to express their opinion and take this opinion seriously. Young people are keen to express themselves on the social themes that concern them. Through culture, their message can be created in a creative way.
- **Take your time:** Allow enough time to get to know young people and build a bond of trust. Work from an open mentoring attitude and give confidence and encouragement to young people. Create a positive climate in which young people can be themselves, and a positive group atmosphere in which they can feel at ease.
- **Diversify and work with youngsters:** Increase diversity in supply, programming and staff. Try to offer young people a spot in the functioning of the organization and enable them to act as role models.
- **Exchange:** Encourage meeting and exchange. Create interactive and safe environments for young people.
- **Peek over the wall:** Engage in dialogue, get to know the way of life of young people and pay attention to their cultural interests and practices. Also, try to offer space to creative youngsters and their practices. Do not wait until young people come to you, but enter their own world and go explore the neighbourhood.
- **Engage partners:** Invest in more and better cross-sectoral collaboration. Take your time to get to know each other, to engage in dialogue and 'scan' goals beforehand. A more consolidated network leads to more efficient collaboration, where there is room for the individuality of each organization and where the needs and wishes of young people are more easily responded to.
- **Communicate:** Facebook, Snapchat, and other digital media are very popular amongst young people. Nevertheless, it is also important to invest in direct oral communication. In any case, apart from which channel is used, keep it accessible and informal.

CONCLUSION

Young people from the Brussels Canal Zone participate actively in culture because of the social aspect, or because they are looking for expression and self development. Culturally active youngsters feel good when they are practicing their cultural practices. A sense of freedom is central to this. The main obstacles for active cultural participation are lack of time, motivation and information.

Social, financial and geographical (distance) obstacles can also affect cultural participation. As far as passive cultural participation is concerned, going to the movies is the most popular activity amongst young people. Only few young people attend dance performances, festivals and concerts. The library, the theatre, museums and exhibitions are widely visited by young people. The influence of the school plays a crucial role.

Young people are primarily looking for relaxation and fun. The social aspect is also important. In addition, young people seem to attach much importance to meaning and experience. They are more inclined to participate when the cultural offer responds to their way of life and interests and when it creates opportunities for interaction.

Cultural workers try to respond to the way of life of young people by focusing on for example, urban arts and digital media. However, many cultural workers find it difficult to match their offer to the interests of young people. Youth workers and teachers recommend submerging themselves in the way of life of young people by exploring the neighbourhood or using a participatory approach. In addition to responding to their way of life, it is also important to find ways to better inform young people about the cultural offer.

Audiovisual and social media and word of-mouth advertising seem to be means and channels of choice. By allowing young people to manage part of the communication, it can be better tailored to the target audience. Cultural, youth workers and teachers often reach quite a lot of young people through collaborations. They co develop an offer or share expertise. Nevertheless, most of them think there is still room for improvement on the level of collaboration, mutual support in the development and exchange of methods used.

Young people would like more space to develop their talents. Several organizations already offer projects where young people can develop themselves and their artistic talents. Some young people are also asking for their own place where they can "do their thing". They ask for the creation of a new space or for opening up spaces within existing institutions. Cultural workers also say that more space must be created for young people to be able to experiment.

More information about the Move It Kanal project can be found on www.move-it-kanal.be.

Colophon

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