



STUDY
PORTRAIT
OF PORTUGUESE
**YOUTH AND YOUTH
ASSOCIATIONS**

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FOREWORD

BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE
PRESIDENT OF THE
PORTUGUESE REPUBLIC



The study "Portrait of Portuguese youth and youth associations" presented here is testament to the efforts undertaken by the National Federation of Youth Associations to contribute to an informed public debate on young people's civic participation in Portugal.

Understanding the current reality and institutional co-operation, as is the case with the University of Porto, is crucial for the creation of coherent and effective actions and public policies. The reality presented here is one that, although not unknown, has perhaps not been sufficiently reflected upon. The dependence of youth associations on public funding, the difficulty of professionalisation and predictability in their structures, the effects of the COVID pandemic on the association landscape, as well as the gender disparity in leadership roles continue to be some of the roadblocks that youth association faces. In this scenario, the role of association leaders who do not give up and strive to find new paths, the tireless voluntary members who dedicate their free time to the mission of the organisation or the youth workers — especially at local level — who provide support is particularly remarkable.

In the face of emerging forms of participation — such as activism, petitions, digital interactions — it is important not to exclude or forget the important role of civic activity arising from youth association. This is imperative due to the motivation that compels young people who take part in youth association and in the surrounding community — as the study shows — and also because youth association is the first truly democratic experience: of work in the service of collective values, of scrutiny of actions, of management of common resources, and of joint creation.

A final word to the young people of Portugal: your approach to life is intertwined with the Portugal we all want: tolerant, inclusive, creative, ambitious, restless, bold, vocal, open to the world, participative. I count on you to fulfil the vision that is also shared by the President of the Portuguese Republic.

Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa

PRESENTATION

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE
NATIONAL FEDERATION OF
YOUTH ASSOCIATIONS



Conducting diagnostic analyses, scientific work and the resulting production of knowledge are vital for a more assertive, pragmatic and decision-making process adjusted to the reality at hand. This was precisely the motto that led the FNAJ to join efforts to analyse the Portuguese youth association sector, in a work that is intended to be continuous in order to better meet their needs and aspirations. Within the dynamic context of youth, this study has made it easier to see its innovative character — challenging a few previous findings in the process. From the outset, we can infer that the majority of youth organisations, founded on principles of local-based action, now transcend their initial borders while still preserving our "Portugueseness" and the traditions of our territories.

In addition to trying to understand the type of associations and their scope, this research also sought to better understand the young people who comprise them, what drives them and what their aspirations are. This is the path that the FNAJ portrays here and which it believes should guide change.

Underlying this work, there are essentially two relevant challenges for our movement: the diversification of funding sources and the convergence towards more gender-balanced leadership. It is up to all of us to understand that mitigating these issues will allow us to be even more plural and inclusive.

It is extremely important that we understand the Portuguese youth association movement in order to better engage young people in an active participation that allows us to explore new avenues and make new strides. May this study become an opportunity to map the youth association movement and guide the decisions that shape the future of our young people!

Marco Santos

INTRODUCTORY REMARK

The FNAJ - National Federation of Youth Associations is the representative structure of youth and the local-based youth association movement in Portugal, fulfilling its purpose since its foundation on 10 May 1996. Its mission is to represent youth associations before public and political authorities, defending the interests and needs of young people and their organisations, and thus promoting the full exercise of citizenship.

Given the mission of the FNAJ, it is quite relevant to characterise the youth association background so that its understanding may help guide actions, outline strategies and provide a more targeted response that helps young people fulfil their aspirations.

In this sense, the FNAJ promoted a study on the impact of youth association, developed by the Centre for Educational Research and Intervention (CIIE) of the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences of the University of Porto. The study is divided into two parts and focuses on the portrayal of the associations and their actions, as well as their leadership and the impact on their leaders and the community in which they operate.

The study carried out at national level aims to produce knowledge on the impact of youth association in the following areas: (a) individual, i.e. at the level of the relevance it may have on young people who get involved in association activities, (b) organisational, with regard to the development of the associations themselves, and (c) community, with regard to the role that association dynamics may have in the contexts of proximity where it operates and with which it relates.

The output presented here focuses on the analysis and interpretation of results regarding the perspectives of association leaders. The data presented enables us to gain a deeper understanding of leadership profiles within youth associations in Portugal, delving into their roles as leaders and their perspectives on the potential impact their associations can have on their territories.

The study was carried out between August 2021 and March 2022. This first study comprises the response of 94 leaders, corresponding to a sample of 9.41% of a universe of 999 youth associations at national level.

THEORETICAL REMARK

Associative engagement fits into a perspective of participation that comprises "all opportunities and spaces where young people have influence" (Bacalso, 2016: 2), and may take conventional or non-conventional forms. Aspects such as voice, transparency or power sharing are aspects that, among others, contribute to the quality and purpose of participation: "participation has a purpose when it is linked to decisions that have a significant impact on young people's lives" (Bell et al., 2008: 65).

In a context with multiple forms of civic and political participation, whether these revolve around causes or forms of resistance to more conventional, hierarchical models and portrayed as radically non-political (Binder et al., 2021), and despite the narrative that young people have low levels of participation, the association context represents a meaningful space to give more voice to young people's agendas.

The literature has evidenced the impact of association engagement on the social capital of young people arising from socialisation processes, as they have the opportunity to acquire skills and adopt multiple roles, as well as develop social networks from which they can benefit (Cicognani et al., 2012). From a social development perspective, the participation of young people has been regarded as fundamental to sustaining the future of democracies and political regeneration (Pickard & Bessant, 2018).

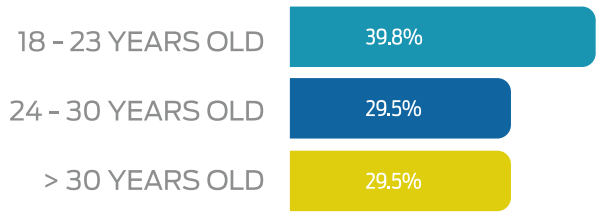
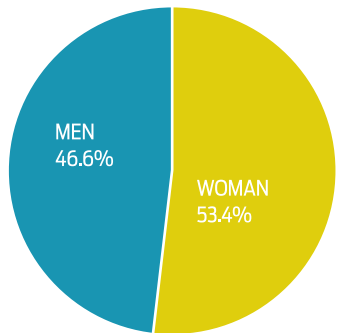
Thus, when looked at in a broader perspective, association can be recognised as having a learning role for democracy and, similarly, as contributing to its own consolidation (Viegas, 2004; Ferreira, 2008). In this case, the question Ferreira asks is relevant: "But in what way do associations perform these socialisation roles? How do the attitudes, skills and performance of its members contribute to the good democratic functioning of society?" (Ferreira, 2008: 109). This discussion is also accompanied by more critical aspects on the constraint that emerge from the association structure itself, but also from the understanding of democracy (Viegas, 2004; Fung, 2003).

Association has been recognised as having the power to act in favour of democracy through the activation of multiple dynamics. Archon Fung (2003) lists: the self-value of association; promotion of civic virtues and education for political skills; resilience to power, quality and equity in representation, promotion of public deliberation, creation of opportunities for participation in governance for ordinary people.

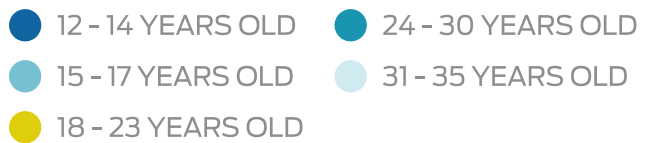
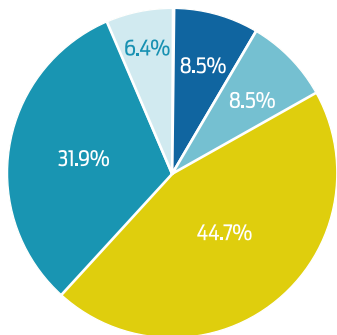
In this context, a better understanding of the perspectives of young leaders — young people as association leaders — is vital, as it allows for the recognition of the potential that this role can play in social change. Youth leadership experience has been seen as a positive development factor through the development of skills that include management, problem solving, and decision making.

WHO ARE WE

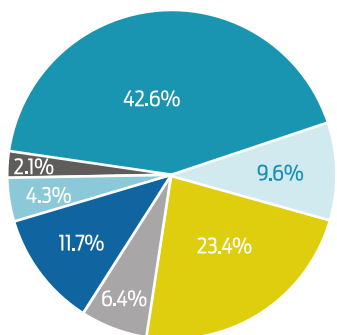
LEADERS



MEMBERS



SIZE

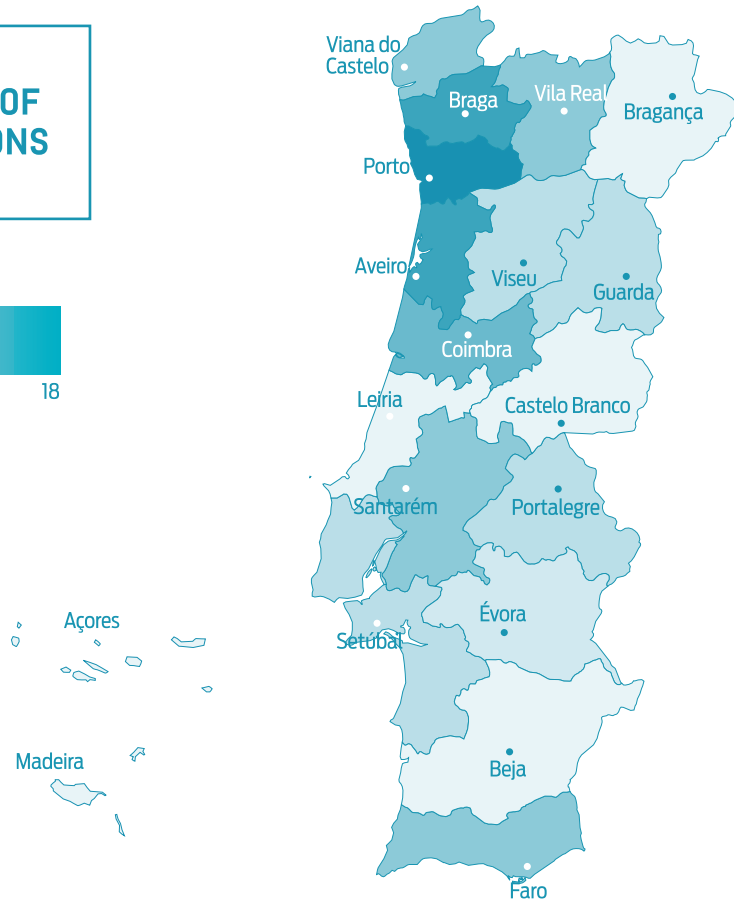


NUMBER OF MEMBERS

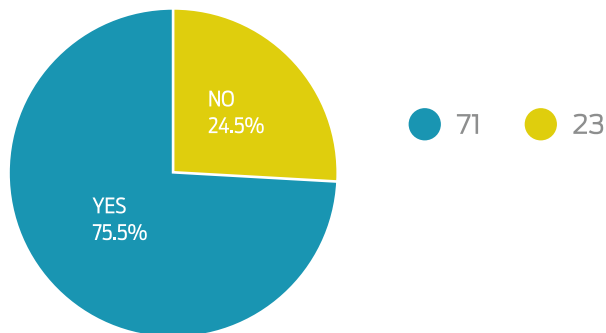


WHERE ARE WE

GEOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF YOUTH ASSOCIATIONS BY DISTRICT

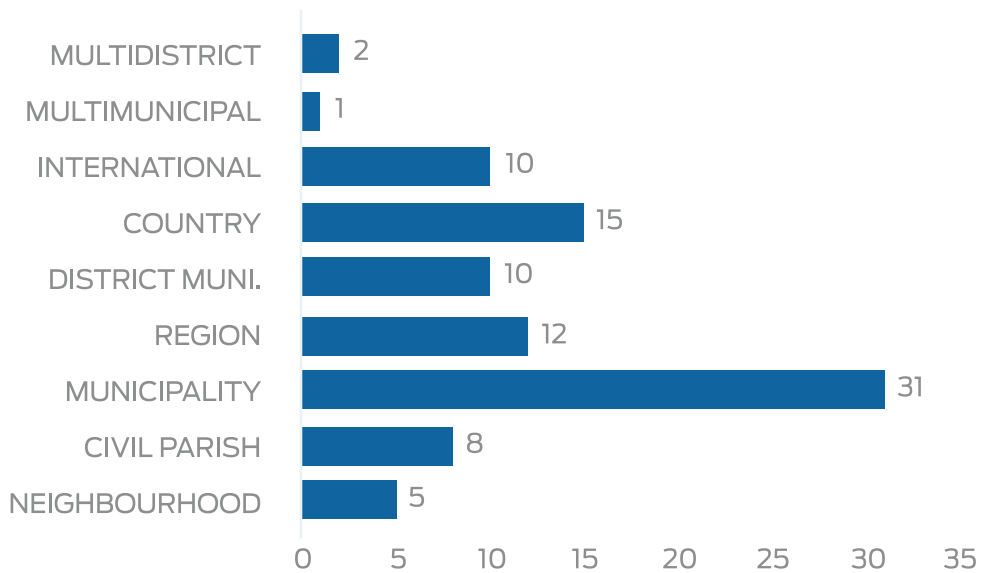


EXISTENCE OF A PHYSICAL SPACE/HEADQUARTERS OF THE ASSOCIATION



WHERE WE DO IT

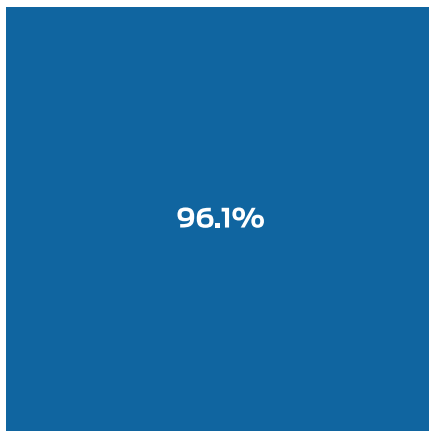
TERRITORIAL SCOPE OF ACTION OF YOUTH ASSOCIATIONS



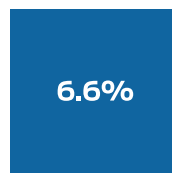
MEANS OF DISSEMINATION OF THE ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN BY YOUTH ASSOCIATIONS

MEANS OF DISSEMINATION

Digital



Traditional



Direct contact

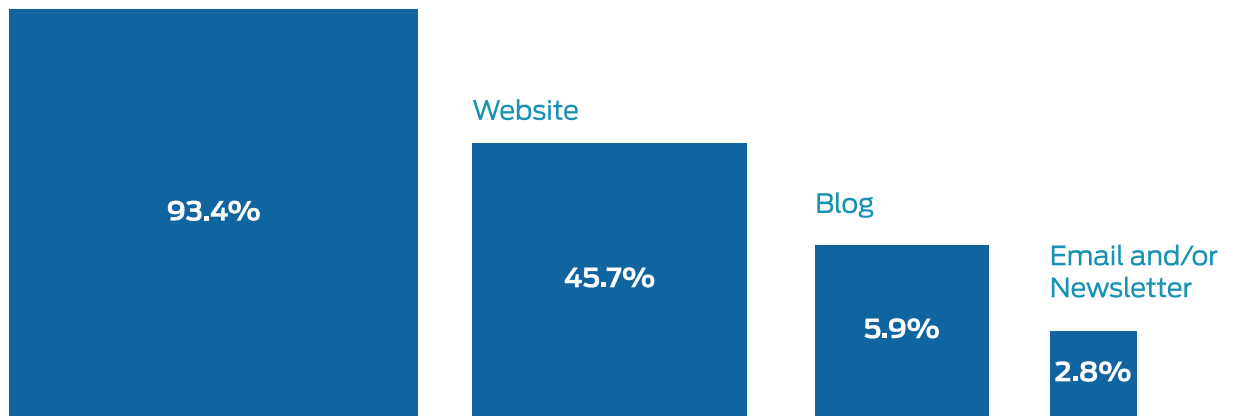


Internal



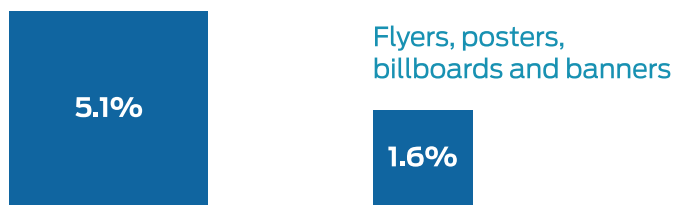
MEANS OF DIGITAL DISSEMINATION

Social Media



MEANS OF TRADITIONAL DISSEMINATION

Media (TV, radio, newspapers)



MEANS OF DIRECT DISSEMINATION

Young people, volunteers, family and/or school



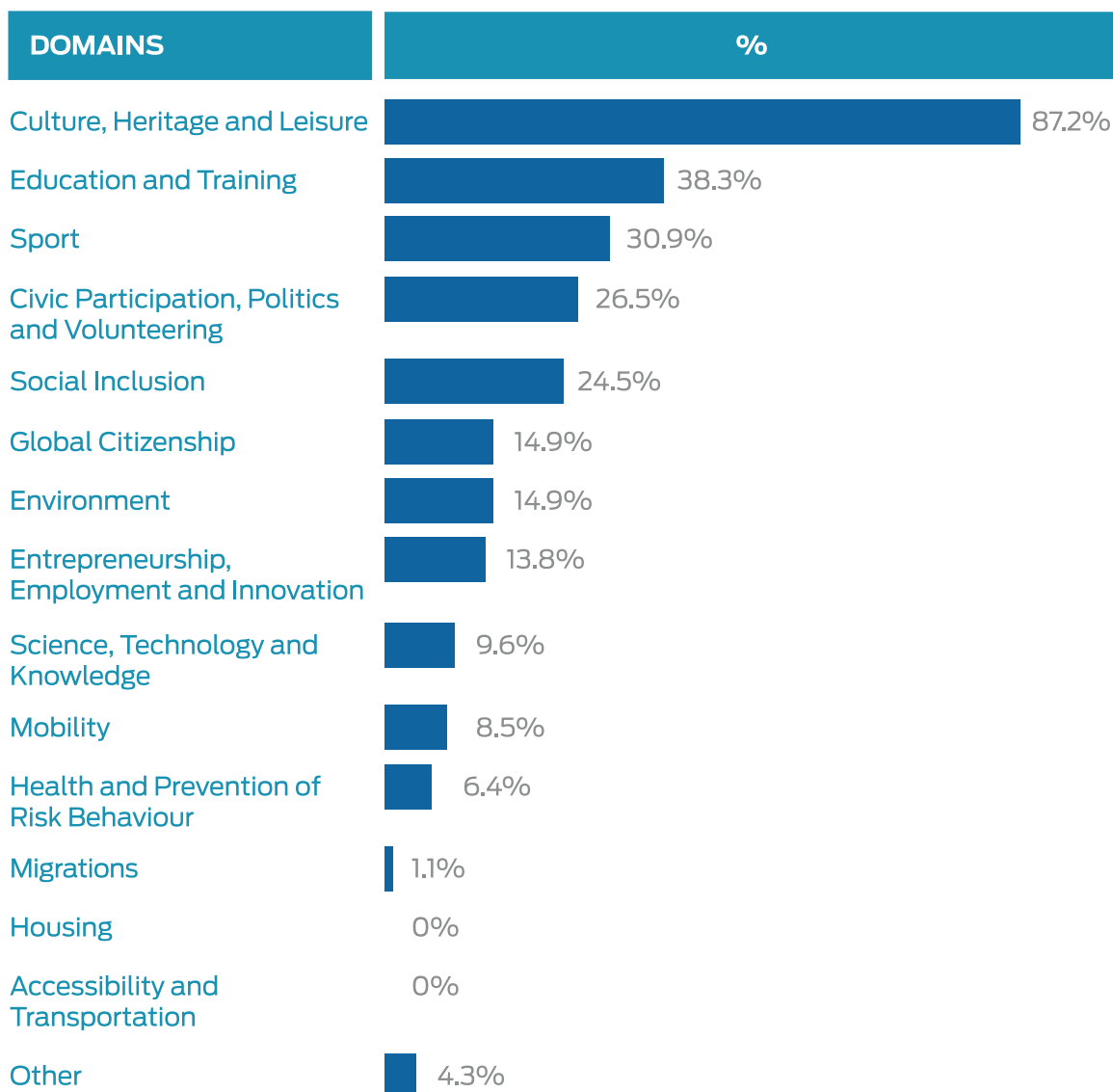
WHAT WE DO

CATEGORISATION INTO DOMAINS AND SUBDOMAINS OF ACTION

Having as a reference the current guidelines from regional, national and European policies for Youth and based on an extensive literature review on youth association and leadership, 27 domains of action or strategic areas (categories) were defined for associations which act specifically on the youth domain. Leaders were asked to indicate the domains (up to a maximum of three) that best represented the association, among the 27 domains presented and, after this analysis and interpretation of the data, it was possible to regroup the initial 27 domains into 15 main domains.

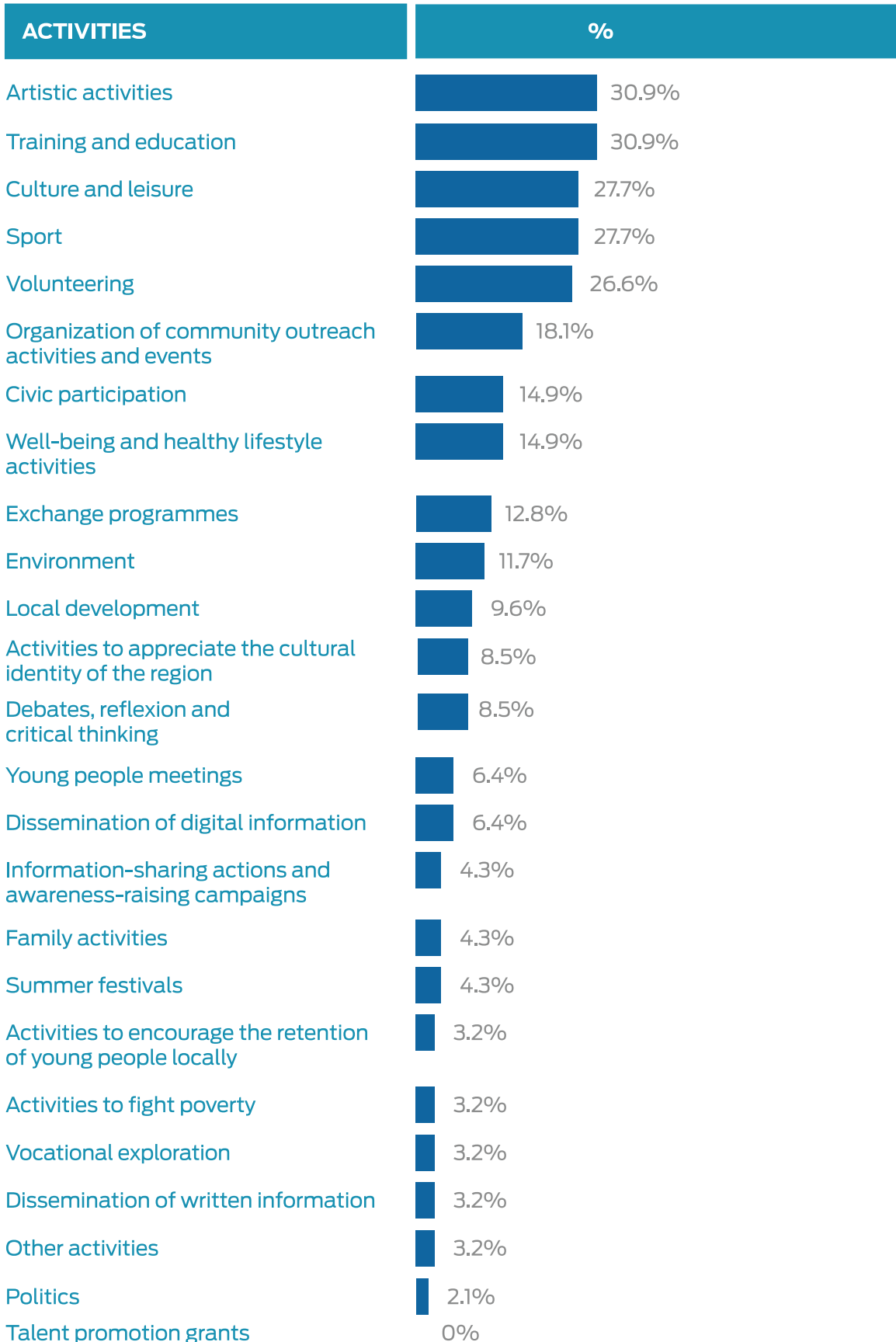
DOMAINS	SUBDOMAINS
Education and Training	Vocational and Personal Development; Education, Training and Promotion of Reading; Promotion of School Success
Culture, heritage and leisure	Art, Creativity and Culture; Heritage and Cultural Heritage; Leisure, Leisure Time, Entertainment
Sport	Sport; Sports Discipline
Civic participation, politics and volunteering	Civic Participation; Politics; Volunteering
Global Citizenship	Citizenship; Human Rights
Social inclusion and social solidarity	Co-operation; Social Solidarity; Social Inclusion
Entrepreneurship, Employment and Innovation	Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Employment; Technologies, Digital Skills and Infrastructure
Environment	Environment, Sustainability and Climate; Animal Rights and Protection
Housing	Housing
Accessibility and Transportation	Accessibility and Transportation
Health and Prevention of Risk Behaviour	Health and Prevention of Risk Behaviour
Youth mobility and exchanges	Youth Mobility and Exchanges (e.g., Erasmus Programme)
Migrations	Migrations
Science and Technology and knowledge	Science; Technology; Knowledge
Other	Communication, Information; Intergenerationality

YOUTH ASSOCIATION'S DOMAINS OF ACTION (GROUPED)



MAIN ACTIVITIES OF THE ASSOCIATION

Based on a literature review, 24 possible activities have been identified within the scope of action of youth associations.



IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD FOR YOUTH ASSOCIATIONS' ACTIONS

IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD	%
Annually and/or over time and/or continuously	44.9%
School year/school term	13.3%
Holidays and/or summer	15.2%
Monthly and/or in a specific month	12.5%
Occasionally/no defined period	1.2%
Event/contextual	1.6%
Periodical	2.9%
Biannually	2.0%
Quarterly	2.0%

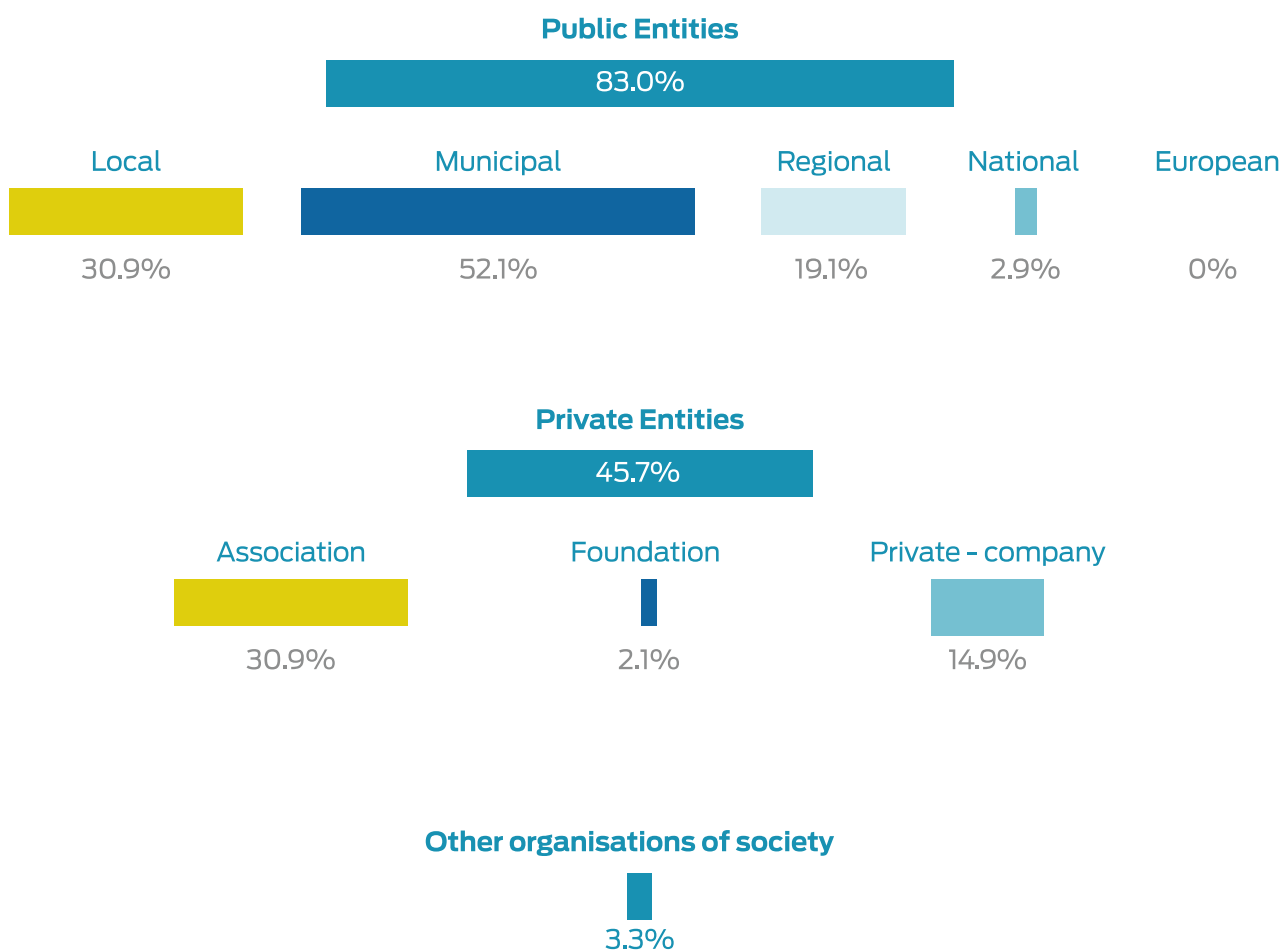
As seen in the table above, a large part of the associations develop their most representative actions **annually and/or throughout the year and/or continuously** (44.9%). This means that most of the actions implemented by youth associations are not limited to a specific period of the year and that these actions that are not limited by time variables/specificities, e.g. specific to a certain season or dependent on the school period of young people. Thus, they are wideranging, not circumstantial actions.

WHAT WE DO

Knowing an association also implies knowing its partner entities. Generally, the categorisation of partner entities is divided into two major groups: public entities and private entities.

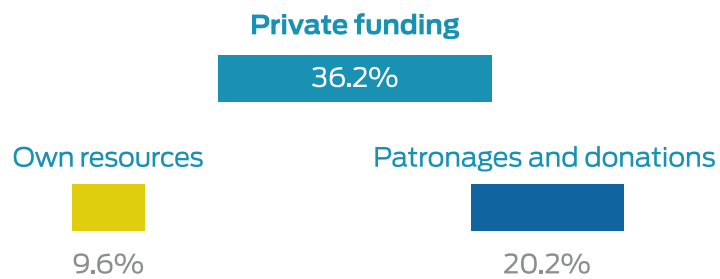
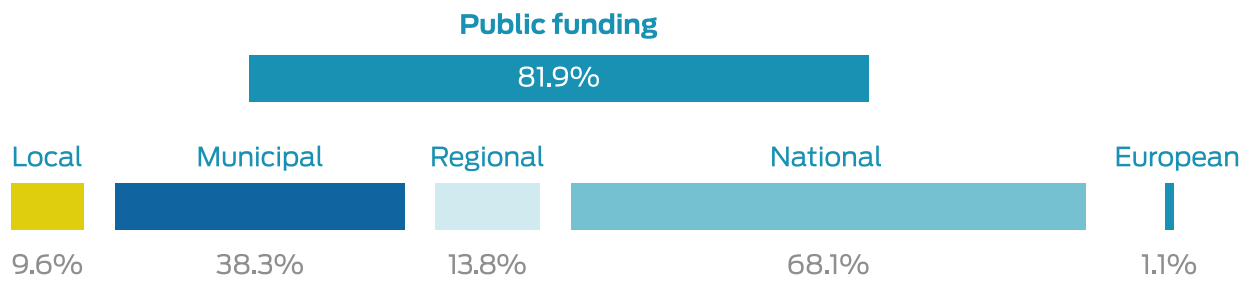
By public entities we mean entities of public law and public utility with local, municipal, regional, national and/or European scope. By private entities we mean legal persons under private law, such as associations, foundations and companies.¹ In addition to public and private entities, a third main category of "other formal or informal organisations of society" was created, such as parishes, churches and civil society groups.

PARTNER ORGANISATIONS OF THE ASSOCIATION



¹ In the case of the Erasmus+ Programme, although it is a programme with European funding, the management of the programme is also national in terms of scope. Therefore, it has been regarded as a national public partner entity.

FUNDING ENTITIES OF THE ASSOCIATION



WHAT IS THE IMPACT

AVERAGE TIME DEDICATED BY THE YOUNG LEADER TO THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ASSOCIATION



SKILL DEVELOPMENT

It is known that the engagement of young people in leading projects or activities creates opportunities for development, namely in terms of socio-emotional, collaboration, management and communication skills. The perceptions of leaders regarding the skills they develop during their work with the association are organised into three dimensions:

Organisational skills

49

Communication and related skills

59

Leadership skills

52

IMPACT ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

With regard to the impact of Youth Associations on their communities, the answers of leaders to the open question fell into the following emerging categories:

Impact on community development

59

Impact on promoting participation / social and civic engagement

23

Impact on the Recognition of the association's work

12

Impact on education/ training and transition into the workforce

10

SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND WELL-BEING IMPACT

It is understood that the impact of youth associations is most evident at the level of community development and the diversity of its populations. It is through this lens that one can understand a role at the level of inclusion, promotion of equal opportunities, understanding that they can promote the integration of differences. This field of action can have a more localised expression —

"greater integration of different communities within the neighbourhood"

-, or more extensive

"The transformation of people and realities".

The associations identify social and economic support as areas where their action and impact is focused, an impact that is amplified when they understand that due to their strategic position they can encourage the development of their own proximity contexts. Thus, they understand that their role is to

"provide social answers to the surrounding community"

They are at the centre of the actions and attitudes to be promoted, namely when considering economic development aspects:

"That the Festival we organise every year brings a larger public to the Municipality and fosters local commerce, as well as all the actions that we undertake several times a year bring joy to everyone in the community."

Thus, the framework of association actions or activities falls within a broader perspective that goes beyond the association's immediate scope.

The perception of the impact they believe they have on the community also extends to aspects related to changes at the community level, whether it be the transformation of small habits and mentalities, the promotion of a more caring community, or the

"creation of more awareness in the community", with

"better and greater engagement"

and collaborative.

The role they perceive an association can be anticipatory, recognising the relevance of the investment made in the present:

"By instilling in young people values that we consider essential for their development as human beings we will be creating a better community, a community with more awareness, more attentive and intervening in the face of today's problems".

In line with this, we find positions which consider that a youth association can have an impact insofar as it prepares future ground, creates conditions, contributes to the development of people and boosts networks:

**"That inspires more projects to be created."
"That is a partnership";
"Promotes creative and innovative activities for the community".**

In this dimension we will also find reference to both the recognition of the impact of youth associations regarding the promotion of healthy living and sports habits, and the promotion of conscious habits in terms of cultural consumption. At this level, there is a significant emphasis on educating audiences about various forms of culture and valuing heritage.

IMPACT ON PROMOTING PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

One of the most emphasised dimensions regarding the perception of the impact of youth associations related to the promotion of greater engagement and participation, mainly at a civic level. They recognise its impact in terms of greater social awareness and awareness in the community of the role it can play, namely when it comes to the integration of people in situations of greater vulnerability.

They believe that they have the role of encouraging engagement in actions in everyday domains, through volunteering actions, or of creating spaces for greater structured political participation, educating for the exercise of citizenship. In addition to viewing their role as

"encouraging the participation of young people" , their vision

encompasses the notion that youth participation and engagement can have a collective, personal, and social development impact, often recognizing and appreciating the role of young people in local actions —

"that young people don't stay at home glued to a computer screen, but rather "roll up their sleeves" and fight for a better and more active village".

The young association leaders who answered this question therefore recognised the importance of their role in the community, viewing it as fundamental for the development of a critical thinking and the effective participation of young people in the community.

IMPACT ON EDUCATION / TRAINING AND TRANSITION INTO THE WORKFORCE

A few answers also point to aspects related to the concerns of young people as students, namely related to academic success, but also to the transition into the workforce.

Therefore, associations believe that they play a significant role in promoting literacy in areas such as health and soft skills, as well as improving the prospects of young people for their future and facilitating their integration into the labour market. They believe that they can contribute to the development of skills needed for the world of work —

“I hope it ensures students complete their degree with skills beyond the degree itself (soft skills)”.

IMPACT ON THE RECOGNITION OF THE ASSOCIATION'S WORK

A final dimension accounts for leaders' expectations regarding the impact they expect to arise within the association itself. In this sense, there are numerous answers indicating that associations seek to be recognised for their performance/ action regarding engagement and development in the community and the people that comprise them, particularly young people.

Recognition can be seen as an indicator of the impact they have on communities and is therefore valued.

WHAT ARE THE MOTIVATIONS

Youth association leadership has the power to initiate changes at both individual and collective levels. It is particularly relevant in motivating youth engagement, fostering their commitment, and raising their awareness of the significant role they can play in driving social transformation across various contexts.

Therefore, our aim is to examine the range of motivations that led the participants in this study to become leaders. The answers obtained led us to organise motivation into 3 different dimensions with the following frequency:

Intrinsic motivations to associations

32

Motivations for community purposes

52

Individual motivations

30

The different dimensions, or typologies of motivation, can be found in the same individuals and are not mutually exclusive.

INTRINSIC MOTIVATIONS TO ASSOCIATIONS

A sense of belonging and of giving back to the association, appreciating the entity that welcomed and trained them. It is not surprising that there are answers with a touch of affection, gratitude and ambition.

MOTIVATIONS FOR COMMUNITY PURPOSES

In this context, expressions of change and creation are evident as individuals perceive their work as contributing to a larger cause and driving social transformation —

“Contribute to a better world”

— as well as feeling useful and part of the process —

“Be useful to the community”.

Within this dimension, there are more concrete answers that reflect a drive for enhanced development in local contexts and an aspiration to improve the quality of life in their communities.

INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATIONS

It is usually focused on learning skills, -

"Develop professional and personal skills, enjoy leading people and contributing to their development."

- the opportunity for interaction, -

"An approach focused on interaction and friendship"

- and development of interpersonal skills -

"Development of skills that the academic degree does not provide me with".

These motivations also indicate an understanding of the benefits that engagement in association leadership can offer, including the exposure to experiential learning within diverse educational contexts, such as taking part in association.

FINAL REMARKS

The associations represented in this nationwide study mostly operate at the municipality level. A significant proportion has more than 150 members (42.6%) and almost half of the leaders who responded to the questionnaire devote more than 10 hours a month to the association's activities.

The domains of action of the associations are very diversified and reflect the specific nature of the associations, their mission and specific objectives, but also show strong incidences of action, for example in the area of culture, leisure and heritage, but also in the area of education and training, sport or civic participation and social action. These domains of action represent the areas where youth associations, generally, demonstrate strength, stability, and continuity. They can serve as service providers for both young people and the broader community, highlighting the social role they can play. These domains of action are put into practice through a variety of activities and actions, which can be either one-time events or part of a systematic approach. However, the majority of associations carry out their actions on an annual basis.

Other areas of action, albeit to a lesser extent, can indicate emerging interests among young people or arise from the recognition of new social challenges. Aspects such as mobility, migrations, global citizenship and environment are so me examples in this regard and may suggest avenues of interest and investment of young people.

In addition to the leaders' strong anticipation of the associations' impact on community development, they also aspire to contribute to promoting social engagement, civic and political participation, as well as facilitating more positive education and training avenues.

Partnership-based networking has been recognized as a factor that enhances the strength of organisations, their capacity for action, and their overall impact.

The motivations expressed by leaders for their engagement in association leadership activities span from individual-oriented motivations to community-oriented motivations, as well as motivations linked to the association itself. The intentions to advocate for community development and transformation justify motivations associated with this dimension, reflecting the desired outputs of making a significant impact on the community through the actions of the association they lead.

The outputs related to the skills that leaders aim to develop — such as organizational skills, relationship building, effective communication, and leadership — can be seen as distinct aspects of a comprehensive concept of leadership, one that involves effective management, attentive listening, and action-oriented behaviour. The manner in which the answers were provided allowed for the observation that, in general, leaders possess an integrated view of leadership. They recognize the interconnectedness of various aspects within it and perceive leadership as a holistic concept. Considering the wide range of skills that can be developed or strengthened through engaging young people in leadership opportunities, it may be valuable to explore the construction of ecological models of skill development.

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FNAJ - National Federation of Youth Associations

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