

## Youth Have a Voice: Qualitative Exploration of a Participatory Action-Research Program

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### Abstract

Although the participatory action-research programs with young people are increasingly common around the world, their inclusion in the evaluation of intervention programs in the area of health promotion is still not a rule. This study presents youths' assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the Dream Teens project, along with its impact on their development as a person, the development of their individual action and their social support (family, school and community). Two studies are presented: study 1, referring to individual interviews, including a total of 12 young people, with a mean age of 18.5 years ( $\pm 1.62$ ), mostly girls (83.3%) attending secondary school (41.67%), higher education (33.33%) and third grade (25%); and study 2, referring to a focus group that involved 8 young people, mostly girls (75%), age 18.5 years ( $\pm 2$ ) attending higher education (37.5%), secondary school (37.5%) and third grade (25%). The NVivo software was used for the analysis and processing of data.

Overall, young people identify the establishment of goals in the project, the relationships established, the acquired knowledge and face-to-face meetings as forces; their difficulty in dealing with empowerment, and weak participation of some young people as weaknesses; the availability of local authorities and some teachers to listen to young people as opportunities; and the necessary bureaucracy in order for a project to be implemented, the lack of support from the educational community and some teachers, along with the lack of support of political power as threats.

In terms of impact on the participants, there is an increase in their capacity for the development of the person, in the promotion of their self-esteem, personal goals, a sense of community participation, communication skills and respect for themselves and for others; and their development of individual action, a greater political empowerment, development of skills and confidence for research-action, and relationships established. The opportunities created include the establishment of new contacts and the feeling of support from some political bodies at a social support level; promotion of active listening, capacity for argumentation and development of new interests at the family level; at school, these include better relationships with teachers and colleagues, better academic performance, easier coping with frustration, better acceptance of the other; and in the community, although they have not noticed significant changes, they believe that their work will have future repercussions.

This work is expected to contribute to an increase in the number of research-action programs with the participation of young people, enhancing their effectiveness as a way to promote their health and wellbeing.

**Keywords:** Participatory action-research program; Impact; Qualitative research; Computer assisted qualitative data analysis; Voice; Youth

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## Introduction

Developed with the aim of "giving a voice" to the youth, the YPAR - Youth Participatory Action Research programs [1-4] have assumed a greater prominence in the last 20 years [5]. Supporting young people's vision as important resources [6], the YPAR programs demonstrate that in sharing knowledge with adults, it is possible to learn from young people [7,8], and make them more aware of the factors that directly affect their lives.

In a collaborative research perspective, based on the participation and determination to increase knowledge leading to social change [9], the YPAR programs are based on the promotion of equity through the development of research skills, the development of critical thinking through knowledge of their rights, integration in the process of action research, and power sharing [10]. The YPAR programs are a source of change in the community [2,11] with an impact on youth personal development, namely: 1) in their sense of self-efficacy, interpersonal skills, and social connection [2]; 2) in the development of communication skills, and strategic thinking [12]; 3) and in socio-political skills and motivation to influence school and community [13].

## The Dream Teens Project

It started in March 2014 with the aim of "giving voice" to young people in matters and political scenarios regarding health and well-being. This project aimed to encourage social participation and a more active citizenship [14,15], and it involved a total of 147 young Portuguese people, aged between 11 and 18 years, from all regions of the country. The call used videos and posters that had the participation of well-known national public figures and a motto which was: Why do you consider yourself an important element for the Dream Teens network? and which was disseminated in institutions related to youth and media.

This project, similarly to other YPAR programs, [3,8,13,16], was guided for the strengths and characteristics of young people that promote a positive youth development (PYD) [17].

In a work aimed to promote greater autonomy and leadership in young people, energized through the social networks *Facebook* and *Skype*, this project began by identifying Dream Teens real needs / problems, in the areas of personal resources and well-being, social capital, love and sexuality, consumption and dependencies, leisure and physical activity, and citizenship and social participation, as their resolution strategies. Subsequently, and after developing their research-action skills, action-research projects were developed. In the final stage of this phase, Dream Teens reported that they felt their "voices" heard in the book "Teens: safe navigation through unknown waters. Lisbon: Coisas de Ler", a book coordinated by the principal investigator of the research team, and in which young people collaborated, and in the national face-to-face meeting, where they presented their work.

In the second phase of the project, young people continued to develop action-research projects in their communities, were included in the discussion and dissemination of the results of the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children / World Health

Organization study [18], developed in Portugal by the research team, and the Dream Teens project, in presentations in their schools and local authorities.

Afterwards, a core group of more active and enterprising young people, as "junior research specialists", continued the dynamization of the network, the development of individual research-action projects, and "giving voice" to youth in scientific conferences.

## Why Use Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS)?

Although the qualitative research manual techniques continue to have its validity, and they are necessary to any analysis of qualitative data, when combined with CAQDAS, they enable more reliable results [19]. The CAQDAS makes the research process more transparent [20], easier and more efficient. The NVivo qualitative analysis software is one of the most used in investigations within the community [21], known for its benefits in promoting research quality [22].

Due to individual interviews and focus group conducted with young participants of the core group (N=16), this study presents a qualitative analysis using the NVivo software to assess the "voice" of young as for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the project, along with its impact on their development as a person, development of individual action, social support, family, school and community.

## Methodology

### Participants

**Study 1 – Individual interviews:** The participants in individual interviews (n=12) had a mean age of 18.5 years ( $\pm 1.62$ ) and are mostly girls (83.3%) from secondary school (41.67%), higher education (33.33%) and third grade (25%).

**Study 2 – Focus group:** The focus group (n=8) included mostly girls (75%), with a mean age of 18.5 years ( $\pm 2$ ), from secondary school (37.5%), higher education (37.5%) and third grade (25%).

### Procedures

Performed at different moments, data from study 1 were collected in June and July 2016, and six months later, in October 2016, study 2 was conducted. Prior to both studies, participants' consent was sought to the recording of data collection to facilitate transcription and analysis using NVivo 11 software.

A structured interview was used for each of the participants and in the focus group to ensure that everyone answered the same questions, although the last one "Are there any issues we have not addressed that you would like to give "voice"?" enabled them to speak freely about any not covered content. The interview script was developed by the research team, based on the results of the study of the impact of the project, and applied by one of the researchers. Conducted at a location chosen by the participants, with the exception of the focus group that was held at the project headquarters, the individual interviews lasted from seven to

twenty-two minutes, and the focus group lasted approximately sixty minutes. For geographical reasons it was not possible for all participants in the individual interviews to participate in the focus group. The interview began with a brief introduction of the work to be done and the young people were invited to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the project, along with their implications on their development as a person, development of individual action, social support, family, school and community. Dream Teens project was submitted and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Lisbon Medical Academic Center, Lisbon University, Portugal.

### Data analysis

All individual interviews and focus groups were transcribed in full, after the end of the entire data collection process, and analyzed in the language in which the interview was conducted. The most relevant contents were highlighted. The data were processed using the NVivo 11 qualitative analysis software. In a first phase, the author read the interview and focus group transcripts, conducted a preliminary content analysis, and looked for a model that would allow him to sustain his data. In the absence of a single model, the SWOT analysis (model a) of this work [23] and the COM-B model (model b) of this work [24] were identified as the most suitable for this work. All data were crossed, in order to ensure the accuracy of coding. A new content analysis was carried out again, reinforcing the use of the distinguished models and the categories to be created.

Hierarchies of nodes of model a) and model b) were developed, along with the classifications "person" and "focus group" with the attributes name and gender, and generated nodes "strengths", "weaknesses", "opportunities" and "threats" in the model a) hierarchy [23], and the "capacity" and "opportunity" nodes in the model b) hierarchy [24]. In the model b), the sub-nodes "development of the person" and "development of individual action" were also created, integrated into the "capacity" node, and the sub-nodes "social support", "family", "school" and "community" in the "opportunity" node [25]. According to the authors of the model [24], capacity and opportunity (along with motivation) influence and are influenced by behavior. Finally, information from study 1 (individual interviews) and study 2 (focus group) was coded.

A memo of the project was used throughout the entire process to ensure greater detail in the presentation of the work developed.

The analysis of the data was initiated by the study of the number of responses per node and sub-node using the response matrix, followed by word frequency per hierarchy nodes (criteria: 30 most frequent words with equal or greater than 8 characters in order to ignore prepositions and conjunctions, grouped by synonyms) with visualization of data in word clouds, with subsequent words frequency per nodes or sub-nodes (criteria: 3 most frequent words more with equal or greater than 8 characters, grouped by synonyms), and finished with a text search, with the purpose of framing the most frequent words in the context in which they were spoken. For a summary and better explanation of the results, a conceptual map has been developed.

## Results

### Study 1 – Individual interviews

Analyzed the number of responses in each node or sub-node of each of the hierarchies – model a) and model b) and found that with the exception of sub-nodes "social support" and "family", integrated in the hierarchy of nodes of model b) who had no response from one of the boys, all encompassed the comments of all young people. Followed the study of the frequency of words by hierarchy of nodes (30 most frequent words with equal or greater than 8 characters, grouped by synonyms), with the visualization through clouds of words.

In model a), the following words stand out: goals, entities, parish, society, community and, secondly, model b), the words: teachers, community, goals, self-esteem (**Figures 1 and 2**).

In the study of the frequency of the three most frequent words by node or sub-node, depending on the hierarchy of nodes of the model, are evidenced in model a): goals, learning, and friendship – forces; goals, demotivation, disorientation – weaknesses; entities, Assembly, Autarchies – opportunities; bureaucracy, community, difficulty – threats. In model b), the words are: self-esteem, goals, community - development of the person; politics, evolution, research - development of individual action; society, work, connections - social support; conversations, criticizing, discussing - family; teachers, academic, principal - school; community, changes, municipal - community, that stand out.

In the text search for the three words identified in each node or sub-node, the quotes of the young people in model a) are highlighted:

**Forces:** "... establish goals for the groups, and the debates between us helped a lot." (CB, girl, 18 years)"

"... the friendships that we have created in the project and our cohesion ..." (DG, girl, 18 years)

"... the coordination team and the project were very well organized so that everything went well, and the goals were achieved ... there was great support there and even in terms of information and initiatives on how to act in society ... this learning was very important ..." (CD, girl, 19 years)

**Weaknesses:** "... the lack of communication ... a line that can guide us when we are more confused ..." (DG, girl, 18 years)

"I found that the weaknesses were more at a system level, that is, we were all talking about Skype, but then there were always people who were missing and who we could not reach so well and then in the last minute they try to participate with one thing or another and we tried to open it.... It was a bit confusing and then there were goals that we set, but sometimes due to communication difficulties in groups, we could not fulfill them and then we became confused and lost, without knowing what was already done or not." (DFM, girl, 19 years)

"In the beginning, Dream Teens was a fantastic thing, but now there is a demotivation of some young people." (GC, girl, 18 years old)



Figure 1 Word cloud of the individual interviews – model a.

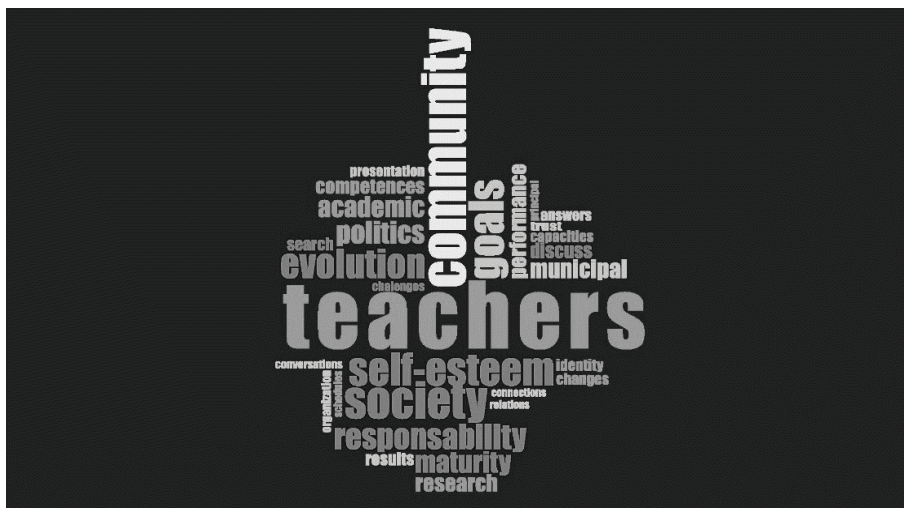


Figure 2 Word cloud of the individual interviews – model b.

**Opportunities:** *"I think the local authorities were open to hear us and hear about the project, and to accept that the Dreamers wanted to collaborate with the Autarchy." (BF, girl, 15 years)*

*"... we have had a lot of notoriety in several media and several entities since the early days. This enabled us to establish partnerships, supports and to have a more present voice ..." (NR, boy, 17 years)*

*"... when we began to gain a name ... there were people who did not want to know, entities that showed no interest and others who were interested in us and sought our help" (SF, girl, 19 years)*

*"... when I went to the City Council it was a spectacular opportunity to publicize the project ..." (CD, girl, 19 years)*

**Threats:** *"... the bureaucracy that is needed for a project to be carried out ... It takes a lot of time ... and also because it is always difficult. It's easy for our representatives to hear ... they always think it's a good idea, but then when it's time to change, it's always harder for something to happen." (BF, girl, 15 years)*

*"... not having support from the school community is sometimes an implication" (DG, female, 18 years)*

*"Difficulty in talking to the people who are in charge of the organizations or schools" (TC, girl, 19 years).*

In the summary of young people's responses, they present: the definition of objectives in the project, learning of new information and how to act in the society, and the friendly relations created, as forces; the difficulty in achieving the objectives due to the scarce participation of some elements, the demotivation of some young people after the beginning of the phase in which leadership and autonomy were competences to be achieved; disorientation to the need for autonomy, as weaknesses; having a "voice" in the entities, the opportunity to present the project in the City Council, and the availability of local political authorities to listen and make themselves available to young people, as opportunities; and the bureaucracy leading to a project to be developed, and the lack of school support and political power, as threats.

The answers to model b):

**Development of the person:** *"... I grew up a lot during these three years and I also knew myself as a person and defined my goals ... My self-esteem has improved ... I feel that I am more competent, that I am doing something for society ..." (BF, girl, 15 years)*

"Goals that I had, I have more strength ..." (CB, girl, 18 years)

"... I felt that I was really doing something, that I had a goal." (MF, girl, 18 years)

"My self-esteem improved a lot ... Dream Teens also helped because it made us feel important ... personally I grew a lot, growing up an activist with Dream Teens because it was my way to also participate in my community and the communities in which I have an interest." (DFM, girl, 19 years)

"... to be part of the project has also changed my goals and who I am." (SF, girl, 19 years)

**Development of individual action:** "If I already had political capacity, now I have more ..." (CG, girl, 18 years)

"... before I was not so interested in politics ..." (DG, girl, 18 years)

"... there was a positive evolution ... The Dream Teens was a door, an opening for me to start doing ..." (DFM, girl, 19 years)

"I think that these parts of research, the skills for research, knowing what we are going to investigate and how we are going to get what we want, has developed immensely throughout the project ..." (CD, girl, 19 years)

"... as I was responding to challenges and doing projects, I had to do research ... I felt that my abilities were evolving accordingly." (MM, boy, 21 years)

**Social Support:** "We have a responsibility in our hands, we have to disclose this responsibility and the project allows us to distinguish between friendship and work." (GC, girl, 18 years)

"... we have seen the impact that we have had in society up to the political level ... I have had the opportunity to make many connections with teachers and researchers" (DFM, girl, 19 years)

"... it made me know at least more people and have more contacts, but I do not know to what extent it made me more supported by the society in which I am." (SF, girl, 19 years)

**Family:** "We discussed a lot more subjects." (GC, girl, 18 years)

"... I used to have political conversations before, but it's just that I have more structured conversations now, and I already know how to correctly accept and criticize what comes back." (CD, girl, 19 years)

**School:** "Supported me in academic development. I've always been a hard worker, but the Dream Teens made me be more effective, more efficient, and get a better understanding of others and empathize, not block mentally when someone showed me a different idea ..." (NR, boy, 17 years)

"... connections with teachers became easier because the teacher also came personally to discuss some issues ... In terms of academic performance, it also increased in certain areas." (CD, girl, 19 years)

"... I approached some teachers and colleagues." (SF, girl, 19 years)

"... A project that I tried to implement there and even for the

presentation of the project Dream Teens, that I tried to talk to the principal and never had availability ..." (TC, girl, 19 years)

**Community:** "... in my community, I have not been able to have a major impact on structural change, but I think that if the project continues, and continue to have this opportunity to change and share my ideas, this can be done." (BF, female, 15 years)

"We always have the bureaucratic barrier, but I think the project has managed to achieve enough goals within this network because for example, with the Municipal Council of Lisbon which is a large Municipal Council, we also managed to change some things and we managed to leave our mark, and even in terms of other, more regional, municipalities, we also managed to get there and we managed to make some changes, we managed to give our voice and there were results ..." (CD, female, 19 years old)  
 "... even if not for everyone, or not on all sides, I think at least somewhere there has been some change. Not at the immediate level, but I think to draw attention to some points I think this was important." (SF, female, 19 years)  
 "... my community has not changed much since Dream Teens, I do not feel that I can still have a voice in my community very strongly ..." (MM, male, 21 years)

A resume of data collected in model b) is presented. For Dream Teens, the project had an impact on their development as a person, on improving their self-esteem, setting goals in the development as a person; in the development of individual action, a greater political capacity, and the evolution of their research-action competences; in social support, it enabled an increased sense of support from society, and establishment of new contacts and social network; in the family, it gave youngsters more conversations, more active listening, increased critical capacity, and the development of new interests; in school, it allowed them to have a better relationship with teachers and colleagues, an increase in critical capacity, greater efficiency, effectiveness, and academic performance, and better acceptance of the other; lastly, in the community, arguing that they know that the changes are slow to happen, but that they have left the Dream Teens brand in their meeting in the City Council of the country's capital.

## Study 2 – Focus group

In this study, it is evident that four young people are the most active in the discussion. Being in model a), the nodes "weaknesses" and "opportunities" those that had a greater participation (n=6). In model b), it is the sub-nodes "development of the person" and "development of individual action" of the node "capacity" that gathered a greater number of responses (n=4), along with the sub-node "family" integrated in the node "opportunity" (n=4).

In the study of word frequency through the word cloud at each node or sub-node of hierarchies, the following terms appear in model a): evolution, competences, community, teachers (**Figure 3**); and model b): politics, problems, mentality (n=4) (**Figure 4**).

In the research of the three most frequent words, it stands out: meetings, work, coordinators – forces; meetings, Facebook, demotivation – weaknesses; teachers, library, presentations –



Figure 3 Word cloud of the focal group – model a.



Figure 4 Word cloud of the focal group – model b.

opportunities; presentations, principal, discussion – threats, in model a); and b) the terms: self-esteem, communicate, respect – development of the person; politics, difference, confidence – development of individual action; politics, Assembly, Parish Council - social support; argue, upset, political – family; academic, conversations, frustration - school; implement, intention, negative – community.

Associated with the three words identified in model a), the following comments are presented:

**Forces:** "Teamwork was very valued in the project. I think it was good to meet new people and the way of working of different people ... "(BF, girl, 15 years)

"The fact that there are coordinators who have had past experiences provide us with a stable base ..." (DG, girl, 18 years)

"... the meetings served to get to know each other, to have bases and an awareness of what each one is capable of, their personality

and the way we deal with each other ..." (TC, girl, 19 years)

**Weaknesses:** "Facebook and social networks do not give an orderly dialogue, I think it did not help there ... Skype meetings always work better. I think hearing a person's voice always has more impact than the text." (NR, boy, 17 years)

"In the meetings you can tell from orality what the person is transmitting." (DG, girl, 18 years)

"The lack of interest, demotivation of some young people ... if the project was to captivate active young people, they ended up showing that their interest was not so great." (GC, girl, 18 years)

"Facebook and social networks are not the same as face-to-face." (TC, girl, 19 years)

**Opportunities:** "... in school I was very well received, my principal, he lost half an hour to talk to me without having previously scheduled a meeting, he put the book in the library ... did not let me announce it to the community... I had spectacular teachers. I

had full support inside the school. "(NR, boy, 17 years)

"... when it was to present the HBSC (Health Behaviour in School-aged Children) study and Dream Teens project, the principal also accepted, but teachers did not feel so funny because it broke the classes, materials and everything they had planned ... In the Azores Congress, media not have been for the most important part, our voice ... they put two microphones directed to the Mayor and the Regional Youth Director, and then went away ... my communication improved, the expressions with the hands and the way to look at a person, the posture, everything, I think everything was obviously not great yet, because you can achieve that in two years, but it has improved a lot..."(DG, girl, 18 years)

**Threats:** "... even to get the book in the library was a mess ... And to make the presentations, ask for authorization, they asked me first to get tenth class schedules, I arranged the schedules, but then they no longer wanted the tenth class and wanted the eleventh class ... then they told me that to cut off Physical Education classes would not be the most appropriate ... and then I even had some sort of discussion with the school principal, ... because I started saying that if things weren't going to be done or weren't going to move forward, it would be a waste of time ... and I was called impolite and it did not go very well. (TC, girl, 19 years)

In summary they stand out: the face-to-face meetings that served for a better knowledge of the group, as forces; the meetings via Facebook, as non-substitutes for face-to-face communication, the demotivation of some young people, perhaps due to their lack of dedication to the project, as weaknesses; the cooperation of some teachers, and the possibility to place the book in which Dream Teens collaborated in the schools libraries as opportunities; and difficulties in convincing teachers and principals to accept the presentation of the project as obstacles to participation.

In model b):

**Development of the person:** "I'm not yet at the level I want, but it had a positive impact on my self-esteem ... Not having to speak what I think, as I think, without fear or if there are problems, I solve these problems, not anticipating. For me this was the perfect self-esteem, it's me being able to say what I think, if there are problems then solve, if there is no better, I already said what I think."(NR, boy, 17 years)

"I think it is important to be able to respect ourselves and our neighbors, and I think that with this project, we have managed to respect the various entities and even our colleagues and so on ..." (TC, girl, 19 years)

**Development of individual action:** "... I've noticed a very positive evolution in my confidence, I used to come to a meeting like that, nervous, thinking about what I'm going to say ... and now I'm much calmer." (BF, girl, 15 years)

"... it is a space that gives us opportunities ... it gave me the confidence in myself before thinking about something, politics for example ..." (NR, boy, 17 years)

"We always saw the newscast and one of the things I always

wanted to see was the part of politics because it was from there that I started to give voice to my ideas and what I hear when I transmit ... there are many things that I do not agree and I am already able to say no and why, and before maybe not, before maybe it was not related to politics, it was not related to education and health ... I think it has to do with the confidence that we have in ourselves and also for example, with Dream Teens I was able to make it easier to speak in front of people, because I noticed it in the oral presentations that the teachers asked us to do. "(DG, girl, 18 years)

"... is not only about the contacts we have established with the various institutions, but also between us, the group, with completely different people, with completely different ideals and ideologies, and I think that the fact of having so much difference of opinion and ideas, helped to build a bigger background. "(TC, girl, 19 years)

**Social support:** "A few days ago I went to the Assembly of Oeiras, and we were talking about the transportation system that is very good here in the area, but there is a lot of opportunity to be better, there are things, the Cascais line is almost collapsing, it's very old, and although there is political will in the city, those who have to make that decision are politicians of the Parliament who do not know us or are not even aware of that (what is going on) ... for me, my ideal policy system of republic, democracy, and we are all in the same box, Government and citizens, we share, we talk to each other and ideas and proposals ... Madeira, I say that I should be a pilot in the way you do things with politics ... being an autonomous region, having the power to do so and political will, allowed that to be a bright space for citizenship ... I had teachers who were part of the Regional Assembly and they came to talk about topics that spoke in the Assembly. (NR, boy, 17 years)

**Family:** "At home I tend to be the one against the political level, but taught me not to be upset with my parents or my brother because of that, to completely separate these two worlds, and to be able to argue and speak better..."(NR, boy, 17 years)

**School:** "At the academic level, my average increased, and I think the Dream Teens helped me ..." (NR, boy, 17 years)  
"In the school climate / context, at academic level, there was no evolution because of the complications that existed in the middle ... There are conversations outside of school time where we can effectively grow as people, and I think we can also help the other part grow, it's not just us... academic performance has improved... I speak of my personal experience, was the fact that I was rejected by the Chamber, the school and have tried and tried again and then in the end ended up not giving anything at all, generated a frustration a bit big inside of me, but then I learned to deal with it ... now I think I can deal better with this kind of situation. As a result, academic performance itself has improved. "(TC, girl, 19 years)

**Community:** "... We did not have a much direct and instantaneous impact, but at least it made everyone aware that in this project, that for the future, if there is intention, it is possible to unite people to make even the systemic change that is sought..."(NR, male, 17 years old)  
"... in my case there have not been changes yet, but I know there

*will be with the project that I will implement ... There's always an Impact, and I think it is more positive than negative." (CG, girl, 18 years)*

In a systematization of model B) are highlighted: the positive impact on self-esteem, communication skills, and respect for self and others in development of the person; the promotion of their political capacity, the development of interpersonal skills resulting from the relationships with young people with different personalities, and an increase in self-confidence for action in the development of individual action; in social support, they say that the political system does not involve young people, and that Parish Councils do not contribute to their social participation; in the family, they identified the improvement in the acceptance of different political opinions, and a greater capacity of argumentation, due to the increase of knowledge; at school, an improvement in academic performance, more conversations with teachers, and feelings of frustration arising from difficulties in articulation with the school are revealed in this context; and finally, in the community, they believe that Dream Teens will have positive repercussions for the future of their community.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Two studies were conducted based on CAQDAS of the "voice" of young people regarding the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the project, and its impact on the development of the person, the development of individual action, social support, family, school and community and although they are distinct, there is a complementarity in the results obtained. To explore their views and experiences that could have been less accessed in individual interviews [26], study 2 allowed us to gather new perspectives and to deepen the results of study 1 [27].

With different words highlighted in the word clouds (30 words with more than 8 characters) from model 1) (**Figure 1**) and study 2 (**Figure 3**), the following terms are repeated in both studies: objectives; entities; parish; municipal; participate, society and community. In model b) of studies 1 and 2, there are the words: teachers; self-esteem; conversations; relations; academic; policy; evolution; which are reiterated in both studies. In the three most frequent words of model a), only the word "demotivation" in the analysis of weaknesses is repeated in the studies, along with model b), of the terms "self-esteem" in the development of the person, "politics" in the development of individual action, and "academic" at school.

In the model a) of study 1, in a research of the most frequent words, integrating them in the speeches of young people, setting goals, learning information, how to act in society, are highlighted as important features of YPAR programs, and the friendships created as forces, and the importance of face-to-face meetings for a better knowledge of colleagues, and establishment of relations between the group in the study 2.

As weaknesses, the difficulty of reaching some of the objectives of the project, related to the weak participation of some elements, and the lack of motivation and disorientation that some faced in the phase in which the autonomy and leadership happened to

constitute project objectives are identified. Still not fully prepared to take the lead role or demotivated with the project?! According to the Self-Determination Theory, which promotes greater participation and psychological well-being [28], motivation and involvement occur when the young person identifies with, internalizes and integrates the objectives of the program. Internalisation is driven by three basic psychological needs: competence, autonomy and relatedness [29]. Complementarily, in study 2, young people identify communication via Facebook as not a substitute for face-to-face communication, and the demotivation of some Dream Teens as a sign of lack of dedication to the project.

In the opportunities, "having a voice" among the entities related to work with youth, a characteristic of the YPAR programs [30-32] the presentation of the project in the City Council, and the availability of local authorities to listen and offer collaboration appear in study 1, while in study 2 identifies the availability of some teachers to support the project, and the placement of the book "Teens: safe navigation through unknown waters. Lisbon: Coisas de Ler" in school libraries.

Regarding the threats, the bureaucracy leading to a project to be developed, the lack of support from the school community and the political authorities identified in study 1, are complemented in study 2, with the difficulty in convincing teachers to accept the presentation of the project, which represents, according to them, an obstacle to participation. Identified as opportunities and threats, the limited support of political power and the school community could be important barriers to youth participation. Although prioritizing the "voice" of young people is considered a right and a priority [33], their integration in matters that directly affect them is often ignored [14].

In the study of model b), the impact of the project at individual level, their competences, social support and life context, the improvement of the definition of personal goals and as a person - their identity [8] at development of the person in study 1, and increased communication and self-respect and respect to others in study 2. Feelings of self-efficacy [2] and communication skills [8,12] have been identified in previous studies. The improvement of self-esteem, a possible result of promoting the voice of young people throughout the project, was reported by the youngsters in both studies.

In the development of individual action, increases in competencies for action and research were referred [34,35] in study 1, and the development of interpersonal skills through dealing with people with different personalities, and self-confidence [36] were identified in study 2. The increased political capacity converges in both studies.

In a participatory research project with young people, developed by authors Ozer and Douglas [13], similar and contradictory results are found in the present study. With a report on the impact on improving socio-political skills, consistent with the data obtained, it has no impact on improving self-esteem, a result reported by the Dream Teens.



Regarding social support, in study 1, the youth emphasize a development of the feeling of support by the society, promoted through its participation in meetings with local authorities and schools, and an increase of their social network [3]. However, in study 2 they emphasize the lack of involvement of the citizens by the political system, and the lack of incentive to the participation of young people by the Parish Councils.

In the family, they identify impacts in a greater number of conversations, in a more active listening, in the development of new interests in study 1, and in the acceptance of different opinions and increase of knowledge in the study 2. The capacity / critical thinking [37] was reported in individual interviews and focus groups.

In a study by Powers and Tiffany [4], the development of social relations and critical thinking appear as two important benefits arising from the involvement of young people in participatory research and evaluation.

At school, better relationships with teachers and peers are reported, more efficacy and effectiveness, greater critical ability and acceptance of the other, and sense of lack of support from the school leadership in study 1, and more conversations with teachers and feeling of frustration due to the school's lack of support in study 2. The prioritization of the participation of young people in their schools should be an important and urgent goal of teachers and principals who defend a democratic education [31]. The increase in academic performance emerges in studies 1 and 2. In a systematic review of YPAR programs, author Anyon and colleagues [38] corroborates the impacts of these programs on the promotion of academic competencies, contrarily to the study of Voight and Velez [32] developed in a school context.

Finally, in the community, in study 1, along with the meta-analysis developed by Durlak and colleagues [39], based on the impacts of PYD programs, the Dream Teens also argue that changes in their life contexts are necessary, revealing that they believe that the

changes take a long time to happen, but that they left the Dream Teens brand, adding in study 2 that their work had an impact and will have repercussions in the future. With impacts on the future of the community, we can believe that the development of skills, knowledge, civic engagement, empowerment, self-concept promotion [40] and feeling of respect and effectiveness [41], also contribute to a more positive development of young people participating in YPAR programs.

With important and positive impacts on the positive development of young people, we consider that this action-research project had and will play an important role for changes in their life contexts. For a presentation of the impacts of this YPAR project in individual level, their competences, social support and life context, a conceptual map based on COM-B model [24] is presented (Figure 5).

This work is expected to contribute to an increase in the number of research-action programs with the participation of young people, enhancing their effectiveness as a way to promote their health and wellbeing, namely their mental health.

## Recommendations for Public and Institutional Policies

- To increase the awareness of politicians and the institutions whose work is related to youth and on the importance of “giving voice” to this generation, and to include them as partners in policies and decisions that directly affect them, namely their mental health and wellbeing.
- To promote action-research competences in young people, and to encourage their social participation in community and school, to integrate them into projects and programs, and to promote their involvement in all stages of the process, to increase their health and wellbeing, namely their mental health.

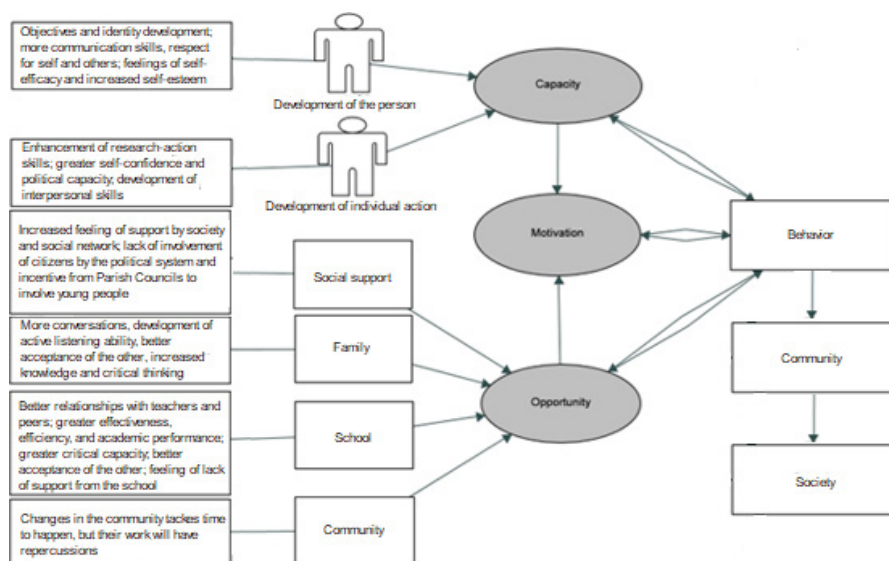


Figure 5 Conceptual map of dream teens impacts.

## Limitations

The authors are aware of the limitations of the study, recognizing the difficulty in making a comparison with other similar studies. Considering the national dimension of the study and their agenda, it would be impossible to conduct interviews with all the young participants and recognizing the core group (N=16) as "junior research specialists". Thus, this group represents our main group of study, and the young people participating in this study (Study 1 - n=12; Study 2 - n=8) and their "voices" constitute an expressive sample of the group, representing 75% of the population in Study 1 and 50% in Study 2.

Considering the positive perception of the impact of the project on the young participants, it is expected that this study will serve as a basis and stimulus for the development of a greater number of YPAR projects, promoters of the social participation of youth.

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