

*A presentation for the  
IFIP WG98.3 Task Force on Case studies of decisions making and decision support*

## **Participatory multimedia supporting young people's decision making on the problem of "nothing to do" in their communities**

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### **Synopsis**

This case study describes the use of participatory multimedia as a component of the evaluation of the Positive Futures Programme managed by the UK Home Office Drugs Strategy Directorate - Prevention Team. This component focused on the views of young people participating in six<sup>1</sup> Positive Futures groups and how they identified obstacles and explored pathways to the creation of value at the community level in contexts where the Positive Futures is involved in local interventions.

The young people expressed and communicated their views in a rich and comprehensive way through *participatory multimedia*: making and communicating documentaries about their communities. They decided themselves on the format and content of their documentaries, and on how and where they would shoot and edit them.

The use, by the young people themselves, of audio-visual technologies enabled the capacity and creation of new forms of expression, giving them myriad possibilities for *ways of telling, ways of sharing and ways of viewing* their reality. The documentaries they made reflected this reality and their life experiences more accurately than the restricted information that could be obtained from using more traditional pre-structured instruments like attitudinal questionnaires or procedures in unfamiliar settings, like focus groups.

**Overcoming "nothing to do"**: The young people, in their documentaries, gave many insights on the existing conditions of their communities. They also suggested constructive pathways to improve local conditions and alleviate community stressors these were generally founded on the need for "*more activities to do*". Typical suggestions were: 1) more sporting activities and facilities; 2) more community centres, and 3) the creation of interesting projects for young people (e.g. DJ-ing, youth clubs).

Providing and encouraging "more activities to do" was shown to be a key community building block, resonating with the Positive Futures agenda. The young people frequently claimed that their Positive Futures activities provided an alternative to just "hanging around in the streets". Positive Futures did indeed keep them out of trouble by "*bringing young people together within a supportive environment where participants are encouraged to make decisions for themselves*".

**Raising Aspirations and enabling change**: The young people groups explored future employment possibilities (e.g. opening a bike shop, a sound studio, etc.) and explicitly recognized the importance of education as a way to increase life chances and "stay clear" of community stressors. Positive Futures activities, particularly making the multimedia documentaries themselves, motivated young people to discover and explore ways to improve their environment and make their communities more vibrant and exciting through sporting activities and facilities, youth clubs, etc. These are clear signs that Positive Futures is enabling change in young people.

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<sup>1</sup> The six groups were selected by the Positive Futures Evaluation & Monitoring Team according to the diversity of conditions where the groups operated.

**Participatory evaluation through multimedia production and communication:** Testimonies and views, collected on video from the young people and their local Positive Futures coordinators, provided feedback about the research pilot design and use of participatory multimedia. This feedback was very positive. Participatory evaluation through multimedia production and communication was described as enjoyable, educational and beneficial, not only among the key frontline workers, but also and importantly, among the young people themselves. They stressed that

- Participating in multimedia production and communication was enjoyable and offered them “something creative to do”.
- In watching and presenting their videos they had the opportunity to learn a great deal about their own community and about other communities that shared similar challenges and difficulties.

## **Implications**

The use of research methodology founded in participatory multimedia was found to offer a very effective and practical tool to explore the views of young people. The nature of inquiry became more personal, connected to real life and immediate to the young people who participated. Making and communicating documentaries in multimedia empowered young people to talk honestly and freely about their lives and about the stressors and building blocks in their communities. They were *empowered* through discovering and communicating *new pathways to value*, both in their own lives and for their communities.

This kind of evaluation research was perceived by the young people as *an innovative activity embedded within the Positive Futures programme*, not as an external monitoring and evaluation process in which they took part. The young people expressed real satisfaction that they had a sense of ownership and accomplishment over their documentaries

These implications will be particularly relevant when evaluating and monitoring Positive Futures in the future. Any properly grounded evaluation process must operate in a way that is sensitive to the diversity of local conditions and innovative possibilities open to the young people who are the key stakeholders in Positive Futures. Much can be achieved through implementing, within Positive Futures, an evaluation process which appreciates the tremendous advantages to be gained when the key stakeholders – the young people themselves - can develop and communicate these possibilities through participatory multimedia.