



TALLINN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING
DESIGN & TECHNOLOGY FUTURES



ESTONIAN ACADEMY OF ARTS
FACULTY OF DESIGN

**PARTICIPATING YOUTH: SUPPORTING &
DISCOVERING YOUTH POTENTIAL**

**OSALEVAD NOORED: AVASTADES JA TOETADES NOORTE
POTENTSIAALI**

MASTER THESIS

Student: Robert Männa

Student code: 192547MADM

Supervisor: Martin Pärn

Tallinn 2022

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Hereby I declare, that I have written this thesis independently.

No academic degree has been applied for based on this material. All works, major viewpoints and data of the other authors used in this thesis have been referenced.

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Robert Männa

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THESIS TASK

Student: Robert Männa, 192547MADM

Study programme, MADM10/18, Design and Technology Futures

main speciality: Design

Supervisor: Engineer, Martin Pärn, +372 513 8791

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Thesis main objectives:

1. Understand the topics around youth independence development
2. Explore design opportunities to support youth independence
3. Design a concept that provides this support

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Supervisor: Martin Pärn 2022

Head of study programme: Martin Pärn 2022

SUMMARY

This thesis explores the topic of youth and their path to independence through design research investigating the role of education and parents, analyses the opportunities but also missed opportunities for youth, and discussing the young people's role in the modern civil society.

While the educational institutions focus on the national curriculums and teaching youth the basics of our surroundings, then the development of youth interests and experiences are dependent on non-curricular activities happening outside of the education system. Usually, this responsibility is put on the shoulders of parents to ensure youth finds activities from non-formal education, to develop their skills outside the curriculum. As the youth develop towards their independence, more responsibility for their interests and experiences is put on their shoulders. Living in a society, where deciding adults consider highly motivated and active youth as an example of a perfect young citizen, the voices of other youth can often be unheard. Furthermore, finding new experiences often requires pushing comfort zones and navigating complexity, leaving opportunities only to the boldest kids, or those with the strongest support from their caregivers.

This thesis proposes a digital platform INNO that aims to support youth in their journey to independence by endorsing their skills and interests and connecting them with organisations able to provide experiences regarding those areas. Through analysing youths' educational data and given interests, INNO is able to create a digital profile based on the input. Helping youth to find and identify their interests and providing experiences to develop them further gives young people more confidence in their choices and helps them to be able to make informed decisions.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Being young is an inevitable part of human life. It is a phase that affects us from different positions: through our own lived experience as a youth, through the role of caretaker as a parent or teacher, and as a bystander, observing young life all around them in the world. This thesis is written from the perspective of an observer, with the experience of a former youth.

Being young is a crucial time in our lives. While swimming in an ocean of options, society expects us to quickly choose the best ones. This inevitably puts the pressure of expectations on the shoulders of the youth themselves, their parents, and the educational system. These last two are the main mentors guiding the youth on their path to independence.

While education prepares us for the main principles and rules of life, experience teaches us through experimentation how these principles and rules behave in the real world. Experience is something that can not be taught, it has to be felt through your own senses. It's something that helps us with making decisions, finding our interests, and choosing our paths.

We live in a time where experience is often valued as equal, if not higher, than education. This creates the question of how this experience is available to us in our youth, and how it fits in with the standard environments of our youth: classrooms, playgrounds, friends and family.

This thesis explores the topic of youth and their path to independence. It researches the challenges of finding your role in society, finding interests and experiences beyond the classroom, and growing up in a time where opportunities are high, and expectations are higher. It then defines a concrete design challenge, to which it proposes a solution, with the help of youth, parents, teachers, and mentors.

This project has delighted the author's inner child. He hopes the reader shares the feeling.

The thesis has been rewarded with a grant from the city of Tallinn - Tallinna Raestipendium.

2 RELATED RESEARCH

Topics of youth involvement, participation and employment in Estonia have been previously researched and discussed by several authors and institutions. Anthropological research has been done by Rakendusliku Antropoloogia Keskus (RAK) on topics such as children's accessibility study (Laste ligipääsetavuse uuring, 2020) ordered by the Social Ministry of Estonia, which studied the children the aged 7-14 about their usage and concerns regarding physical public spaces and regarding services and products. Through a collaboration project between Tartu Ülikooli sotsiaalteaduste rakendusuringute keskus (RAKE) and RAK have studied youth participation in decision-making processes (Noorte osalus otsustusprotsessides, 2018) on the order of Eesti Noorsootöö Keskus. In 2020 the social ministry of Estonia has made a study on encouraging early work experience among school-age youth (Varase töökogemuse soodustamine noorte seas).

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Defining the topic

A starting point for this thesis was stumbling upon a child accessibility study ([RAK 2020](#)) done by RAK - Centre for Applied Anthropology (Rakendusliku Antropoloogia Keskus). The study analysed children's accessibility from a perspective of physical public space and how comfortable it is for children to use and from a service point of view - what are the services available for children and what is children experience using it. This anthropological study recalled and opened up many similar memories from my own childhood and my path to independence - from the first independent commutes in the city to living abroad for studies. Despite being a fairly independent child, I had my own fears and doubts when commuting to the city, exploring new areas and activities and meeting new friends. But it also entailed many invaluable experiences which have had a strong impact on who I am personally and professionally today.

These thoughts have led to initial starting questions for this thesis:

- What is the path to youth independence today?
- What are the opportunities youth have for shaping their personal and community's future?
- How are youth involved in local decision making today?
-

These questions set the path for the rest of the thesis. The goals for the thesis is to:

- Find ways how to raise youth motivation to participate in activities, which have the potential in supporting youths personal future
- Find out how this can be done without stressing the current educational system
- Offer new opportunities for integrating youth into society today
- Discover what triggers youth to be involved in civil society.

For reaching the goals and finding answers for questions brought up, the thesis follows a methodology of constructive design research and a concept of product service ecology. The research of the thesis is mainly done through literature research, interviews, observations and workshops. As the research started with a motivation rather than a hypothesis, it did not have a clear goal or a problem that it is aiming to solve. The final design proposal has been achieved through framing and analysing the problems found in the research.

3.2 Constructive design research

The thesis paper follows a constructive design research method as a way of forming a research question through experimentation and iterations. The model facilitates a process of framing and reframing the research. During that, hypothesising is seen as an ongoing process which is framed initially by the overall research motivation. The activities during the research help to redefine and evaluate the original hypothesis and research questions. Finally, new knowledge is synthesised through the evaluation of experiments, helping also to redefine the original hypothesis (Bang et al., 2012). The model helps to understand the somewhat hectic process of design research also carried out in this particular thesis.

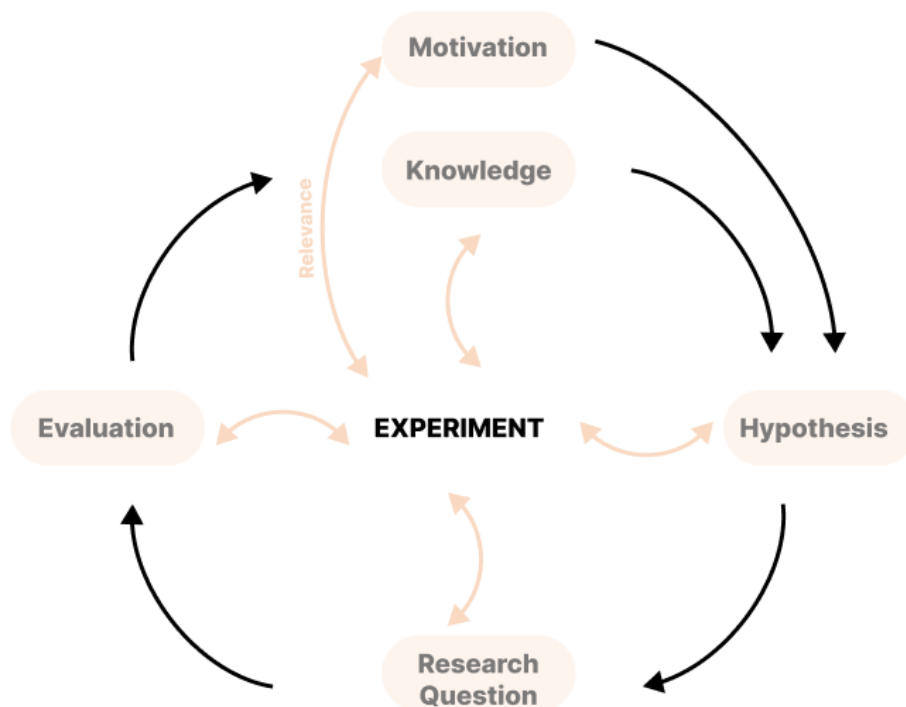


Figure 1. Constructive Design Research Model (Bang et al., 2012)

3.3 Research methods

Literature Research

In order to understand the topics around youth development, I started off looking into anthropological research conducted locally around youth. This gave initial leads to find-

and look further into scientific articles conducted on the topics, and also find what statistics have been collected regarding Estonian and European youth.

Interviews

To dive deeper into the topics I conducted face-to-face and virtual interviews with youth and their families, specialists from non-profit organisations, formal- and non-formal educational institutions and local government representatives. Keeping the interviews semi-structured helped to widen the problem space and empathise with the variety of stakeholders the research area entails.

Observations

Invaluable part of the research was attained through the observations carried out in public spaces, schools and youth centres. This sometimes led to open-ended conversations, which helped to get a better understanding of the situations young people find themselves in.

Workshops

To validate my research findings and test developed hypotheses based on the research, I hosted two physical co-design workshops with youth from Rocca al Mare School.

The first workshop was held with 12 volunteer students from the 9th grade ranging in age 15 to 16. During the workshop, students were challenged with tasks, which aimed to challenge their creative thinking and put them in the role of designers. The goal of the workshop was to validate initial ideas and understandings regarding the involvement of youth in decision-making and co-design processes. The second workshop tried to physically prototype the proposed ideas presented in the first workshop.

4 STRUCTURES OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Independent youth

There are 273 871 youth citizens in Estonia, marking 20.61% out of the whole population according to 2020 statistics (Statistikaamet, 2022). Development of youth is a complex path of its own as the development is strongly influenced by controlled and uncontrolled factors: location, family, schools, peers, non-governmental organisations and media.(Aksen et al., 2020)

The daily lives of the youth are vastly dependent on their parents' choices. As they get older, more responsibility in decision-making is put on the shoulders of a child. The first experiences in social life are acquired from kindergarten, playmates, and siblings. That specific period from birth till a youth is driven by raw curiosity. Here the exploration of the surrounding environment and communication with the world happens through play. During the school years, the exploration of society and the world exits the controlled home environment and moves to new undiscovered grounds. The lives of the youth and their parents become a balancing act between what can be defined as formal, non-formal and informal learning.

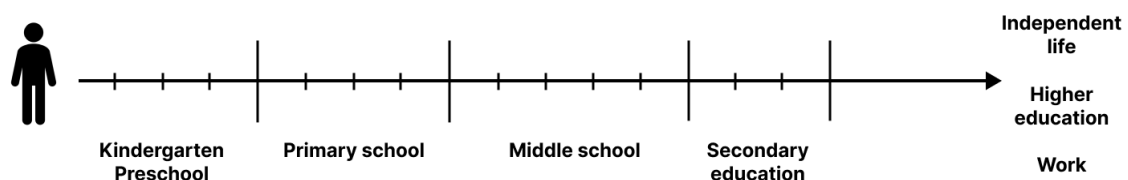


Figure 2. The educational development timeline of a youth

Formal learning

The educational system offers a formal learning process, following a syllabus where learning is set as an explicit goal. Outcomes of the process are being measured by tests or assessed in other ways (Council of Europe, n.d.). Formal learning happens in schools, from primary schools to universities. Participation in formal learning is mandatory by the law until the 9th grade in school, marking the end of middle school. From there on, youth have the option of whether to continue their studies in gymnasium, trade school or step into independent life. Despite secondary education not being mandatory in Estonia, in 2021 90.4% of youth between the age of 18-26 had received higher than first level

education(Statistikaamet, 2016), which can be seen as rather positive when comparing the results with other OECD countries. Over the years the number has been steadily decreasing. In 2016 Estonia was ranked second after the Czech Republic in the number of 25-64-year-olds who have received secondary education (Valk, 2016). Therefore it can be stated that youth participation in secondary education is high and on a positive trajectory.

Schools are usually divided into national, municipal and private schools - depending on who is the organiser and financer of the school. Schools can also be different in their teaching methods. By this, they can be seen as mainstream and alternative schools.

Mainstream schools are considered schools with traditional teacher, class, lecture and subject setups. Alternative schools aim to receive education through exploring, experimenting, practising and reflecting. One of the most well known and long-lasting forms of alternative schooling is Waldorf schools. The Waldorf pedagogy aims to develop youths' artistic, intellectual and practical skills in an integrated and holistic manner. During the school years, there is a strong focus on the development of youths' creativity and imagination in a way that serves their developmental needs.

For a long time, schools with different religious beliefs have provided alternative education. An example is the Old Town Education College, whose aim is to create an environment where a healthy, self-respecting person could grow. Who would be able to take responsibility for him- or herself and has the will to support the formation of a livable society? (Vanalinna Hariduskollegium, n.d.) For that, they are based on Christian values, where they believe that education must support the holistic development of the individual. This means that the child should develop physically, mentally and spiritually - his mind, will and conscience, his own personality and his openness to others (Ibid). Out of similar beliefs, several smaller schools have grown out of Old Town Education College: St. Michael's School, Kohila Manor School and Tallinn Toomkool.

In addition, there are many other schools based on religious values, such as St. John's School, where schoolwork is collaborative rather than competitive. The school's value system is built on Christian beliefs: respect for something higher, which in turn means respect for and consideration for one's neighbour, respect for one's country, past, culture and nature, and the opportunity to experience the support of teachers and companions. (Püha Johannese Kool, n.d.)

In the last decade a number of schools with alternative concepts have emerged. One of them is the Open School, which is the first school in Estonia to implement a trilingual immersion program.(Avatud kool, n.d.) This means that children of Estonian, Russian and other nationalities learn together on a daily basis and acquire a foreign language through daily communication with both students and teachers. Multilingualism is useful for students in the globalising world and plays an important role in connecting communities.

Emili Kool, a primary school located in Tallinn, focuses on communication and analysis between students and teachers. The main feedback is not in the scores but in verbal feedback. Students will not be given grades 1-6 for this. Oral feedback is important until the end of the põhikool. (Emili kool, n.d.) In addition, attempts are made to link subjects to projects outside of school life. This approach has been widespread in Estonia, and the School of Security that was established in 2020 is also based on a grade-free approach. Students are assessed mainly verbally until the 6th grade, but in addition, they have a 6-point grading scale implemented from 3rd grade. They also support the principle of mentoring among both students and teachers to guide the comprehensive development of the self-directed learner. (Kindluse kool, n.d.)

Several schools have reduced the proportion of grades and thus reduced the stress among students. However, this is controversial since students are rated based on their grades when they apply to higher education stages. Be it a gymnasium or a university, the entrance thresholds in Estonia are currently based on grades. Qualitative assessment is mainly used for assessing students' work, while quantitative and standardised testing is used for activities which are required for entering higher education.

Qualitative assessment has found its wider use in some traditional schools too, in a form of formative assessment. This is taken as a process throughout the course by giving descriptive and analytic feedback on the knowledge, skills and activities obtained in school. This enables students to identify gaps and improve learning already during the learning process, instead of later, after being formally assessed. An example of using formative assessment can be brought from Peetri kool, where students receive only formative assessment until the 5th grade. Although from the 6th grade the current national curriculum requires quantitative assessment, the school continues to assess qualitatively in parallel until the end of middle school. A strong emphasis is on self-assessment, as students are guided to assess their progress themselves. Through

this, students learn how to notice and analyse themselves independently and notice where they need to progress further. (Peetri kool, n.d.)

Non-Formal Learning

Educational activities that happen outside of academic curricula are considered part of non-formal education. Non-formal learning follows an organisational framework but takes place outside of formal learning surroundings. It is motivated by the conscious decision to learn or master a particular skill, activity or area of knowledge (Council of Europe, n.d.). This type of learning usually takes place in community settings, for example, sports clubs, music schools and art classes, which can have offerings for a variety of ages. Some of the activities can transition from non-formal to more formal as learners get more competent. Non-formal learning shares similarities with formal learning as it is being taught or mentored by someone, such as a teacher or an instructor.

It is important to differentiate between the learning opportunities that are available for youth, which can be divided into two: curriculum- or activity-based, and hobby-based. Curriculum- and activity-based activities are systemically mentored and follow certain guidelines. This makes those activities eligible for receiving grants from the local government. Hobby-based activities are considered unstructured, like hobby classes which do not follow any specific guidelines. These are more dependent on participants' own motivation. Some curriculum-based activities such as music schools assess their students through grades, but generally, if an assessment is given at all, it is done formatively, by giving feedback on students' progress verbally during the activities. These shares similarities with formative grading done in some of the primary schools mentioned before, but an assessment is not always required in non-formal learning activities, the communication between students and teachers is based more on dialogue.

Informal Learning

Informal learning happens outside of school through being involved in activities which do not specifically have a learning purpose in mind, but are an unintentional and inevitable part of daily lives. While formal and non-formal ways of learning can be partly intentional and also partly incidental, informal learning is solely incidental - it cannot be attained in a purposeful, structured manner (Ibid). This enables people to learn internally about themselves, the people surrounding them and in a wider world. It can play an important

part in supporting personal development and emotional discovery (The Open University, n.d.).

While formal and non-formal learning is planned in the early years of youth and guided by parents, teachers and tutors, informal learning mostly takes place outside of formal and non-formal learning spaces without a specific instructor. This could happen while commuting, playing and being with friends, helping someone, getting hurt while playing, or missing a bus. The places where this kind of learning takes place are usually places and spaces which pupils voluntarily choose to attend and where they are free from obligations (Ibid). Informal education is described by Tony Jeffs and Mark Smith as “the learning that flows from the conversations and activities involved in being members of youth and community groups and the like” (Jeffs & Smith, 2005)

Education mix

Through the combination of these three ways of learning, young human beings are prepared for the awaiting adulthood. However, since formal ways of learning are compulsory, and non-formal ways are widely available and come with a high social pressure to follow, they can easily override the importance of informal learning.

When children are put to school, parents often try to give them the best opportunities they can achieve, and end up trying out multiple non-formal education opportunities, ranging from sports to culture (Korp et al., 2022). However, by overdoing it and being a constant curator of children's activities, parents can take away from children's internal motivation and self-management skills. The negative experience of forced (or over-encouraged) participation can have the effect of distancing children from after-school activities in general. The logistics of handling so many structured activities often overburdens the parents as well, affecting the whole family.

4.2 Family Perspective

To better understand and verify the daily lives and routines, I carried out virtual and physical interviews with 10 different families whose children attend school in the city centre area of Tallinn, in the age span of 12-17. All of them had an experience with non-formal education ranging from a variety of sports to arts and music. Almost all of them required commuting to the activities, as these were not offered on the school premises.

The majority of parents had experienced overburdening their children with activities due to the wish to provide their child with the best opportunities. Also, parents addressed the fear of their children spending too much time on their phones or computers if they would go home straight from school. On the other hand, they understood the need for children's own free time.

Distance between school and home seems to define the daily regime. Families who live within walking distance of the school showed more signs of early independence in their children. In one example, a family that lived 100 metres from a school identified themselves as an activity centre, as after school their son would bring his classmates over to play board- and video games. Families living on the outskirts of the city emphasised the stress and time-cost related to commuting. Since public transport is slower than driving, many families bring their children to school by car, just to save them a little bit of sleep or bring them to school safely.

From the beginning of the school years until some point in middle school, the choice of non-formal education or activities is more guided by the parents. For those who have had the luck of trying out different activities, the preferable ones are filtered out by the first few years. After a while, some activities start to require progression and tend to get competitive and serious. A youth studying in Kalamaja põhikool brought out his example of why he decided to quit football.

"I quit football as it got too serious for me. On Saturdays, my family would go to the countryside but I couldn't join them as I had to attend matches held in the morning. Every time I missed a training session I had to write an excuse signed by my parents. I just wanted to play, not become a professional." - Martin, 14 years old

At some point during the middle school years, youth are becoming more independent: they have a better understanding of which activities they prefer and which ones they don't like as much. The authority of parents' decisions is getting lower and youths' own interests are starting to form. Some of the activities tend to drop too due to days getting longer and study responsibilities getting more important. This was especially true with youth attending "elite" schools, where there are opportunities to study specialised areas such as science, languages, and arts. In an anthropological study carried out by RAKE, a girl living in Narva said the following:

"If somebody would have only told me in the fifth grade, what opportunities and activities are out there where I could have had a chance to participate."

This illustrates the information gap in youth and their dependence on their parents who are usually responsible for their children's activities at that given age. From the teenage years, youth get the opportunity to find these activities also independently from the internet, if they know what to look for. Therefore, youth might benefit the most if they hear about a variety of activities already through the schools themselves. (Aksen et al., 2020)

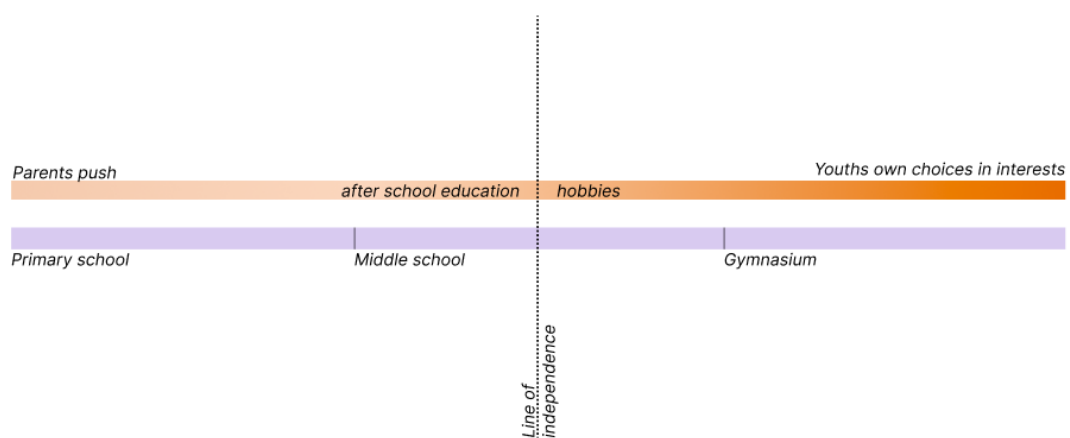


Figure 3. Development of choices and independence

School and spare time activities seem to be viewed as separate by all stakeholders - children, parents and schools. In the interview with Rocca al Mare School social studies teacher Katrin Saareleht admitted that sadly schools at the moment do not have an overview of what their students are doing outside of school. This information is only accessible through (informal) conversations in school. Teachers see themselves as the most instant mentors for giving recommendations, but the busy daily school life and current structure of teaching do not allow them to reach all of the students. Furthermore, students' non-formal education or activities are not considered in the assessment process, making it difficult to form a bridge for collaboration between formal and non-formal activities. Outside activities are highly valued in school, but there are few or no ways to bridge the world of academic and nonacademic education currently.

This leaves youth in a tricky situation regarding after school activities. Either they are dependent on their parents' choices, find something interesting through their friends or have to find it themselves. To put this responsibility solely on youths' shoulders has a threat to result in not finding any suitable activities at all.

4.3 Trust of the parents & physical independence

Children's independent mobility is key in their development. Mobility has been defined by Mayer Hillman as "the freedom of children to travel around in their neighbourhood or city without adult supervision" (Marzi & Reimers, 2018). Children's independent mobility has been associated with active travelling and physical activity. As conducted in the research of physical activity levels of children who walk, cycle, or are driven to school, children commuting independently by walking or cycling are found to be notably more physically active and are more prone to meet the physical activity guidelines (Cooper, Andersen, Wedderkopp, Page & Froberg, 2005). Psychological outcomes of independent mobility include general well-being and a positive effect on cognitive development. Furthermore, social competencies are learned and experienced through prioritising independent mobility (Marzi & Reimers, 2018).

According to the general recommendation, children need to participate in one hour of medium to high-intensity activity per day. Different countries have approached the guideline differently. For example, Norway has set to reach the target during the school day alone and has applied it to their national curriculum, while for Estonia, it has stayed as a general guideline and recommendation (Maarja Kalma (Personal Interview) 2021). For helping to reach children's physical activity guidelines, a non-profit organisation Liikuma kutsuv kool (School inviting to move) has done work on helping schools across Estonia promote physical activities and prevent sedentary behaviours.

Physical activity happening outside of school territory is strongly dependent on habits formed from home and family. Family is also one of the factors that have an effect on the children's independent mobility. A research paper on an ecological approach to creating active living communities has identified recreation, transport, occupation and household as key domains influencing the active living. These can be categorised into socio-demographic characteristics, social environment and physical environment which all play an important role in affecting the rate of a child's independent mobility (Sallis et al., 2006).

Due to the fear of children not receiving enough physical movement and training from the schools, children are often put into at least one physical activity training to compensate for that. However, this can have a reverse effect on the youth habits, as it

can develop into the mindset that the majority of physical activity should come from training, not a general movement that could be achieved through commuting, playing and wandering. Therefore parents can (unintentionally) act as gatekeepers for youth independence and informal learning opportunities.

4.4 Development of Values

An important part of youth development is the development of values. These are the values that are not only reflecting the uniqueness of the youth but also belong to others. Development of identity is thoroughly studied by psychologist James Marcia who has stated that youth wish to live through different experiences and are actively searching for them through experiencing new relationships, hobbies and work while defining new roles and values. Geert Hofstede has found that values develop already in the youthhood when youth are slowly developing the skills for adulthood. These values have a strong probability of staying persistent throughout their life. Self-confidence is built upon a strong identity and existence of values. (Harno, 2021)

Ronald Inglehart has studied values internationally and has explained the shift in youth values through the changing living conditions. He has pointed out through the development of Western welfare societies that every following generation has started to prefer values tied to self-expression over materialistic values, such as financial coping and a sense of security. This has also resulted in an increased importance of self-expression, subjective welfare and quality of life. Since these results have not changed drastically throughout the past 30 years, it can be assumed that the high rates show the constant will for independence and developing ways for self-expression which can be tied with a will to find a suitable lifestyle. (Ibid)

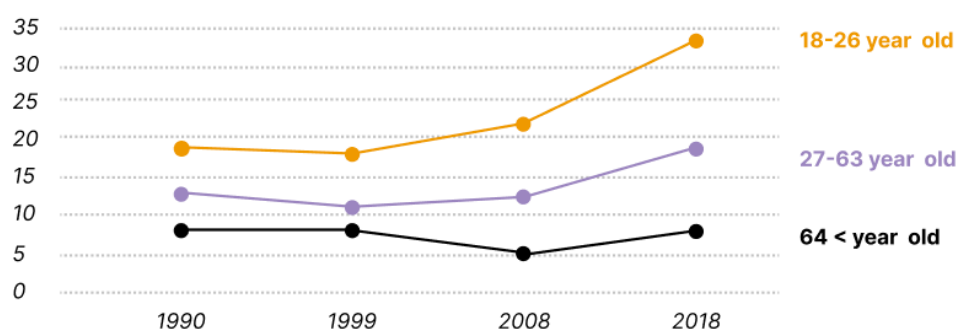


Figure 4. The importance of creativity development in families for Estonians (Harno, 2021)

Estonian youth have participated in World Values studies since 1990. When looking into who highly prioritises the importance of independence raised by families among their children, youth between the age of 18-26 have rated the importance constantly higher than the other age groups. When looking into the importance of developing imagination and creativity, again, increasingly more pupils have marked it important when compared to other age groups. Today, Estonian youth feel that they are happier than the other generations, feel more open and mark the importance of free speech and tolerance higher than fighting with the increasing cost of living. (Ibid)

4.5 Schools and creativity

The OECD, The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, has constructed a conceptual framework within the Future of Education and Skill 2030 project where they have identified the necessary skills for surviving in the near future environment. Motivation to learn, adaptability, autonomy, responsibility, empathy, curiosity and creativity, amongst others, are addressed in the document (OECD, 2018). Creativity in everyday life or life-wide creativity is a term used for describing the personal effectiveness in dealing with unknown territory in recognising and making choices in order to survive and thrive in the 21st century (Jackson et al, 2006).

As the framework proves modern society demands more and more initiation and self-drive. When the life of youth is planned on fixed narratives and instructions, this can have a negative effect on the personal development of a child. Therefore it is important to discuss the schools' role in supporting creativity, autonomy and adaptability amongst children.

Estonia has been rated highly in PISA test results, which assess youth on their skills in functional reading, mathematics and science and rank them accordingly with other 80 countries. In 2018 Estonian students ranked 5th in functional reading, 8th in maths, and 4th in science worldwide. In Europe, Estonia was first in all three topics (SA Innove, 2018).

While PISA tests have brought a lot of compliments to the current education system, it has also been criticised for missing results for creativity. The Estonian education assessment system has been focused on Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM). In order to introduce creativity into it, a letter A for arts has now been included, resulting in STEAM. The goal is to develop children's creative skills but also improve

problem-solving and critical thinking. Furthermore, the goal is to teach all these areas interrelated to one another.

Indrek Lillemäe, educator and school leader, has discussed the term educational fault (*haridussüü in Estonian*) as the flipside of Estonians' strong belief in the educational system (Lillemägi, 2021). This is the understanding that the majority of solutions for complex questions are found in education. Problems such as climate crisis, coexistence with artificial intelligence, demographic concerns, habits, etc, should find their solution already from school education. Secret answers to these questions can lie in the aforementioned skills of adaptability, autonomy, responsibility, empathy, curiosity and creativity. These are things that are currently not measured with PISA tests, which are meant to measure knowledge and skills but miss out on attitudes, the process of individuation, a person's relationship with the people around them, nature, the community and their identity.

Tartu university psychometry senior researcher Olev Must has studied the added value of schools. He has compared the results of middle school graduates with their gymnasium exam results, to find out in which schools the students' performance increases. When comparing the list of schools with high development indexes with the schools with high exam results, the results were apparently very different (Ibid). This raises a question, which is more important, the development process and experience of youth or the exam results?

4.6 Role of The Social Science Studies

One of the important classes in schools regarding integration into society can be considered the social science classes. Students are first exposed to social science in Estonia, twice in middle school - usually in the 6th and 9th grade, and twice during the gymnasium. The aim of social studies is to give students an understanding of how society and democracy work and function. Its role can also be seen as the base of knowledge and tools for the youth to be able to analyse situations arising from society and help to find a stance in it.

The studies are divided between middle school and gymnasium, where middle school focuses on society, social structures, democracy and governance and gymnasium concentrates on the development of society and democracy, and economics and world politics.

4th - 6th grade	7th - 9th grade	Gymnasium
Social relations Democracy Work and consumption	<p>Society and social relations: Media and information Social structure of society Institutional structure of society - public, private and third sector The rights of the members of society</p> <p>State and government. Democracy: Differences of democratic and non-democratic societies Estonian governance Civil society Economics</p>	<p>Development of society and democracy: Society and its development Modern society and its formation Governance of a democratic society and civic participation</p> <p>Economics and world politics: Management of society World development and world politics</p>

Table 1. Curriculum for Social Studies

The current format of social studies has received criticism by the teachers themselves. First, the time designated for social studies is too short to practise active learning methods, and currently it's only possible to briefly explain the topics. This results in classes staying mostly theoretical and lacking practical experience. One of the main concerns of social studies is staying updated with developments in the modern world (Ibid). New topics that would be important to be explained are dependent on the interest of the teacher, as it requires teachers' creativity to find overlaps between topics where to discuss it with youth.

In an interview with Rocca al Mare schools, the teacher of social studies described the curriculum as well-developed due to its progressive topic approach. This enables them to start broader and during the studies go deeper with the topics. Time constraints and dividing the time and relative importance of other school subjects is the reality of schools - yes, there is always room to go deeper with the subjects, but it is necessary to take into consideration how much new knowledge the students can handle, if they can relate to the topics, and how interested they are in the topics in general (Saareleht (Interview), 2022).

A parallel can be brought here with previously mentioned Indrek Lillemäe's proposed term "educational quilt". When talking about integrating youth into society, guiding them on how to find their role and actively participate, it is quick to assume that this is

something that should come from education. While the expectation is valid, the reality asks for external methods that would assist or provide opportunities for youth to be integrated. Schools can be seen only as one stakeholder of the concern, but the solution requires participation from all the stakeholders. The current situation can be visualised as seen in the figure 5 where schools and parents can be seen as the only ones responsible for sending youth to the open world.

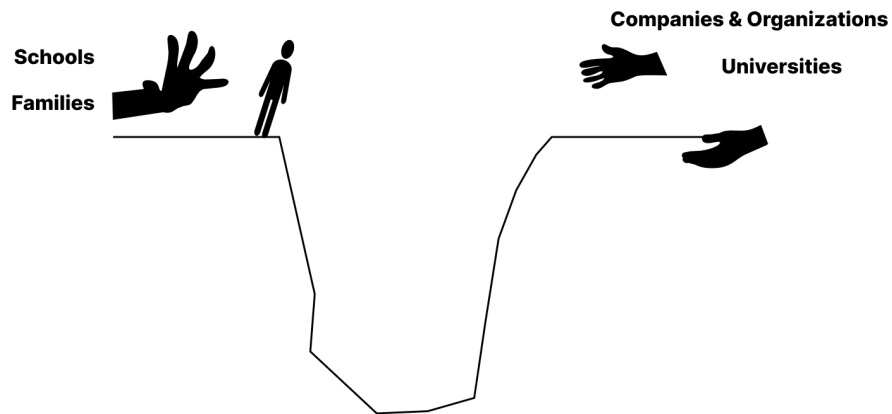


Figure 5. Push to the independence

5 OTHER SETTINGS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Despite the distance between formal and non-formal education, there are existing initiatives whose goal is to prepare youth and discover and fulfil their potential. Those offerings vary from public to private institutions.

5.1 Youth centres

Youth centres offer youth a variety of possibilities for activities. The majority of them work by the method of open youth work. The aim of open youth work is to offer young people participating on a voluntary basis, in order to support their activity and coping in social life, with a focus on openness and free will. Open youth work is based on human relations and works on the principle of young people. It is a process that supports a young person in being young, or in becoming an adult. The role of a youth worker is to be a mentor. Instead of focusing on the results, the process itself is the key focus. This gives prerequisites for a positive environment in which youth feels the feeling of community and their importance to society.

There are 281 open youth centres in Estonia, out of which 216 are managed through the local municipality and 65 are working through a non-profit or a foundation.

The activities youth centres offer can be roughly divided into two (ENTK, 2018):

- Regular activities, which are considered base activities. These are:
 - open living room - possibility to meet with friends, listen to music, play board games, use a computer, participate in information events and the possibility to use the kitchen.
 - project consultancy and supporting youths own initiative
 - forwarding the information for youth
 - consulting or mentoring the youth on a base level, when necessary referring to a specialist
 - preventional thematic activities
 - enabling volunteering activities
 - coordinating youth participation and active groups

- Activities that require special preparation or extra resources such as finances or specialists. Examples of this would be:

centres are located and financial support assigned by the municipality. This means that a youth living in Mustamäe has different opportunities to participate in youth work than the one living in Kopli.

Part of the youth work offerings is also organising youth jobs (*Õpilasmalev*), which are coordinated by the Education and Youth board. Usually, this is carried out by a period of seasonal, entry-level work where youth also receive a paycheck for their work. It is a work-based educational project that combines employment and youth work and aims to increase young people's competitiveness through the development of young people's work skills and knowledge. This enables youth to get primary work experience, visit local companies and participate in a variety of leisure activities.

The goal of the youth jobs initiative is to increase the competitiveness of young people in the labour market. While this seems positive, it can be criticised based on the nature of the jobs. Usually the jobs carried out are related to agriculture or maintenance activities such as berry picking or maintaining local parks. Young people may gain experience in education and earning money, but professional development or ideas of what to do further on in life tend to stay in the background.

Interviews and Observation at the local youth centre

To get a better understanding of how youth centres operate, I had an interview and observation session with the head of the youth centre in Põhja-Tallinn. The given youth centre is considered quite attractive due to the large spectrum of activities it can offer. Having a skatepark on the outside premises also increases the attractiveness for some youth.

The activities of youth centres in Tallinn are under the control of the local districts. At present, each district has its own youth centre. The opportunities that youth centres can offer depend largely on the location, size and budget allocated to them. This has again created a situation where youth centres in different parts of the city can vary from one another. Thus, the opportunities that youth centres can offer are different from each other. This has created a situation where some youth travel to a particular youth centre while their residence can be in a different municipality far away.

One of the main objectives of open youth work is to support youth initiatives, but over the years it has resulted more in searching for initiative. There are only a few active

youth finding their way to the youth centres, therefore the objective may be left in the background as the majority of effort goes on providing leisure activities and introducing different activities for youth. Despite that, active youth are noticed and supported, but sadly the amount of these youth is generally low when compared with the total amount of youth visiting the centres. Usually youth find their way to the youth centre through a friend who is already participating in activities the centre offers, or due to living nearby the centre they are already aware of the existence and the centre has been a vital part of the local youth community.

In Tallinn, very few youth are aware of the existence of youth centres and youth work in general. In rural areas the awareness is higher due to fewer youth. For that, youth centres have started collaborating with local schools to inform students about the opportunities youth work can provide. When interviewing youth and families and asking questions regarding local youth centres in their area, few had some experience with the youth centres, and they were not always positive. Four interviewees in the age of 13-16 identified their local youth centres as boring and mainly as a leisure centre for primary school. One interviewee had a negative experience with a youth centre in primary school and due to this never wanted to return there, even when years older and more confident. In an interview with the head of a youth centre, she described situations where youth workers had to explain to the youth parents the nature of youth centres and what actually happens there. Fighting the stigmatisation of youth centres being a centre for kids without activities and bad habits sadly belongs to the everyday life of the workers.

5.2 Youth organisations

One of the options where youth can participate are various youth organisations. The general goal of such organisations is usually to gather people together around subjects that interest them. These organisations are usually operated by the youth themselves. Participation in such organisations provides opportunities to network with people with similar interests and collect experience around the topics the organisations work with. Organisations can be divided roughly into two: student councils and youth associations.

Student councils are informal associations in schools based on the values of citizens' initiative. It provides students a right to represent and defend fellow students within and outside of schools, take part in development of local school life and be part of or lead new projects around schools. The main purpose of student councils is to represent

students' interests, identify problems around student life and be the main connecting link between students and school officials such as school board, teachers and parents. Participation in student council work is available for students studying in grade 8 to 12.

Youth associations are non-governmental organisations that gather youth around topics of particular interest for them. Youth associations resemble the whole population of youth until the age of 26. These organisations can be tied to professions, protection (such as climate or animal protection), worldview, non-formal learning, youth councils, political organisations, international relations and university student organisations. (Eesti Noorteühenduste Liit, 2021)

In Estonia, youth associations are concentrated under the Estonian Youth Association Union (Eesti Noorteühenduste Liit). With close to 130 members, the purpose of the union is to provide custody for youth associations, form a supportive public opinion and legislative environment for youth, represent the youth political interests in Estonia and promote active participation of youth in society. (Ibid)

Representation of youth by the youth associations and student councils has been criticised by the anthropological study carried out by RAKE. They have identified that youth participating in these groups can often be labelled as active youth: actively involved with different organisations and activities, both political and non-political. The concern is then in the ability to attract and represent youth with other characteristics and backgrounds.

5.4 Job shadowing

Job shadowing week is a yearly event happening on the third week of November, organised by the Junior Achievement Eesti. This week is meant for promoting career awareness around youth. Job shadowing provides an opportunity for students to get a day in a life experience from a worker in a field that interests them. The day is mainly focused on observing the worker and asking questions regarding the profession. Usually job shadowing happens on a voluntary basis, but some schools make it mandatory in the gymnasium.

When the shadowing is happening on a voluntary basis, the responsibility of finding a job where to shadow is up to the youth to organise. This can be a difficult process for a youth to go through, especially when they might not be certain about their future

5.5 Working

Youth's first experience with legal work life can happen in the early teenage years. Working as a youth is linked to indicators of well-being, such as increased independence and responsibility, increased self-awareness and confidence, improved social skills, while supporting children's transition to adulthood (Aufseer et al., 2018). Working and studying can be seen as enemies to each other, as the monetary benefits of having a job can distract the focus on studies. Yet a 10 year study held in Canada managed to prove that people that had work experience in their early youth received better career opportunities and had higher income rates (Houshmand et al., 2014).

For employers, employing youth can solve the labour shortage on seasonal jobs or find workers for positions that are difficult to fill in with adults. On a society level, the age-appropriate inclusion of children in the labour market is one way of democratic participation and inclusion, making children more active and aware members of society by giving responsibility.

In Estonia youth in the age of 7-15 are allowed to legally work under the law that requires confirmation of employment with work inspection separately. From 15 years and older, the employment process of youth is similar to adult employment, but under some restrictions describing the nature of work, with a clear list of jobs that are not allowed to be carried out by underage youth.

In 2018 the employment rate for youth aged 15-16 was found to be 3%, and 10% for 17-year-olds. Over the years the interest of youth to work in the summer and the interests of employers have increased. Youth are mainly employed by the private sector (85%) rather than the public sector (15%). The majority of the jobs offered through the public sector are summer youth camp jobs. 63% of the jobs carried out were held in the summer months, meaning 37% of the underage youth working are doing it throughout the year. (Sotsiaalministeerium, 2020)

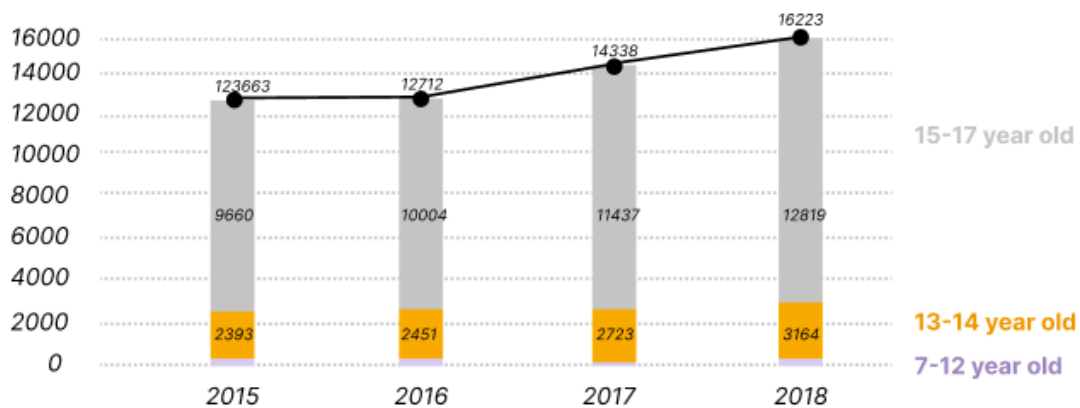


Figure 8. Statistics of working underage youth (Sotsiaalministeerium, 2020)

Qualitative research carried out by the social ministry identified that 79% of the participants who had work experience found the opportunity through their families, relatives or acquaintances. Every fourth youth was offered a job, meaning they did not need to search for it (Ibid). This finding addresses the dependence on finding job opportunities on the parents. Youths identified independence, work experience and habit of work as the main reasons for working as a student (Ibid).

From the employer perspective, employing youth has been described as refreshing as they are considered as good employees fueled with enthusiasm and initiative (Põhjarannik, 2019). Unicef has identified a variety of reasons why young talent should be valued amongst employers. Youth can bring new perspectives to companies through different ways of thinking. With most youth employees willing to learn, build experience and apply their skills can be a new invaluable asset in refreshing work culture and developing new ideas. Employment of youth can help with leveraging of resources and trigger employee rotation, as youth can be assigned with entry level positions and more experienced employees can work at more strategic levels of the job. (Unicef, 2019)

The hiring of youth is seen positively too from the local employers in the information technology sector. Although the training of a youth might take a longer time than a specialist, it has a potential to pay off if it is managed well from the employer's side. The fears of employers are often regarding the quicker rotation in youth workers, as the training requires both time and money investment. Employers seeing their workforce as a part of a human capital see it from a perspective of rather training the employer well

and risking losing him, than not training and being stuck with him (Haridusportaal PM, 2021).

This gives assurance that companies looking to develop human capital within their organisations would value greatly in employment of youth even partially - investing in youth can be seen as investing in the future.

6 SPACES FOR YOUTH

6.1 Where can experience be found in public spaces?

The stereotypical place in a city for youth is the playground. The city of Tallinn is quite well covered with playgrounds. The 2018 report card on physical activity for children and youth-rated nine categories regarding youths' active movement, one of them being community and environment, receiving a grade of B. It states that the majority of children and youth feel that in their neighbourhood there are places where they can play safely. In every district, there are parks, playgrounds, and paths for jogging or running. (Mäestu et al., 2018)

However, this study does not consider the suitability of these opportunities for different ages. Playgrounds found in Tallinn usually contain a slide, sandbox, and a few swings. Newer ones are covered with rubber surfaces for a softer landing and have bumps which can be climbed or ridden with a scooter. These playgrounds are relatively inviting during the period when children attend them with their parents. When they grow older and are in the age of visiting those playgrounds alone, the majority of them fail to provide interest anymore. The activities offered on the playgrounds do not provide enough challenges and become boring. There are very few opportunities for imaginative playing, and often the supervision of other adults restricts the activities of older children.

The topic of playgrounds has been addressed in Kaisa Sööt thesis *Playground as a Typology (Mänguväljak kui Tüpoloogia)*, where she criticises the standardizations of playgrounds. Standardised playgrounds are designed conservatively with an aim to minimise injuries. This leads to similar playground designs, which fail to challenge youth to engage creatively (Sööt, 2021). Eik Hermann has written in his essay "Space like a tile car" (*Ruum nagu klotsiauto*), that by emphasising excessive security, it may happen that the children's spaces no longer consist of anything other than a safety room, so the real play space - the opportunity to make mistakes, get to know yourself and expand your boundaries - is not enough. Playing on the border of a risk makes the game tense and interesting, pulls us all the way in, so we lose our sense of time and self and force us to put everything out. (Hermann, 2014)

As youth grow older and develop more independence, all the urban environments should become a playground, but instead they offer commuting corridors. This is a common

problem amongst urbanised cities - failure to provide environments that provide challenges and spark interest in operating around independently.

Junk playgrounds are one of the ways public playgrounds have been made more interesting for all ages of youth. It follows a principle that children have the autonomy to build their own surroundings using available materials for it, such as construction waste, plywood, rocks, car tires, etc. Junk playgrounds became popular in Western Europe after the Second World War, when children were seen playing actively on plots which were destroyed by the war (Korp et al., 2022). These areas provided enough shelter, different landscapes and enough materials to construct their own playground. One of the first artificial junk playgrounds was made by Danish landscape architect Carl Theodor Sørensen. The playground was visited by the British lady Marjory Allen who started to implement the idea in Great Britain. She developed a concept for building junk playgrounds, which had to cover three points (Ibid).

- 1) Junk playgrounds need as much greenery, ponds and varying landscape as possible and as little asphalt and concrete as possible.
- 2) The main components of the playgrounds are ropes, pipes, bricks, wooden material, hammers and nails. It should have as little surveillance as possible to enable children to build their own swings, castles and huts.
- 3) The area has to have a shelter from the rain, which can also be used as a meeting spot.

This provides children with valuable physical and cognitive challenges that help them develop motor skills, realise their potential and limits, dangers and risks, and the ability to solve problems.



Figure 9. The first example of an adventure playground "Emdrup", opened by Carl Theodor Sørensen in Denmark (Photograph: SVEN TÜRCK / VISDA)

Junk playgrounds can be considered as laboratories for democracy. They are based on the belief that values are acquired through real-life experience. Democratic values are not acquired through coercive activities guided by adults in an autocratic way - this happens organically in the course of free social play between children, in a situation where they are equal and everyone has a say in agreeing the rules of the game. The rights and opinions of others must be respected in order for a person to be admitted to the game or for their teammates to leave (Gray, 2009).

Another challenge for public environments is to compete with the attractive digital world and to be accessible for youth. Restriction to social spaces leads to teenagers hanging around in shopping centres and sitting in bus stops. Positively, to support youth activity in the cities, the officials have started to plan and build newer skateparks together with street running areas and outdoor gyms, but these are all oriented towards action sports, which touches the interests of minority of the youth, and mainly males.

This concern can be viewed through the perspective of teenage girls - what is a suitable public space for them? The current parks, play equipment and public spaces are designed from a perspective of a default male, and the absence of female public spaces has a negative effect on their activeness, health later in life, and how they see

themselves in the public sphere (Make Space for Girls, n.d.). One of the NGOs fighting for teenage girls' public space is Make Space for Girls located in Great Britain.

Co-founder of British charity Make Space for Girls has addressed the failure of public space design for teens through the example of swings. "Girls love swings and there are not enough swings made for teenage girls. They are almost always placed with the equipment for younger children, so that if teenagers use them they are seen as invaders"(Lange, 2021). Often teenagers are seen as invaders by the general public: being too loud and big for playgrounds, but on the other hand too young, broke and loud for restaurants and bars. The same feeling was addressed also by Estonian teenage girls participating in this project's co-design workshops, by sharing examples of how they have been sent away from playgrounds by younger children's parents, but also from shopping centres by the security guards.

In the RAKE study, girls living in Narva addressed the concern about Estonian climate - yes, it is nice to walk around on the promenades, and go to the beach and parks, but this is only available for three months a year, the rest of the nine months these activities are either not possible or not inviting. "For nine months we're just freezing". (Aksen et al., 2018)

Youth can stay invisible in the process of urban planning and services, as they fall to the short in between state of being too old and too young. Yet this short period of time is crucial for the development of values, skills and knowledge as stated beforehand.

This raises a big question for youth living in Estonia. When youth feel excluded from the public spaces and offerings, where are they supposed to go? What public spaces are necessary for enabling youth to socialise and spend their time outside of school without being forced to spend their already valuable pocket money?

7 PARTICIPATION, RARELY INVOLVEMENT

As the research discussed in earlier chapters has identified various shortages regarding youth in their surrounding environments and opportunities, it is important to look into and discuss what opportunities there are for youth to participate in discussions and shape their environments and opportunities. This topic is thoroughly analysed by a research carried out by RAKE, also mentioned earlier in the thesis.

Involving youth in decision-making and enabling youth participation is associated with strengthening community capacity and contributes to positive youth development. It is one of the ways to build stronger and inclusive communities, while balancing youths' social rights with their responsibilities. It also challenges the negative stereotypes shaped around young people and can help in breaking down the barriers between adults and youth. (Ministry of Youth Development, 2010)

The theme of participation and involvement can be seen from two different ends: how youth can participate under their own initiative and how youth are involved in the decision making.

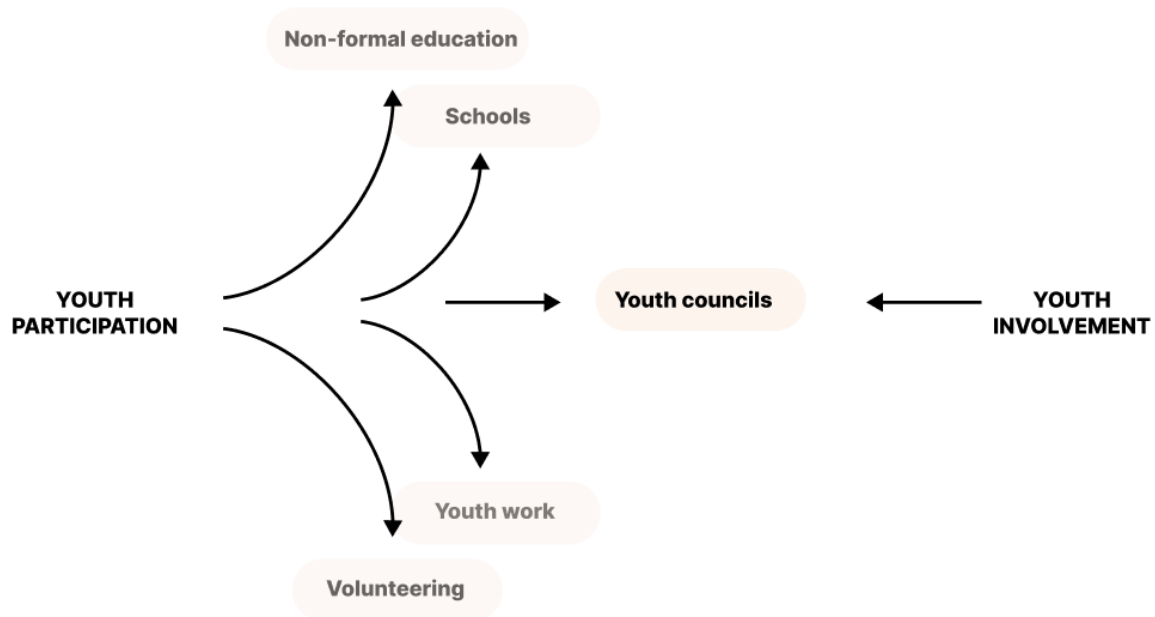


Figure 10. The meeting point between participation and involvement

The most common ways for youth to participate in shaping their surrounding environment and politics is through student councils, youth associations and youth work as also mentioned in chapter 5. Student councils allow youth to participate as a representative of students at their own school. This gives opportunities to have a say in

things affecting the everyday school life and organise activities in the school. Participating in youth associations gives an opportunity to do the same things on a wider scale, ranging from participating in associations concentrating on climate change such as youth movement "Fridays for the Future" to political youth parties. This also enables possibilities to participate on a more political level and take part in the work of youth councils.

A youth council is a participatory council consisting of young people with advisory rights operating at a rural municipality or city council. The purpose of the youth council is to discuss issues concerning young people within the competence of the rural municipality or city, and to make proposals to the rural municipality or city council and the rural municipality or city government based on the needs and interests of young people. (Eesti Noorteühenduste Liit, 2017)

While the existence of such associations is necessary, the concern lies on the type of youth participating in them. RAKE has categorised youth into five types based on their participation characteristics: (Aksen et al., 2018)

- **Hyperactive youth** (10%) - Participates in variety of activities: civic associations, politically active, participates in culture and sports events, uses media
- **Subculture conscious youth** (19%) - Similar to the previous group, but more balanced. Focus is on self development and topics that provide personal interest.
- **Pop Culture follower** (14%) - Is significantly less interested in public life, but is aware of the changes.
- **Social media citizen activist** (19%) - Statistically relatively inactive citizen, but somewhat actively using social media as a way of citizen expression.
- **Inactive youth** (38%) - Their activity can be expressed in a narrow area of interest. Statistically described through high social discouragement.

Pupils participating in youth councils can be mainly described as hyperactive youth. This can have a risk of not being able to represent all the social groups of youth, as they might not be aware of the needs of other groups (Ibid). This has a high chance of topics being of interest for less active youth not making it to the table of decision-makers.

This can be highly crucial for youth in other social groups, as one of the only ways how youth involvement politically works is through the youth councils. This is also criticised

by RAKE, bringing out the social norm of highlighting active youth and their lifestyles, and setting these as an example of how to raise activeness also in other groups (Ibid). This shows the importance of finding new methods from political institutions on how to involve youth outside of youth councils or how to make participation in youth councils more active.

Social versus political activeness

Youth often equalise social activeness with political activeness and tie that with participating in student boards and youth councils, but not so much with participating in local cultural and community life. One of the initiatives that aims to improve that understanding is the community internship (*Kogukonnapraktika*) founded in 2013. During the internship youth have the opportunity to participate in the planning activities of one of their local community organisations for 10-15 hours in a period of one week. This provides young people an opportunity to get hands-on experience with citizen' initiatives, see what type of problems those initiatives are trying to solve and why they do it. This is done in collaboration with schools and social studies teachers, who incorporate the topic into their citizen society classes.

8 CONCLUSION OF THE RESEARCH

The research has indicated the variety of problems and opportunities youth face while growing up. As the journey to independence involves a variety of stakeholders, the concerns arise from all of them.

Youths' experience at a younger age is largely dependent on their families. This includes the location of residence, financial situation, but also the parents' knowledge about available opportunities. Without getting the opportunity to participate in after-school activities, be it organised or non organised, youths have a risk of missing out on new experiences. These experiences are important for living in the modern world, which emphasises adaptability, autonomy, responsibility, empathy, curiosity and creativity. Activities happening outside of school premises are proven to help in providing those experiences.

One of the primary goals of schools is to provide education. As the education system follows a national curriculum, there is little room for customization. Therefore non-formal education and outside activities play a large role in complementing formal education. Yet, the relationship between schools and activity providers can currently be identified as "distanced allies". Students' activities outside of the schools are not taken into consideration when assessing their progress. Institutions operate independently and it is the responsibility of parents and students to analyse and communicate the progress between institutions. Therefore the experience gained from outside activities has a threat of being overrun by the importance of grades.

When skipping ahead to the age where youth have the options to participate in activities which compared to hobby schools can be more advanced, such as student/youth unions and organisations, job experience and volunteering, the participation opportunities are now much more dependent on their own motivation and aspirations than their parents. This happens in the teenage years, a time period that is fueled by uncertainty, curiosity and confusion. The idea of participation in such activities can be overwhelming or described as happening too soon, as the general opinion amongst students is that only highly motivated students take part in it. Yet these are usually the activities where youth have a high opportunity to gain experience that has the possibility to get a better understanding of what to do in the future. Through knowing their own interests and potential, students are able to take control into their own hands.

Youth are often left out in society - being too old to play in playgrounds, but too young to visit bars and restaurants. This can be felt in the public space, public service offerings but also when gaining job experience. Youth centres are one of the examples of spaces designated for youth, but due to the scope of trying to serve a large age span, many

youth find it unattractive, or are not aware of the existence of youth centres in the first place. Prior research has proven the need for youth to have a feeling of belonging in public spaces, and dedicated placemaking for youth is one of the ways to improve that.

When involving youth in decision-making processes, it is mainly done through youth councils, which are assembled by mostly active youth, whose personality suits these kinds of groups. This has a threat of not including less active youth whose interests might be different. Therefore the voices of less active youth might not be heard. This calls for new methods from the decision-making institutions, rethinking how to access those unheard voices better.

From the research the main theme stays floating on the surface, which would be youths' access to experience. While we live in a world where experience is valued as much as, or more than, education, how can gaining experience be made more accessible for youth? Experience can help to narrow down the sea of future opportunities and help youths to find their path, where they can fulfil their potential, and find their passion and interests.

9. DESIGN PROCESS

As mentioned in the methodology, the design process can be described through a constructive design research model. As the topic is personally relatable by being a former centre stakeholder of the topic and currently a spectator, the project started with personal motivation. The initial motivation led to a hypothesis wrapped around the topics of youth independence and involvement. The iterations of experiments, such as co-design workshops, user journeys and prototypes, functioned as a core for the design process as they helped to validate and clarify the research question while keeping room for accessing and considering new knowledge that was attained. This allowed for reframing throughout the design process, as the goal was not simply to prove the initial hypothesis, but to propose a possible design solution for the problems synthesised through the research.

9.1 Workshops

The initial idea for hosting a workshop came from a need to validate the research findings and test out how youth could be involved in an event and urban planning process. One of the targets set for the workshop was to get youth input for a street festival organised in Tallinn city centre. This situation enabled experimentation of different methods for co-design but also helped to get direct insight from youth, regarding how they feel about the topics of independence and taking responsibility, but also generally about contributing to the local communities. The workshop was planned as a pyramid, with the first assignments and discussion points being general, while gradually getting more specific, complex and creatively demanding. The reason for this was to keep youth engaged, while not overwhelming them with complexity in the beginning.

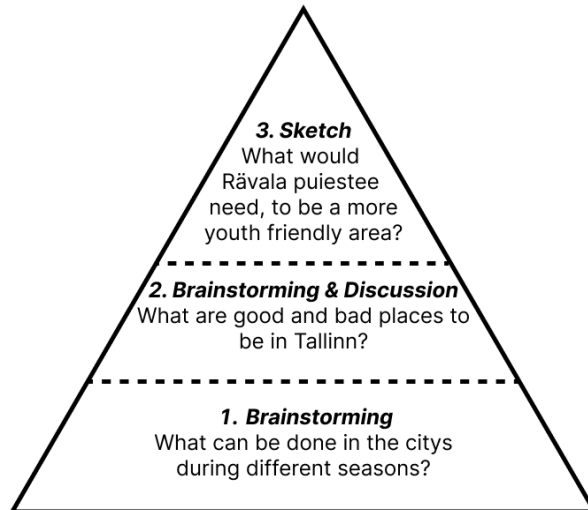


Figure 11. Workshop outline

Workshop was hosted at Rocca al Mare school with 12 volunteering students from the ninth grade and lasted for 90 minutes. The students were not aware of the topic for the workshop. Despite that, students were engaged in the activities. In feedback, students reflected on feeling empowered, by being asked for input, as they felt being actual stakeholders of the topics they were asked for input. When it was later revealed that the project was not conceptual but actually happening during the summer, students reflected that they would have taken the ideation task more seriously. Students were invited to join another workshop to prototype the ideas physically at the location where the festival was planned to be held. Approximately half of the students showed interest to participate.



Figure 12. Workshops

The second workshop was held at the location where the festival would be held. Out of the group of 12, two students showed up. The workshop was started with a clip on the topic of feminist urban planning to warm up the students for ideation and prototyping. Next up, the ideas were chosen to be prototyped, following the actual low fidelity prototyping of action at the location. While the expectations for the results of the session

were higher on my behalf, the participants reflected on the workshop positively in a perspective of trying out something new and getting new experiences. They also felt the need for examples and more guidance, as they felt new to the activities they were asked to participate in.

In a longer discussion it turned out that one of the participants attended the workshop purely from a need of getting experience around citizen involvement, as she found useful when applying to a secondary education in spring. The experience can be shown as being socially active and this gives an opportunity to stand out and have higher chances of getting accepted. Also affected by the covid pandemic, participants reflected that there had been little opportunities, if at all, from the schools to participate in community involvement activities happening outside of schools. This discussion verified the interest of youth for receiving outside experiences, while they are often not able to find these themselves. This insight became an important starting point for the following design brief.

10 DESIGN BRIEF

The research process together with the design process has shown that the topic of youth independence is complex, with many sides to consider. From the research key pain points of youths' journey to independence can be identified.

Distanced allies	Formal and non-formal education are viewed institutionally separately. Formal education does not consider youths' outside activities when assessing students.
Parents as gatekeepers	Finding hobbies or extracurricular activities is very dependent on parents' knowledge, budget, logistical skills, and drive. Available information is fragmented and available spots are quick to be filled in.
Uncaptured awareness	Youth are very aware of world movements such as climate warming and feminism, but are missing ways how to implement this awareness.
Unreachable opportunities	Youth have the opportunities to participate in activities, but it requires highly active input from them, making these opportunities challenging for most of them

Table 2. Painpoints

Youth independence is strongly linked to their own experience. Gaining experience again depends largely on the young people's own motivation, initiative, awareness but also opportunities. If one of these factors is already low for young people, it may not be possible to seize the opportunities available. As the independent decision-making period mostly begins with the end of middle school, I have decided to focus my intervention on students studying in the second half of middle school and upper secondary school. This requires clarification and re-framing of the issues raised above in the context of gaining experience.

How might we enable youths access to non-educational experience during the school years, while recognizing individual youths strengths and interests?

This question becomes a basis for the design brief. A goal is to design a platform that will analyse youths' academic and non-academic interests and performance for nudging youth towards participating in activities, based on their interests and characteristics so that youth can find the areas they are interested in for fulfilling their potential.

The emphasis of the platform is to give young people opportunities for participating in activities providing valuable experiences. The activities should provide:

- opportunity not a challenge / commitment
- Youths role should be considered being involved and not being an observer
- change the formal attitude that schools are not the only places for preparing youth for the future but also being involved in outside experiences, such as from companies and organisations would be also necessary
- The initiative should come from the youth
- experience is also important next to the formal education

10.1 Gamification

One of the ways to approach the concept behind the platform is through using the concept of gamification. Gamification uses game elements in non-game contexts, aiming to increase the engagement of users and also the motivation (Deterding et al., 2011). The use of gamification is discussed by Tea Taruste. As the new generations are considered native to the digital world, the environments youth are used to interacting with are expected to be playful and gamified (Mandatum Life, 2017). Gamification allows motivating users through new methods such as award systems, competitive situations, levels and satisfying a need to achieve or offering an opportunity for self-expression (Liivak, 2018).

11 DESIGN CONCEPT - INNO

INNO is a service platform aiming to help youth get invaluable experience by participating in a variety of real-life activities offered by companies, non-governmental organisations, local governments, universities and schools themselves. INNO brings together needs and offerings by giving youth a self-reflection platform and channelling the organisation's needs to motivated participants. The platform analyses youths' academic and non-academic interests and performance for nudging youth towards participating in activities, based on their interests and characteristics so that youth can find the areas they are interested in for fulfilling their own potential. The usage of the platform is aimed at youth starting from 15 years old until the graduation of secondary education.

The name INNO (/ˌɪn.əʊ/) is derived from the word innovation, meaning the use of a new idea or a method. The "I" resembles the pronoun *I* - me, and also *independence*. N resembles the youth in Estonian - "*noor*", and O stands for *opportunities*.

11.1 INNO in the ecosystem

In order to understand how INNO functions, it is necessary to see it first in a context. INNO functions in between four main stakeholders - students, organisations, and formal and non-formal education options. While the former experience creates an important background for the system, students and organisations are the main benefitters of the system.

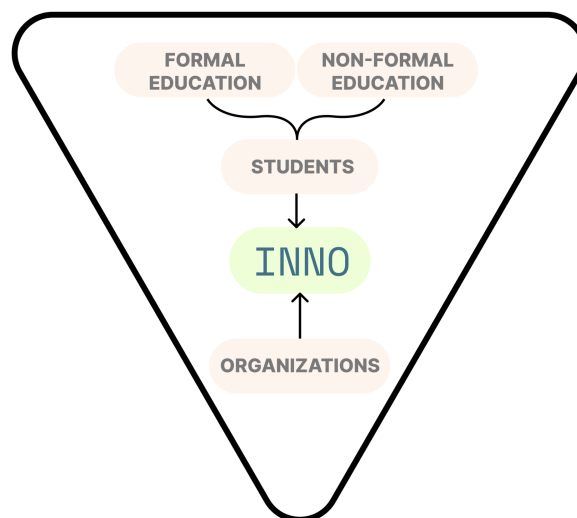


Figure 13. Positioning of INNO

11.2 Service Outline

As INNO works as a middleman between students and organisations, it is important to differentiate between the activities happening inside the service and outside the service.

Internal activities grant access to activities happening externally. Internal actions are the core of the system, as these are enablers for youth to find activities and for organisations to reach youth. Parts of the internal actions include the youth profile, skill board, experience cards and opportunities. These are activities, which aim to provide new valuable experiences for youth, such as job shadowing options, internships, summer jobs and volunteering.

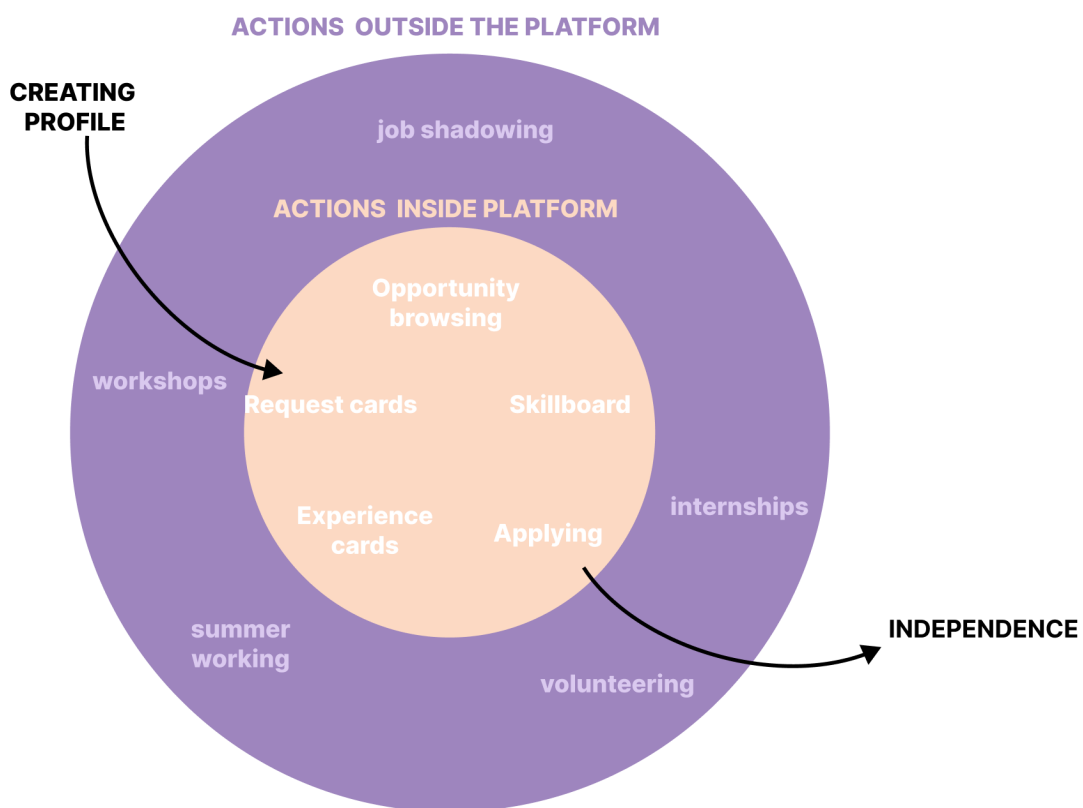


Figure 14. Service offering

11.2 User Profile

When joining the platform, youth give INNO some information about themselves. By the midway of school, youth have generated quite a lot of useful data about themselves, which gives a good initial starting point in creating a digital twin based on previous experience, performance and interests. These existing databases can be synced to the system to attain youths path in non-formal education through ARNO system and school performance through Stuumium or eKool.

Information from non-formal education covers youths participation in sport training, hobby schools and if applicable, also youth job experiences. School performance data gives indication about the subjects youth has had during the school and how they have performed in it. It also allows information about skills attained at schools such as programs or handicraft skills.

Youth has to enter his interests manually, such as sports, arts, science etc. These will become an important factor for the system in order to recommend youth suitable activities to their profile.

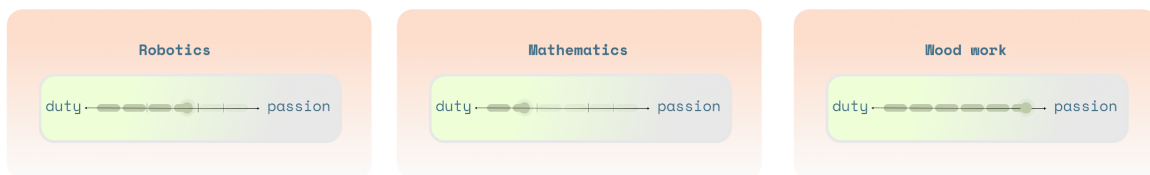


Figure 15. Defining the importance

Once the initial information has been gathered, broader interests are asked to be narrowed down to some extent to get a clearer understanding of youths interests. After that, the youth has to define the importance of each interest, subject, and skill identified. This will further help with getting a better digital model of the youths' interests.

When the profile setup is completed, youth gets access to the INNO system. On the profile landing page, youths progress in the system is shown, together with the recommended opportunities to participate in. This gives a youth an overview of his progress and gets suggestions for new experiences that might be suitable for him.



Figure 16. User profile of INNO

11.3 Growing In The System

One of the core elements of INNO is in collectable virtual cards and a level system. The system is built up on levels to motivate youth to grow within the system. Levels indicate the complexity of an available experience and give an indication of what interests or skills are required as a prerequisite from the youth. There are four levels in the system, each level indicating the complexity or difficulty of the activity. While observations such as job shadowing does not require any prior interest, then participating in a short term internship in such a job would require to be familiar with the job content beforehand. Therefore being a job shadow in a specific area or field can open up a new level, which can offer a short term internship.

The interests that are set up when setting up the profile become a starting point for the youth when using INNO. While the user has freedom to explore all the available opportunities, the platform highlights the ones being a closest match to the users profile.

Applying to the experiences happens through Experience cards. The cards show the organisation's name, experience type, experience level, duration of the experience and prerequisites for the youth for applying.

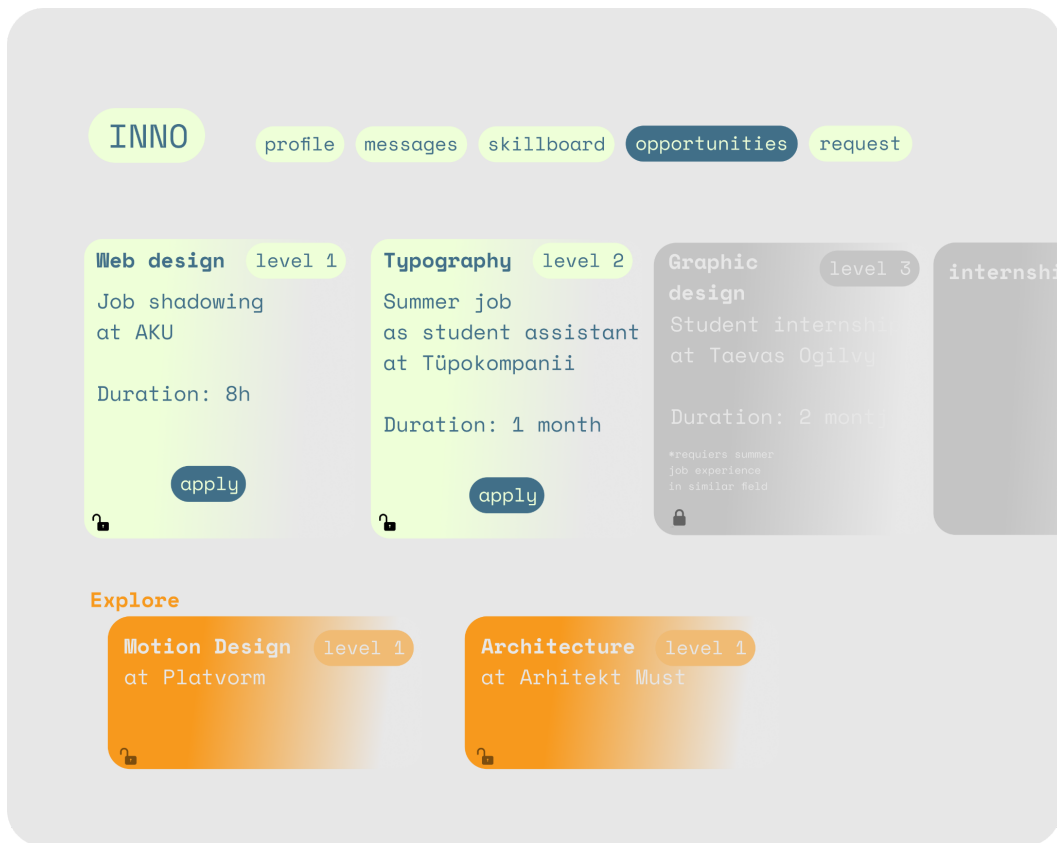


Figure 17. Opportunities in INNO

When a youth finds a new experience that he is interested in, he can apply for it. Once applied, the organisation receives a notification of interest, confirms the application and a communication channel is opened up through INNO, where the organisation representative and the youth can directly contact each other for any further detailed information regarding participating in the experience. Once the youth has participated in the experience, he receives an experience card confirming the participation and it is added to youths experience collection. If the activity involves learning or acquisition of a new skill, it will be added to the youths skill board as well.

When a youth cannot find an activity based on his interest, he can submit a request for it in the system. Team behind INNO will then find some options regarding that particular field and contact the potential organisations.

Through collecting skills and experience cards, youth are nudged towards getting different experiences.

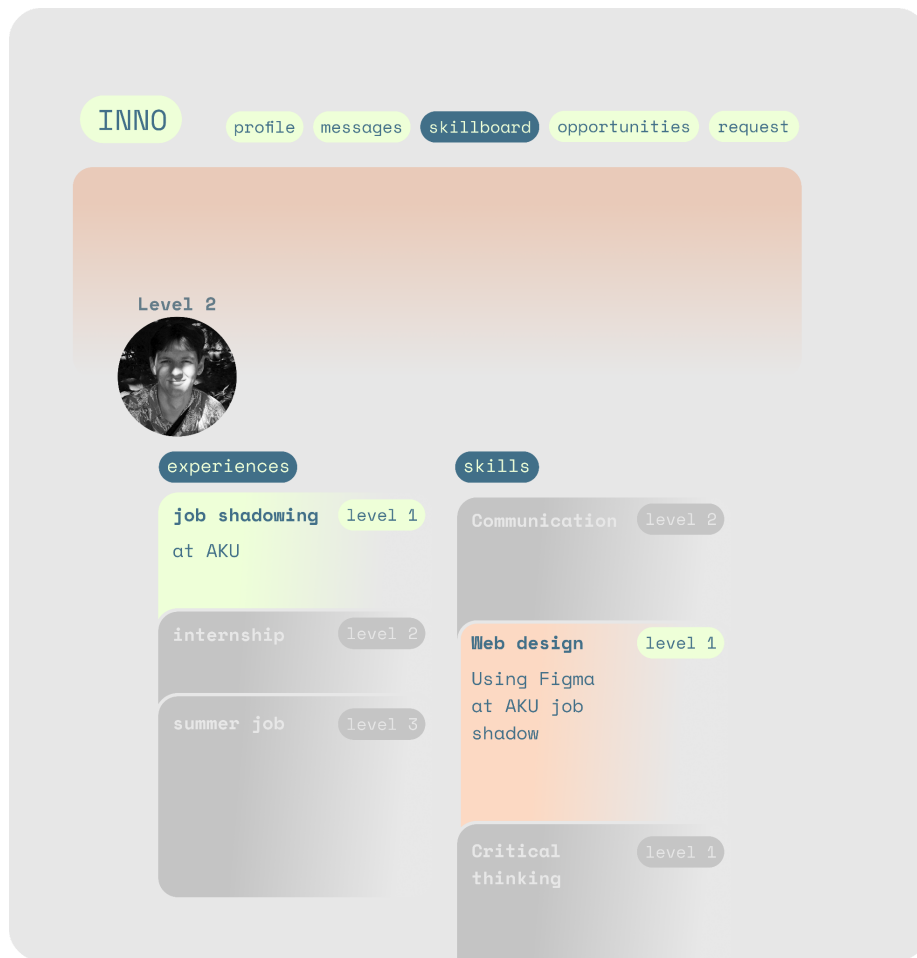


Figure 18. Skillboard

11.4 Recruitment of Organisations

Potential experience providers such as companies and organisations are invited or can apply to join the INNO platform. When joining, they have to declare what type of experience they can offer to youth and what would be the prerequisite interests for that. Companies can offer the opportunity for job shadowing, offer more meaningful summer jobs for getting thorough experience of the profession or even provide longer, more serious internship opportunities. Non-governmental organisations can set up their volunteering opportunities, but also provide opportunities for job shadowing or interning. Companies deeply interested in collaboration opportunities with schools and local municipalities, can sign up to take part in an education collaboration program, which will be described later.

11.5 Collaboration

One of the opportunities the implementation of INNO provides is the possibility to channel collaboration opportunities between organisations, youth and schools. One of the examples is involving local municipalities in the system for involving youth in the local real estate and infrastructure planning processes and provide them with hands-on experience in practising the methods to participate in a civil society.

Local municipalities can propose projects, where youth input is needed and INNO as a middleman can find interested youth or schools on these requests. Schools or social studies teachers can sign up for the system as active participants looking to contribute to projects and by this provide their students with new experiences in codesigning and working with topics where youth themselves can be part of the stakeholders. This provides opportunities for getting the experience of participation in co-planning and gives potential for youth participating in such activities also in the future.

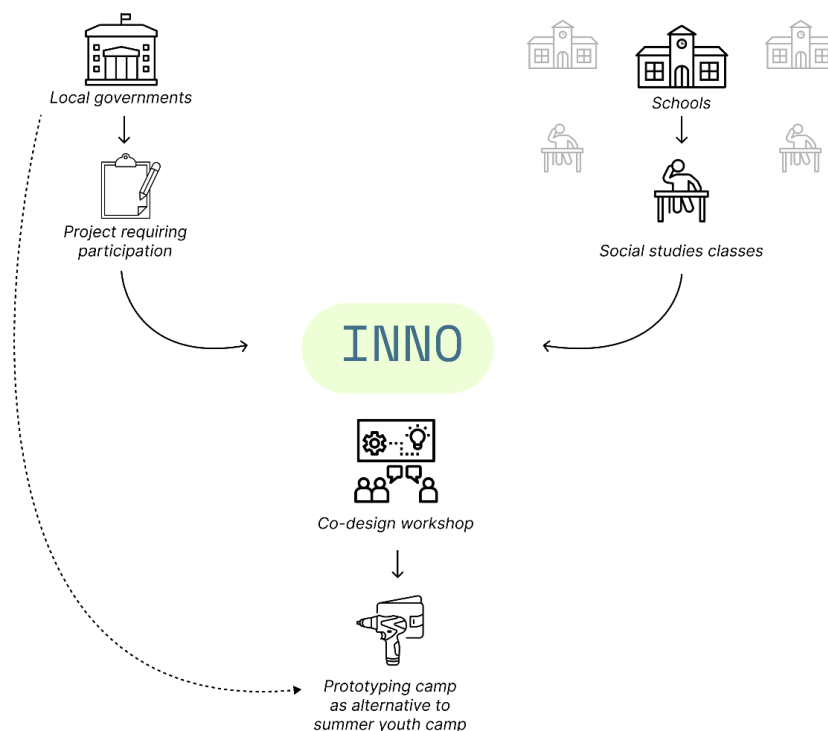


Figure 19. Collaboration proposal of INNO

Through the workshops there is a potential to rethink the summer youth job camps. Projects proposed by the municipality can have a potential to grow further into a practical camp in a format of a hackathon, where students get the opportunity to

prototype or actually realise the proposed ideas. This would enable youth to receive more valuable experience than in the traditional youth job camps such as berry picking.

11.6 Exiting and Integration

INNO is a platform targeted for students studying in the end of basic education and secondary education. This means that the participation in the platform is meant to end at one point. In this case it would be one year after the student has graduated their secondary education. This gives youth the opportunity to gain experience also after the graduation of school. As not being limited by following the school curriculum, youth have the opportunity to participate in longer paid internships, allowing them to take a gap year from studying. Through that they can verify their interests in the field before deciding whether to start potential studies in higher education. This can nudge youth to take thought through decisions and validate their interests.

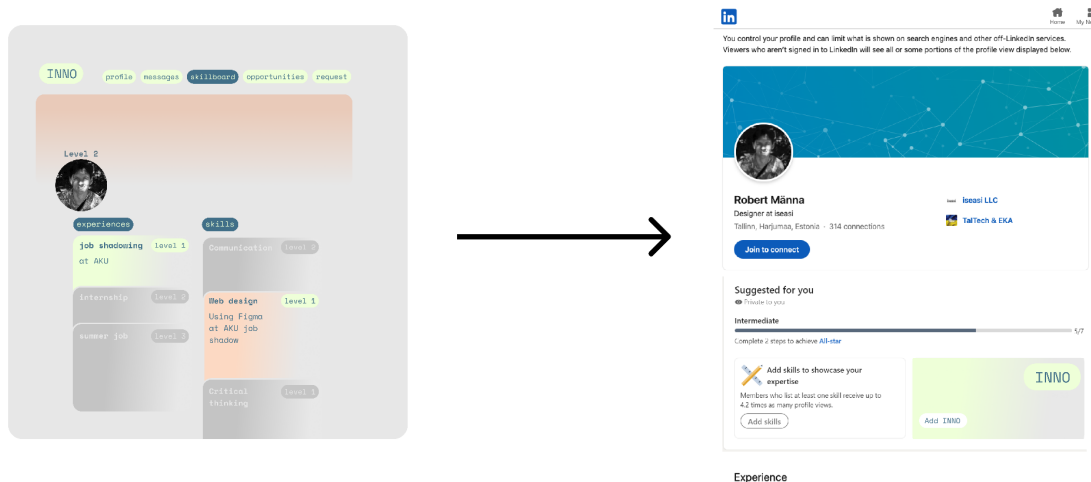


Figure 20. Integration to LinkedIn

When leaving the platform, youth have the opportunity to sync their experience with other professional networking applications such as LinkedIn. This gives them a head start in kicking off their professional career also on the online services.

12 CONCEPT EVALUATION

The natural next step after proposing a service platform is to test it with one or multiple stakeholders. Testing helps to judge the quality of the platform as a whole, and of specific elements. When testing with users that were involved in the research, it can also help to understand if their needs are represented properly.

A part of the concept discussing the potential of collaboration channels was tested through hosting a collaborative workshop for students helping to design the youth area for an upcoming city festival hosted in Tallinn. The input has been submitted to the representatives of the city of Tallinn and it will be considered when organising the upcoming youth area. The students reflected on a co-design method being a good creative task, where they had a chance to use their own interests and knowledge about youth as input for a task. Usually, during regular school curriculum contexts, there are very few, if any, chances to use it. Youth participating in the workshop showed interest in also helping with organising the festival if it is possible. For me, this proved the need of connecting youth with organisations, so that they would receive an experience that they would not be able to find themselves.

The concept has potential to be iterated through involving students, school officials and organisation representatives who have prior experiences with involving youth in their work. The iteration would require stakeholders to criticise the concept from their point of view: What features would they need, so that the system would be usable from their side? How often would they use it? Also a critical question remains regarding the organisations: What would be the ways to motivate organisations to participate in the platform beside the social responsibility and new labour options?

Unfortunately, the timeline of this thesis project did not allow for extensive testing. This would be the first next step to continue this project. Despite that, the concept has received positive feedback when discussing it with local peers. Many reflect on their experience from the gymnasium, where they missed out on a job shadowing opportunity, as they were not even aware what profession would interest them, not being able to find companies regarding their interest or being scared off by the complexity of the process. This interest in enabling opportunities, even in hindsight, is a strong indicator of the value of a platform like INNO.

13 CONCLUSION

The factors that affect youth development and the path to independence today have drastically changed with the times. When looking on the surface one could say that there are more options for youth than ever before, but on the flip side, this makes it more difficult to choose a suitable path as the selection is getting wider.

Young people's choices in the early days of youth are highly dependent on the choices of their parents. When getting more independent on their journey, youth get the opportunity to become their own decision-makers, which results in a higher responsibility on their own shoulders.

This responsibility entails defining your own interests and getting familiar with the real world. The current education system focuses mainly on following the curriculum and receiving good academic results for its students. Finding real-life experiences helping to guide youth on their choices is dependent largely on their own initiative.

As society values highly motivated and active youth, who are often considered to be representatives and role models of all the youth in the civil society, the voices, concerns and ideas of less active youth are often left out of the conversations. Similarly, finding new experiences often requires pushing comfort zones and navigating complexity, leaving opportunities only to the boldest kids, or those with the strongest support from their caregivers.

Enabling these experiences for everyone also requires collaboration from the organisations providing them. While including youth in organisations should be considered as a social responsibility, the organisations can also benefit from the involvement in other ways, such as potentially motivating future specialists in the area they operate in.

Getting experiences that help youth make their choices for independent life should be accessible to everyone, regardless of their character and background. One of the ways to help youth narrow their options down is through valuing and noticing their interest, strengths and skills. This can be further encouraged by helping youth get experience from the organisations or specialists working in those fields of interest.

The proposed platform INNO aims to bring the distanced stakeholders closer together and bridge a gap between the youth and their access to experience. Helping youth to find and identify their interests and providing experiences to develop them further gives young people more confidence in their choices and helps them to be able to make informed decisions.

Diverse experiences and a drive for self-development will only gain value over time. Every child deserves the opportunity for these kinds of experiences, especially in a society where so many opportunities are available. Access to them should not have to be dependent on schools or families but requires solutions from elsewhere.

By bridging the gap between formal and non-formal education, and leveraging external experience in the academic assessment of children, INNO hopes to rethink how we encourage development and independence in youth and offer them a strong start to their futures.

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