THE CONCEPT OF A MODERN YOUTH CENTER
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF YOUTH

MARCH-APRIL, 2021

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes the findings from the quantitative and qualitative research on the vision of modern youth centers in Ukraine completed in March–April 2021 by the IREX UNITY team. The purpose of this research is to understand youth (10–35 years old) expectations and needs of modern youth centers. The research takes a deep dive into specific components of modern youth centers, including the desired design of the physical space, youth center staff profiles, location, naming, and the skills and knowledge taught there, as desired by youth. The research also focuses on understanding key motivational factors for youth to attend youth centers and outlines major barriers.

With the new Law on Youth in force[1], the findings of this research will be used to channel key stakeholders' efforts in modernizing the network of youth centers in Ukraine in line with needs and expectations of youth themselves. It will also spearhead the UNITY program efforts in designing 12 youth centers for the six target oblasts where the program currently operates.

METHODOLOGY

The research incorporates qualitative (focus group discussions) and quantitative (online survey) methodologies. The methodology was developed in close coordination with the UNITY Youth Center Lead to reflect the ongoing needs of the program. The field work was conducted in a sequential manner, with focus groups being completed in March, and the survey field work taking place in March and April 2021. Research findings were discussed in UNITY's school for youth center leaders and compared to local research done by youth center initiative groups when they applied to take part in UNITY. A detailed description of the research is provided below.

Focus group discussions (March 10–12, 2021)

UNITY organized three online focus group discussions in which UNITY Youth Advisory Council (YAC) members expressed their vision of how youth centers should serve their communities. Twenty-seven young people participated in the focus groups, of whom 17 were women/girls and ten were men/boys. The focus group participants represented different regions of Ukraine and were organized in three age cohorts: 10–14 years old (six participants), 15–19 years old (13 participants), 20–35 years old (eight participants).

Online survey (March 29–April 12, 2021)

The different visions expressed in the focus groups formed the basis of a nationwide online survey to further inform the youth center strategy and include voices of underrepresented groups. The survey questionnaire was posted online and shared among partner organizations that work with the LGBTQ+ community, Roma women's community, and people with disabilities.
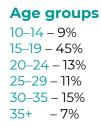

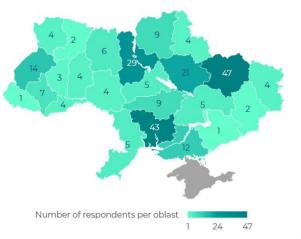[1] https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1414-20#Text

The total number of respondents across the country was 245:

- 80% live in urban areas
- 20% live in rural areas

Gender[2]

65% women and girls

35% men and boys

Age groups

10–14 – 9%
15–19 – 45%
20–24 – 13%
25–29 – 11%
30–35 – 15%
35+   – 7%

Number of respondents per oblast

1   24   47

Thirty-five percent of the respondents said they experienced obstacles to opportunities to participate in societal life or to achieving their goals. Among those respondents, the cited obstacles were:

36% age
31% their place of residence (city or village)
21% disability
13% health
10% sexual orientation
7% political views
3% gender identity
1% religious beliefs
1% ethnic origin
*in % of those who stated having fewer opportunities (N=67)

The answers of 15% of the total number of respondents (35 answers) were analyzed in more depth to highlight the specific needs of vulnerable and underrepresented groups. This group includes answers received from partner organizations serving vulnerable groups and the answers of those who reported fewer opportunities because of a disability, health, sexual orientation, gender identity, political views, religious beliefs, and ethnic origin. Within this group, 60% identified as women and 40% as men. All the age groups mentioned above are represented in this subgroup.

Although not solicited, some survey respondents were over 35 years old (18 answers). Their responses were reviewed and analyzed separately for comparative purposes only. Their data is not presented in the findings on youth below.

Research limitations

Due to the nature of the online survey with self-selection sample, quantitative results of this report cannot be extrapolated to the opinion of all Ukrainian youth. The sample does represent opinions of youth from all regions of Ukraine, and it is slightly skewed towards Kharkiv, Kherson, Kyiv, and Poltava oblasts. The demographic distribution is also uneven; more girls took the survey than boys, and 15–19 year olds were the most represented group.

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[2] Survey participants were also given the option of "other", although no-one selected this option, whilst 1% did not answer. The percentages presented are of those who answered the question.

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

Awareness of youth centers

- In general, focus group participants see youth spaces and youth centers as places to relax and unwind from the formal atmosphere of schools, socialize with like-minded people, take up a hobby, or discover something new and interesting.
- When given a choice between the phrases "youth center" and "youth space", the vast majority of respondents agreed that "space" sounds freer and more substantial, while "center" is associated with red tape and excessive formality.
- Participants' level of familiarity with youth centers varied: some claimed they did not have a youth center within their community, or it was difficult to access; some said that they had visited youth facilities but did so irregularly; and some actively participated in the functioning of their local youth center.
- As for impressions of visiting youth centers, one of the first things to be mentioned was the atmosphere; one respondent described it as "comfortable", i.e., devoid of strictness and formality.

The vision of the desired youth center

- When choosing the most important elements of a youth center, the atmosphere of "peace, respect, friendliness, and safety" was considered to be essential. Respondents also frequently mentioned the need for friendly staff who would treat visitors with respect, the availability of professional trainers in different fields, and interesting programming. The accessibility of the center was also high on the list of priorities mentioned by the participants.
- Curiously, the availability of food and beverages was deemed significantly more important by male participants than female ones.

Portrait of an ideal youth center employee

- Focus group participants mentioned motivation and a sincere desire to work with young people, sociability, tolerance, and inclusivity, as well as being generally "on the same wavelength" with youth as the most relevant characteristics for a youth center employee.
- In addition, various technical skills were often brought up, such as computer literacy, design skills (for creating posters, for example), and experience using different online tools, including social networks, to support and promote the activities of the center.
- Managerial skills also featured in many responses, including the ability to organize events and coordinate the work of multiple people. While some participants argued that the age or level of experience was not a crucial factor for a youth center employee, several respondents, especially in the youngest cohort, considered it desirable for youth center staff to be young themselves.

Participation in youth center operation

- Participants expressed a readiness to engage in most aspects of the youth center, from the development of the concept to its implementation, in particular, choosing the formats and content of events and assisting during events. Many respondents supported the idea of sharing their views on the functioning of youth spaces through voting or through online forms.
- According to participants, Telegram, Instagram, and TikTok are the communication platforms that would be best suited for interaction between youth center visitors and their administrators, as well as getting visitor feedback and promoting events.

Terms of visiting a youth center

- In concert with their previous answers, many participants singled out the "atmosphere" as a key factor in making their decision about whether to visit the center or return to it. The importance of feedback from other people, particularly friends and acquaintances, was also repeatedly mentioned. Also significant for the respondents was the freedom to speak about any topic and the inclusivity (accessibility).
- Predictably, the center's schedule and its location were also identified as important factors for attendance. Preferred hours of operation varied depending on the life circumstances of different respondents, such as the need to attend extracurricular activities or studying in the late afternoon.
- Opinions were divided on whether youth centers should be set up on the premises of schools or universities. Many respondents were against it, believing this posed the risk of centers taking on the negative features of the school routine. Those who supported the idea argued that deliberate efforts should be made to preserve the independence of the center from educational formalism and bureaucracy.

Principles of a youth center

- According to participants, youth centers should strive to be as inclusive as possible, actively declaring tolerance and openness to different ideas in order to attract the widest possible audience with a variety of backgrounds and beliefs.
- At the same time, the center should have policies to ensure that every visitor can feel comfortable and not expect to encounter hostility or neglect from other guests or employees.
- Respondents said that in terms of the primary audience, youth centers should focus on attracting younger people, such as schoolchildren because attending such places will help them to understand what they want to do in life. Representatives of public organizations and activists should also be primary engagement targets, as well as people who want to explore their interests and would benefit from meeting new, like-minded people.

SURVEY FINDINGS

Experience of visiting youth centers

Among those aged 10–35 years old who were surveyed, 60% have never visited a youth center and 36% said that they have visited a youth center in their community. Some mentioned that they had been involved in creating such centers on a voluntary basis. Among other answers, several respondents emphasized that there had been places for youth in their community (a skatepark, youth center) but now they are closed or damaged. Fifty percent of those who did not know if there was such a place in their community were young people from Mykolaiv Oblast and 11% from Kherson Oblast.

Are you aware of the existence of a youth center in your community?

Category	%
I do not know if we have such facility	25%
Yes, I am currently attending a youth center	24%
No, we definitely do not have such facility	18%
Yes, I know of such facility, but have never been to it	17%
Yes, I used to go to a youth center	12%
Other	4%

*in % of the respondents aged 10–35 years old (n=227)

The highest number of respondents who were sure that they did not have such a space or center for youth were from Kirovohrad, Lviv, Chernihiv, Kherson, and Poltava oblasts. Among those who were sure that they did not have a youth center in their community, 53% lived in urban areas, and 47% in rural areas. But this indicates not only the absence of youth spaces in communities but also low awareness of youth centers. For example, two respondents from Zhmerynka city (Vinnytsia oblast) said they do not have such a place in their community, whilst two other respondents from the same city said they are current visitors of youth spaces in their community.[3]

Within the subgroup of vulnerable and underrepresented youth, the share of those who were aware of a youth center but have never visited it was twice as big as in the overall sample (34% compared to 17%).

The main reason not to attend a youth center for half of underrepresented groups was the lack of information about such places. Other reasons included inconvenient location (17%) and the lack of amenities for people with disabilities (8%). One of the respondents said that he did not need a youth space because he had "one of his own" and another one mentioned that youth with disabilities do not have any chance "to live a full life" in their community even if they had such a place.

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[3] As of August 2021, the Ukrainian government does not have accurate statistics on the total number of youth centers. Therefore, there is way to corroborate whether respondents simply did not know if there was a youth center in their region or if one did not exist. The International Organization for Migration are gathering data on the number of youth centers, which will be available in October.

Frequency of visiting a youth center

75% weekly

15% once every two or three weeks

5% once a month

5% less than once a month

*In % of those who currently attend a youth center in their community (n=55)

Seventy-five percent of those who said they currently attended a youth center in their community usually did it weekly.

Among those who visit it weekly:

62% – visit it more than twice a week
26% – once a week
13% – twice a week

Reasons not to attend a youth center

For those who have attended a youth center previously, the main reasons not to attend them now were:	For those who have never been to one but were aware of such a place in their community, the main reasons not to attend them were:

1. Lack of relevant events and services. Twenty-two percent of those surveyed mentioned that they did not attend a youth center because of a lack of relevant events. Some mentioned that they could find them in other places for active youth (such as the Ukrainian Leadership Academy).

2. Inconvenient schedule was the main reason not to visit a youth center for 19% of respondents who had previously visited a youth center.

3. COVID-19 restrictions were the main reason not to visit a youth center for 19% of the who had previously visited a youth center.

4. Uncomfortable relationships were the main reason not to attend such a place for 14% of former visitors, half of whom mentioned that these relationships were towards the staff, and another half said that they were towards other visitors.

5. Inconvenient location was the main reason not to attend for 11% for those who used to visit a youth center but do not anymore.

1. Lack of information about such places. Forty-four percent of the surveyed youth cited the lack of information as the main reason to not have attended a youth center.

The things people were not sufficiently informed about included available services, schedule of events, how to participate, and the information about accessibility.

2. Inconvenient schedule was cited by 15% of those who have never visited a center, half of whom mentioned that the events were held at inconvenient times. The other half said that in general, the work schedule was inconvenient for them.

3. Inconvenient location of a youth center was the main reason not to visit for 13% of the surveyed youth.

4. Lack of acquaintances in youth centers: 8% of surveyed youth said that their friends do not go there, and they do not want to go there by themselves.

Among other reasons were the following:

- 7% said that the reason is that none of their friends visit with them.

- 7% believed that such a place was only for younger age groups:

  💬 *It is no longer relevant for me, it is designed for schoolchildren, and I am already a university student.*

  💬 *I have already grown out of volunteering and other social projects.*

- 4% decided not to visit it because they did not agree with its goals, values, and reputation due to its proximity to political groups.

Among other reasons were the following:

- 5% did not know because they have never been interested in searching for information about it.

- 5% cited the lack of relevant events and services.

- 5% said that there were other more interesting places for them (for example – America House)

- 3% did not visit because they did not agree with its goals, values, and reputation due to its proximity to certain political groups.

- 3% did not visit it because it did not have sufficient amenities for people with disabilities (e.g., there were no ramps, mobile furniture, etc.).
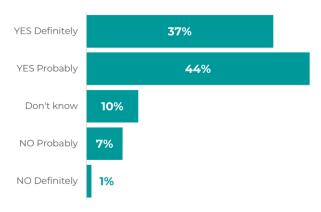
Willingness to attend a youth center

If they had a chance, 81% of those whose community did not have such a place for youth or did not know if there was such a place would like to visit one.

For the 18% who did not want to visit a youth center or were not sure if they wanted to visit, the main reason not to attend was either a lack of free time or not seeing the value of visiting:

💬 *Why should I do it?*
💬 *I do not need it.*
💬 *I see no reason to go there.*

Would you like to attend such a facility?

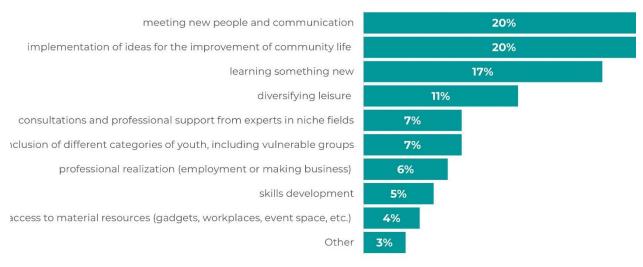|	
YES Definitely	37%
YES Probably	44%
Don't know	10%
NO Probably	7%
NO Definitely	1%

*In % of those who do not have such a place for youth or do not know if they have such a place in their community (n=97)

Among the 18% of those who were not sure if they wanted to visit such a place (answered "do not know", "no probably" and "no definitely") 85% were aged 15–19 years old and 90% lived in urban areas. Youth from Mykolaiv Oblast (55% of those who were not sure) and Poltava Oblast (20%) demonstrated the lowest willingness. Additionally, 70% of those who were not sure of their willingness to attend places for youth identified themselves as women or girls.

To define the value of such a place for youth, the respondents were asked to name what would be the main benefit of a youth center. The options presented in the survey were based on the results of focus group discussions.

What do you consider the main value of such a place?

Category	Percentage
meeting new people and communication	20%
implementation of ideas for the improvement of community life	20%
learning something new	17%
diversifying leisure	11%
consultations and professional support from experts in niche fields	7%
inclusion of different categories of youth, including vulnerable groups	7%
professional realization (employment or making business)	6%
skills development	5%
access to material resources (gadgets, workplaces, event space, etc.)	4%
Other	3%

*in % of the respondents aged 10–35 years old (n=227)

Among the "other" answers offered by the respondents were general opportunities to broaden their horizons by learning something new in different areas and things not taught in school, opportunities to ask questions on important topics, or "to come and to find something interesting to do for me and my kids".

Within the subgroup of vulnerable and underrepresented youth, meeting new people and communication were also named as one of the most important benefits (mentioned by 20% of the respondents), and the second most mentioned was the opportunity to learn something new (also for 20%). Improving community life was valuable for 11% of vulnerable and underrepresented youth compared to 20% for the total group. The proportion of vulnerable/underrepresented people who stated the importance of the opportunity to include different groups of youth in community life was twice as big as for the total group (14% against 7% for the total group).
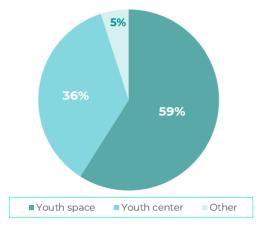
Concept of a youth center

Naming

More than half (59%) of surveyed young people prefer to call such a place a "Youth Space" ("Molodizhnyi prostir"). Focus group participants also preferred using "Space" instead of "Center" in the name because it implies the greater freedom of ideas that exists in such places.

Among other options were the names "Youth Space" in English or "Public Space" ("Hromadskyi prostir" or "Suspilnyi prostir"), "Youth Parliament" ("Molodizhnyi parliament") or "Creative inclusive center for young people with disabilities 18+ "Mriy ta Diy!!!". Several young people mentioned that they would like to use a creative and unique name, for example, "Pantry" ("Komora").

If a youth facility opened in your area, what would you prefer it to be called?

	Percentage
Youth space	59%
Youth center	36%
Other	5%

*in % of the respondents aged 10–35 years old (n=227)

Placement

To finalize the strategy of youth centers, the respondents were asked to evaluate three types of institutions as potential locations for future youth centers: libraries, schools or lyceums, and universities or other higher education institutes. The majority of surveyed youth (69%) tended to support the idea of youth centers located in libraries. The least desired idea was a school-based youth center (28% did not support this option).

Which institution is preferable as a basis for a youth space?

	Fully support	Rather support	Neutral, it doesn't matter	Rather do not support	Absolutely do not support
Library-based	34%	35%	19%	11%	3
School-based (any school or lyceum)	21%	31%	19%	19%	9
University-based (any higher education institution)	25%	35%	20%	14%	6

*in % of the respondents aged 10-35 years old (n=227)

Management model

Respondents were offered several models of youth engagement for organizing and managing the activities of a place for youth. Respondents stressed the importance of interaction between staff and visitors in managing and organizing activities.

Which role should youth attending such a facility have in organizing and managing its activity?

70% Youth work with the facility's staff to both discuss ideas and put them into practice

16% Staff put forward suggestions, and youth helps put the ideas into practice

7% Youth put forward suggestions, and staff put them into practice

3% Staff put forward suggestions and organize everything by themselves

4% Hard to say

*in % of the respondents aged 10–35 years old (n=227)

A perfect youth center is…

The respondents were asked to write down the first thing that comes to mind after the prompt: "A perfect youth center/space is…" They described their perfect place for youth in terms of the features of the physical space, opportunities for communication and networking, the feelings it evokes, support, inclusiveness, meaningful free time, self-development opportunities, creativity, and realizing creative ideas.

SUPPORT

Some young people described a perfect youth space as a place where young people can find support. It could be psychosocial support, informational support, or support for obtaining physical or material resources. Young people would like to be supported in building relationships with peers or parents, feeling emotional comfort, attaining personal growth, professional realization, and getting prepared for the future.

💬 It is a place where youth can get any kind of support.

💬 A place where youth can be supported in their aspirations and plans.

💬 It means supporting each other and getting prepared for the future.

💬 A place where somebody supports and helps you.

💬 A place where you can find not only answers about personal growth but also ways and resources for its realization.

💬 Support with consultations and maybe resources (people, premises, equipment).

💬 A place where I can be supported in improving relations with my parents and doing homework.

COMMUNICATION AND NETWORKING

Describing their perfect place for youth, respondents emphasized the importance of communication. This need was described through the following perspectives:

Making friendship and new contacts

- New people and interesting communication.
- Somewhere you can make new contacts with peers.
- A place where you can find a lot of new friends.
- A place for making new contacts.

Belonging to a like-minded community

- A place where like-minded people can interact comfortably and easily.
- A community of people interested in personal growth.
- It is a place where I can find like-minded people and discuss important topics with peers.
- It is a friendly community of like-minded people.

Collaboration and teamwork

- It is a place where fruitful cooperation arises.
- To listen and to hear each other, to make joint decisions, to act together.
- It is a place for comfortable communication that gives birth to creative collaboration.
- Where there is teamwork without rivalry.

Exchange of views

- The intersection of people with different ideas, tastes, and views.
- Lots of interesting, different people with interesting ideas!

FEELINGS

Some young people described a perfect place for youth through the feelings it evoked. In a perfect youth space, they would like to feel:

Safe

- It is a safe space.
- The place is accessible and safe.

Free

- A place where people feel liberated and comfortable, so they can generate a lot of ideas for creating something.
- When you can easily share your thoughts and ideas.
- A space open to different ideas.
- A place where everything is clear and easy.
- I do not need to ask somebody for something.
- A space where your initiatives and ideas are not limited by others.

Accepted and respected

- It is a place where you are always welcomed.
- It is a place where you can follow your soul's voice and you are not afraid of condemnation.
- There is no place for pathos and bullying.
- A place where people can hear you without judging and where my ideas and thoughts are considered.
- It is a place of mutual respect.

Valued

- Feeling that you are important.
- It is when every participant is important, and your values and beliefs are supported.
- When you feel that you are useful for your community.
- It is when you are valued.

Comfortable being themselves

- An environment that unites different people but allows you to be yourself.
- Feeling that you can be who you really are.
- A place where you are perceived as you are.

Cozy

- A place where you feel at home.
- To feel warmth ... It is a place for my soul.

In a friendly environment

- It is when people around are smiling and positive.
- Friendly atmosphere.
- There is life in the space, you can feel the constant movement and communication is buzzing.

Some described their youth space in terms of inclusiveness, emphasizing that people must have equal access to the place and its services, and services should be available to and relevant for different age groups.

Equal access and opportunities

- A place where you are treated the same as everyone else and other people listen to your opinion, regardless of age, gender, or social status.

- It is a free space with activities for education and the development of different age groups of young people, regardless of their social status.

- A place where everyone is happy, and everyone feels comfortable and safe.

- Accessible and open for everyone who wants to come.

- Equal opportunities for self-development.

- A space that is free to visit, which has everything to meet everyone's basic needs and not only the needs of certain people or groups.

- A comfortable place for people aged 18–24, 30–35 and others, so everyone has something to do there.

- A place where anyone can come and have a good time.

- There is a place for everyone in my perfect space for youth.

Integration

- A place that develops youth but also engages other groups of people, if possible.

- Integration of different people.

PHYSICAL SPACE

A perfect place was described as a physical space with equipment and personnel to make it comfortable. Youth saw it as a large spacious area with modern design and equipment that is accessible physically (easy to get to) and digitally (easy to find the information online).
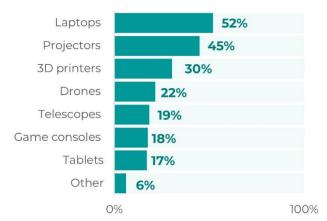
Design and equipment

- A modern room with a stylish design, modern devices, interesting games, and allows you to develop and express yourself.

- Comfortable and accessible for everyone, with lots of information about the youth space on the internet and social networks.

- Large room with stylish design and soft furniture

- Modern, open, mobile space.
- A place in harmony with nature.
- Large, spacious place for youth.
- It is cozy and convenient
- (both the equipment, and the location).

Respondents were asked about the desired technical equipment in a youth center. Seventy-nine percent pointed out that they would like to have access to some equipment, 14% said that it was not important for them to have access to technical equipment, and 7% found it hard to answer.

The desired gadgets for Youth Spaces

Gadget	Percentage
Laptops	52%
Projectors	45%
3D printers	30%
Drones	22%
Telescopes	19%
Game consoles	18%
Tablets	17%
Other	6%

*in % of those who would like to have access to technical equipment in such a facility (n=182)
**several answers were possible

Among the desired equipment the most frequently mentioned were laptops and projectors.

The opportunity to use the laptops was described both as occasional (during particular events in youth centers) and using them more regularly as part of the working area of a youth center.

Among other responses for desired equipment were:

- multi-functional printers
- camcorders
- musical equipment and microphones

Areas of the space

💬 A spacious room with free coworking area, library, and sports ground in the yard.

💬 A space with workplaces where you can communicate with others.

💬 Workspace and a place for events.

💬 This is the way we see our center:

- Locker rooms, toilets
- Educational kitchen
- Computer class
- Theater studio (puppets)
- Wall of indoor flowers
- Classrooms
- Ecological zone
- Exercise room with simulators

- Sports ground with special coating and fence
- Workshops for sewing, making candles, soap, pottery
- Assembly hall (communication space)
- Video library and interactive whiteboard and projector
- Art therapy development studio for youth with disabilities, using inclusive programs and methods.
- Training apartment to prepare youth with disabilities over 18 for independent life

Youth center staff

💬 The staff focus on the quality of events, not just the quantity of events

💬 Friendly curators who communicate with young people who come to the center.

Respondents were asked about the most important qualities of youth center staff. The proposed list of qualities presented in the survey was based on the results of the focus group discussion with the UNITY Youth Advisory Council members.

The survey results were consistent with the focus group discussions. For youth, the most important quality of a youth worker was being on the same wavelength as youth—meaning understanding their interests and needs—as well as the ability of a youth worker to find approaches for different people, different situations, and resolve conflicts.

Which three qualities do you consider most important for youth center staff?

63% Being "on the same wavelength" as youth—understanding their interests and needs

50% Knowing how to talk to different people, resolve conflicts

40% Knowing how to lead and take responsibility

37% Having strong managerial skills

23% Having a broad outlook and knowledge about opportunities for different youth groups

21% Being empathetic and friendly to other people

15% Being engaging (knowing how to make people laugh, entertain, and pique their interest)

12% Being knowledgeable and skilled in dealing with children and youth

10% Being knowledgeable and experienced in psychology

8% Staying tidy, organized, and focused

*in % of the respondents aged 10–35 years old (n=227)
** three answers were possible

MEANINGFUL FREE TIME

Some young respondents described a perfect place for youth as "a recreational platform" or "a place where youth spend their free time" or "a place where you can go after school" or "where youth have meaningful leisure time". Meaningful leisure time means:
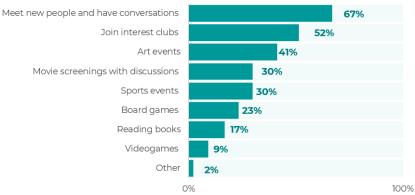
Personal growth while relaxing

💬 A place where you can grow personally while relaxing.

💬 A space where you can broaden your horizons: travel together, and have entertainment and learning opportunities at the same time.

💬 A place where you can choose between having fun and learning.

💬 It is a combination of leisure and development.

💬 A place to express myself.

Fun and anti-stress

💬 A place to relax, away from problems.

💬 Sport and psychology for relaxation.

💬 A safe place where you can have fun.

💬 A place where my soul can relax.

What would you like to do in your free time?

Activity	%
Meet new people and have conversations	67%
Join interest clubs	52%
Art events	41%
Movie screenings with discussions	30%
Sports events	30%
Board games	23%
Reading books	17%
Videogames	9%
Other	2%

0%   100%

*in % of the respondents aged 10–35 years old (n=227)
**several answers were possible

When answering the question about the desired type of leisure, respondents stressed the importance of communication regardless of the activity.

Other options included a book club, an open dialogue club, debate club, lectures on different topics (such as cinema, theater, urban history). But the important factor in each answer was the chance to have a discussion with others.

CREATIVITY AND REALIZING IDEAS

A perfect youth center was also described as a "platform for creativity", as a place where young people can interact, generate new creative ideas, and find a way or resources to implement them.

Creativity and generating ideas

💬 A place where young people can initiate their ideas.

💬 … and find like-minded people to realize [their ideas].

💬 A place to start a new project/event/startup.

💬 A place of creativity—everyone can create freely.

💬 A place where you can create and learn how to create something, and new ideas arise.

Implementing ideas

💬 Unlimited space for implementing ideas, creativity, and self-improvement.

💬 A place where you and like-minded people can implement interesting projects.

💬 Space for realizing youth ideas and thoughts.

💬 New opportunities for implementing ideas.

Improving community life

💬 An environment of motivated people who generate interesting and useful ideas and implement them for the benefit of society.

💬 A space that unites people who care about their community and who are ready to develop it.

💬 A place where young people from different communities can work on joint projects and reveal their strengths.

💬 A place where people can change the life of their city for the better with their creativity and initiative.

Respondents described a perfect space as a "place for self-improvement" or as "a platform for self-development" that provides youth with information and skills for personal growth and self-realization. It was described through the following perspectives:

Self-development

- A space where you can expand your horizons, make new, useful acquaintances, and reveal your own skills and professionalism.
- A space of like-minded people aimed at development, not at degradation with alcohol.
- A place for youth development and capacity building.
- Care for spiritual and aesthetic development.
- A group of young people who strive to become better as people and as future professionals.
- Where every young person can find answers to questions about self-development and leisure. And maybe even ways to implement ideas.

An opportunity to learn something new and share one's own experiences

- A place where young people gain new knowledge in areas that are not studied at school (psychology, finance, business), there are intellectual games and competitions, language learning, and so on.
- To learn something new and important for the future.
- ...where one can learn something new for oneself.
- An open space for young people, where everyone can learn or implement their ideas.
- A place to get acquainted with something new and gain knowledge.
- ...where I can learn new things and share experiences.

Developing skills

- An opportunity to acquire practical skills.
- A place to develop youth leadership.
- A place where I can acquire the skills needed to promote my ideas and actively take part in society.
- Attend interesting and informative events, gain new skills and abilities.
- A place where young people can develop skills.
- ...where active youth can increase their abilities.

Finding yourself and self-realization

- Comfortable, safe, and accessible environment for all categories, where everyone can find themselves and realize their potential.
- A place where everyone can find themselves.
- A place where young people can realize themselves with the necessary support and skills.
- A place where you can realize yourself.
- A place for self-realization in society.

Learning needs

To know more about learning areas that can fulfill the need for personal growth and self-realization, the respondents were asked to share the skills that they would like to develop and the issues that they wanted to be more aware of. Additionally, they named specific fields for which experts could give masterclasses or other support. Summarizing the answers, these issues and skills can be found in the following areas:

- Improving community life and civic engagement
- Grant writing and applying for funding
- Self-determination, professional orientation, employment
- Entrepreneurship
- Social media marketing
- Project management
- Event management
- Computers, technology
- Physical development
- Ecology and environment protection
- Arts
- Languages
- Psychology
- Law and rights
- Soft skills and life skills
- Knowledge of the world
- Better knowledge of school subjects

Areas of the desired skills and knowledge

Soft skills and life skills

- Communication skills:
  - Teamwork
  - Storytelling
  - Debate skills
  - Networking and making friends
  - Public speaking and charisma
  - Effective communication
  - Conflict resolution
- Time management
- Goal setting
- Planning the future
- How to be more focused and work more effectively
- Creating a personal brand
- Creative thinking
- Financial literacy
- Media literacy
- First aid

Languages

- To learn different foreign languages
- To learn or to improve English
- To visit speaking clubs
- To improve Ukrainian

Project management

- The project cycle from idea to implementation
- Managing project budget
- Managing risks
- Team management in a remote format

Events management

- Facilitation courses (for coaches)
- How to hold an interesting event
- How to organize an event

Better knowledge of school subjects

Arts

- Journalism and literature
- Handmade crafts
- Drawing
- Playing musical instruments (guitar, piano, drums)
- Contemporary art (bas-relief, string art, etc.)
- Theater and cinema
- Gardening and landscape design
- Dancing (modern dance)
- Creative writing
- Ceramics

Computers and technology

- Computer literacy
- Professional graphic editors
- Simulation, animation
- Working in photo and video editors
- Photoshop
- Sony Vega
- Creating videos
- Basics of photography (to promote personal brand online and business projects)
- Design and create products on a 3D printer
- Programming languages / IT skills

Knowledge of the world

- History (of theater, cinema, city)
- Knowing more about different cultures
- Diversity of religions and their differences
- Astrology, spiritual practice

Physical development

- Learning from experts about healthy nutrition and lifestyle
- Exploring new sports
- Support for hobbies

Self-determination
Professional orientation
Employment opportunities

- How to choose an area of study or a career pathway
- How to find a joyful profession that fits you best or is based on your hobbies
- How to apply for a job and pass the job interview
- How to plan a career
- To know more about possible professions
- To know more about modern labor market
- To define areas of additional training for professional development
- To see examples and success stories within different career pathways

💬 I'd like to understand what is interesting to me, I'm already in the fourth year of the institute and still haven't found a job to which I could dedicate my life, it seems like I'm stuck.

💬 At this stage of my life, I cannot decide on a profession, so I would like to get help from a career guidance specialist who would help me guide myself in choosing my future profession.

💬 I would like to learn more about a particular profession from people who have been working in this field for some time, something like masterclasses with a specialist.

💬 It would be useful to know more about the profession we have chosen and our possible employment opportunities. Maybe we will see other options and choose the one that suits us best.

💬 I would like to know what I want and where to go next.

💬 Planning the future: it is difficult to understand what to focus on, what to do, what to work on.

💬 To find oneself and work with pleasure!

💬 To find a way to make a hobby a profession.

💬 Information about the modern market and actual professions.

💬 To know about professions and to choose the education field.

💬 What should I learn additionally for my professional growth?

💬 How to apply for a job and to pass an interview to get the desired job.

Entrepreneurship

- How to choose a business area
- How to run a business step-by-step
- How to write a business plan
- Funding programs and development opportunities for the entrepreneurs
- Meetings with successful entrepreneurs
- Entrepreneurial skills building
- Social entrepreneurship
- Youth entrepreneurship
- Female entrepreneurship

💬 To have meetings with entrepreneurs to ensure that I have alternative opportunities to organize my own employment.

💬 I am thinking of starting my own business and would like to communicate with people who have gone this way and can share their experiences.

💬 Starting your own business and finding your niche.

💬 Creating your own business using a step-by-step guide.

💬 Supporting programs for entrepreneurs.

💬 Gaining skills that will help to create your own startup.

💬 Entrepreneurial thinking, practical steps to implement projects.

💬 Implementation of own business projects and their financing.

💬 To know more about social entrepreneurship.

💬 Consultations on youth or female entrepreneurship.

Social media marketing (SMM)

- How to run a successful online business
- How to become an SMM manager
- How to promote projects online
- How to create interesting content
- How to attract a larger audience to a project page

💬 To know how to develop a business on social networks.

💬 To promote my project on social networks.

💬 To promote of my social networks as a personal brand.

💬 To get lifehacks on creating quality content.

💬 How to fill personal pages on social networks and project pages to promote them.

💬 How to promote the projects that will develop the community to make them more successful.

Civic engagement and improving community life
- How to get local authorities to act
- Opportunities for youth engagement in community life
- How to support people in difficult life circumstances
- How to create a project step-by-step
- How to define community problems
- Where to find a team
- How to coordinate a project
- How to obtain funding
- How to engage community members in solving community problems

> To force public authorities to achieve results, rather than pretending to be active.

> How to force the authorities to build a skate park?

> How to help people in difficult life situations.

> What are the stages of creating a project, how to identify a painful and urgent problem, where to find a team and how to coordinate the project?

> To know more about the needs and wishes of people in my community and try to help them.

> To learn more about current issues at the city/country/world level and discuss them.

> The role of youth in the development of the city.

> How to involve the youth of my village in the landscaping of our village and organizing an active sport lifestyle.

> I would like to have consultations on the development of volunteering and making projects in the community—on sorting, cleaning bodies of water, arranging public spaces, educating the population.

Ecology, environment protection
- How to sort waste properly
- How to make communities environmentally friendly and clean
- How to involve other community members in protecting the environment

> To hear the recommendations of experts and to know how to involve young people in protecting the environment.

> How to get rid of the garbage in the city and our parks.

> I want to live in an environmentally friendly and clean place.

> Improving the ecology of my city.

> How can we better deal with batteries?

> I would like to learn how to sort waste and disseminate this habit amongst others.

Grant writing, applying for funding
- Where to find funding opportunities
- How to apply for funding
- Skills of writing grant proposals
- Professional support in writing grant proposals

> I would like to apply for funding to implement my project, but I do not have the skills for it.

> I would like to be able to write projects and grant proposals for raising funds on my own because it's good when somebody helps you, but they can leave, and your skills will stay with you.

> I would like to receive information about grant opportunities and to have support with writing grant proposals.

Law and human rights
- Basics of law—to be aware of basic rights
- Consumer rights
- Labor law
- Support business projects or social initiatives
- Working on solving specific personal issues

> Legal support is very important in labor relations.

> To know more about legislation and my rights.

> Every conscious (and less conscious) citizen of Ukraine should have legal literacy.

> I had to open an NGO, and I'm not a lawyer—it was difficult without support.

> I think about social entrepreneurship, if I had someone to turn to for accounting and legal issues, I would be much happier.

> Improve knowledge in areas of law that are given little time in the education system.

Psychology and mental health issues
- Motivation
- Emotional intelligence
- Pandemic issues
- Sex education
- Socialization and adaptation
- Healthy relationships with others
- Personal space in relationships
- Personal family issues
- Family relations with adolescents
- Support for families affected by the War in Eastern Ukraine
- How to find yourself in this world
- How to make the right choice
- How to find common ground with people
- How to manage fears, low self-esteem, self-doubt
- How to manage problems of bullying, discrimination, and abuse

💬 Psychological support of families after the War in Eastern Ukraine.

💬 How to maintain one's mental health during the pandemic.

💬 The help of psychologists is now important because of remote work.

💬 Understanding between parents and adolescents.

💬 Psychological support for motivation!

💬 Solving the problems of bullying, discrimination, sex education, and abuse.

💬 A psychologist to help you to understand yourself.

💬 Work with a psychologist, solve personal problems that I do not understand myself.

💬 To understand more about my attitude towards other people.

💬 Psychologists may be useful for those who have problems in the family.

💬 Fear of missing out (FOMO) and psychological trauma that prevents us from moving on.

💬 Learn more about this world and find "my own" place.

💬 To build healthy relationships with others (e.g. lectures on how to recognize abuse).
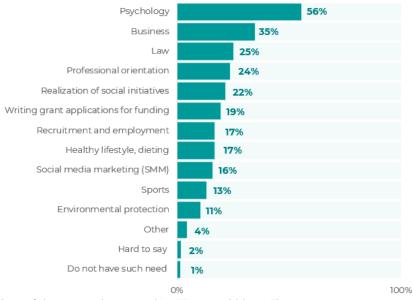
Expert consultations

If surveyed youth had an opportunity to get a free consultation in a specific field, more than half of them would like to have a consultation or a masterclass with an expert in psychology. Consultations with experts in law cover cross-cutting issues including raising general awareness, solving personal issues and issues related to employment, entrepreneurship, and managing social initiatives.

Among other desirable expert consultations or masterclasses, the following areas were mentioned:

- Accounting – for business consultations
- Style and fashion – for self-care
- Crafting – for creativity
- Blogging – for motivation
- Video production—"to help to evaluate ideas and create something new"
- Journalism – stories about their profession, to learn about its advantages or disadvantages
- Finance – to help in managing budgets and financial literacy.

If you could get free consultations from an expert in a certain field, what kind of experts would you be most interested in talking to?

Field	%
Psychology	56%
Business	35%
Law	25%
Professional orientation	24%
Realization of social initiatives	22%
Writing grant applications for funding	19%
Recruitment and employment	17%
Healthy lifestyle, dieting	17%
Social media marketing (SMM)	16%
Sports	13%
Environmental protection	11%
Other	4%
Hard to say	2%
Do not have such need	1%

*in % of the respondents aged 10–35 years old (n=227)
**several answers were possible

Top three opportunities in a youth center

At the end, the respondents were offered to choose three opportunities that they would most like to have available at a youth center or youth space:

If you had free access to the opportunities described below, which three would you choose?

99% Interesting leisure activities: chatting, watching films, playing board games or videogames, attending sports or art events and workshops, etc.

85% Taking part in solving the problems in my community, joining community initiatives

69% Meeting new people

63% Participating in events that develop skills

52% Getting free consultations from experts

43% Attending events that build certain areas of knowledge

34% Having access to modern devices: laptops, 3D printers, drones, telescopes, etc.

30% Having a place to work (coworking) or space for organizing events

24% Having free access to information: opportunities for youth (grants, scholarships, etc.), books, the internet.

*in % of the respondents aged 10–35 years old (n=227)
** three answers were possible

Within the subgroup of vulnerable and underrepresented youth, opportunities to visit skill-building activities and expert consultations were more valuable than the opportunity to meet new people, and skill-building had the same value as the opportunity for interesting leisure activities.

49% Interesting leisure activities: chatting, watching films, playing board games or videogames, attending sports or art events and workshops, etc.

49% Participating in events that develop skills

37% Taking part in solving problems in my community, joining community initiatives

37% Getting free consultations from experts

34% Meeting new people

31% Attending events that build certain areas of knowledge

17% Having access to modern devices: laptops, 3D printers, drones, telescopes, etc.

17% Having a place to work (coworking) or space for organizing events

6% Having free access to information: opportunities for youth (grants, scholarships, etc.), books, the internet.

*in % of the respondents that represent vulnerable and/or underrepresented groups (n=35)
** three answers were possible

Barriers to and motivation for attending a youth center

Respondents were asked about the most likely factor that would prevent them from visiting a youth center or youth space. Within the subgroup of vulnerable or underrepresented youth, the presence of sufficient amenities for people with disabilities was more valuable (for example, someone mentioned that they could not visit if there was no sign language interpreter). Relationships with staff, as well as relevant and quality events and services were even more important. Uncomfortable relationships (both with staff and visitors) would be a barrier for 21% of youth within the whole group of respondents and 26% within vulnerable or underrepresented respondents.
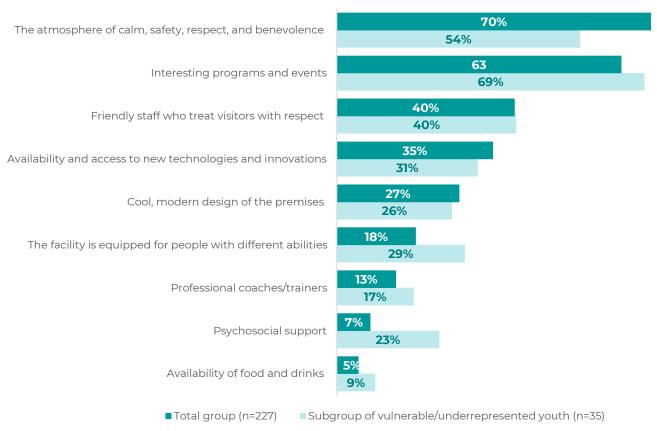
What would most likely prevent you from visiting such a facility?

Within the total group of respondents	Within vulnerable/underrepresented group
14% If work hours are inconvenient	**17%** Uncomfortable relationships with staff
14% Not enough relevant events or services	**17%** Not enough relevant events or services
13% If it is too far from me or hard to get to	**14%** Dissatisfaction with the quality of events/services
12% Uncomfortable relationships with staff	**9%** If it is too far from me or hard to get to
9% Uncomfortable relationships with other visitors	**9%** Uncomfortable relationships with other visitors
9% Inconvenient events schedule	**9%** If it is only open on weekdays
8% Dissatisfaction with the quality of events/services	**9%** If it does not have sufficient amenities for people with disabilities
6% If no one would come with me, and my friends were not there	**6%** If work hours are inconvenient
5% If it is only open on weekdays	**6%** Inconvenient event schedule
4% If it does not have sufficient amenities for people with disabilities	**3%** If the design of the premises is outdated
3% If the design of the premises is outdated	**3%** If my parents/guardians were against it
2% If my parents/guardians were against it	
1% Other (COVID, difficult to answer)	

*in % of the respondents that represent vulnerable and/or underrepresented groups (n=35)
** only one answer

*in % of the respondents aged 10–35 years old (n=227)
** only one answer

Which 3 components are the most important in a youth center you would like to return to?

The atmosphere of calm, safety, respect, and benevolence	70%	54%
Interesting programs and events	63	69%
Friendly staff who treat visitors with respect	40%	40%
Availability and access to new technologies and innovations	35%	31%
Cool, modern design of the premises	27%	26%
The facility is equipped for people with different abilities	18%	29%
Professional coaches/trainers	13%	17%
Psychosocial support	7%	23%
Availability of food and drinks	5%	9%

■ Total group (n=227) ■ Subgroup of vulnerable/underrepresented youth (n=35)

A modern youth center from the perspective of people over 35

The answers of people over 35 years old (n=18) were reviewed and analyzed separately. For most issues, their vision matches the vision of those under 35, but some specific needs were more important for this age cohort.

Improving community life was the main value of a youth center for both the 10–35 age group and for those who are over 35 years old. However, for the older age cohort, learning something new was of the same importance as improving community life. Additionally, older age groups saw youth centers as an opportunity to share their knowledge and experience.

When describing their perfect youth space, over-35s focused more on communication and self-development opportunities, calling youth centers "places for self-improvement" or a place for realizing one's own potential for the public good. Additionally, for this age cohort it is also important to feel their own value: "feeling that your expertise is unique and in-demand".

Talking about the needs for new or increased knowledge and consultations, the group of the respondents over 35 years old was more focused on employment, entrepreneurship, and funding:

- To be supported in writing grant applications.
- To be consulted in running and promoting their business.
- To grow professionally with career consultations and skills-building opportunities.

In particular, they mentioned developing communication skills, public speaking, planning, financial literacy, computer literacy, Photoshop, 3D printer, and foreign languages skills.

Additionally, this age cohort was also open to creative development (playing musical instruments or drawing) and civic engagement through developing personal projects.

Inconvenient work hours and the lack of relevant services were the main reasons not to visit a youth space for both under and over 35s. But the age group over 35 cares less about the location of the center than the younger group. For the older group, relationships with the staff and other visitors (17%) and the quality of services (17% of the respondents over 35 years old) were much more important.

Like the other age groups, the most important factor that motivates people over 35 to return to a youth space was the atmosphere of calmness, safety, and respect (important for 72% of respondents within the subgroup). Similarly, interesting programs and events were important for 67% of them. But the difference is that half of the respondents (50%) valued access to new technologies and innovations, compared to 35% within the total group.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth center attendance

The research findings outline different challenges for increasing youth center attendance. On the one hand, there is low awareness about youth centers in communities—25% of youth do not know if there is a youth center in their community. On the other hand, the attendance level is also very low— more than half (60%) of those respondents who were aware of youth centers in their community never visited it.

The data indicates a clear need for local authorities to create tailored communications campaigns to inform youth about youth centers in their communities as well as the opportunities that those centers offer. For example, for those who have never attended a youth center but were aware of such a place in their community, the main reason not to attend was the lack of information about such places (44%). Given the finding that within the subgroup of vulnerable and underrepresented youth, the share of those who were aware of a youth center but have never visited it was twice as large as in the overall sample (34% compared to 17%), such communications campaigns must intentionally address the needs of diverse youth. In addition, respondents wanted to know which events were held and when, how could they participate, and accessibility information. The latter is especially important for vulnerable groups of youth (half of them said that they know about this place but do not visit it due to lack of information about it), also 17% of vulnerable youth named inconvenient location and 8% lack of amenities for people with disabilities as key hinderances to attending youth centers.

The communications campaigns should also incorporate young people's motivations for attending, which are communication with peers (20%) and personal development (20%), as well as the desired youth center branding—"Molodizhnyi prostir" (Youth Space) (59%).

The other recommendation for government actors is to tap the huge potential for youth to be directly involved in the development of the youth center network. For example, survey respondents were willing to participate in managing youth centers by making common decisions with the facility's staff, discussing ideas, and jointly putting them into practice. The spirit of volunteering remains high among youth, which represents vast opportunities for authorities and the UNITY program.

Concept of a modern youth center

The research findings outlined a number of modern youth center features that youth wanted to see. A modern (online and in-person activities), inclusive (equal opportunities) physical space with staff on "the same wavelength as youth" were named as the most desired features. Respondents wanted youth center premises to include space for events, classrooms, library, sports grounds, and art. Peer support and opportunities to build relationships with parents were also named as important features of a modern youth center
Authorities can use these research findings to develop a set of standardized features that youth center networks should have. These standards should incorporate hard (design of physical spaces) and soft (skills building) features of a modern youth center. For example, the respondents named several priority areas of development that a modern youth center should support, specifically:

- Entrepreneurship/professional orientation
- Soft skills and life skills

- Social media marketing
- Project management
- Events management
- Computers and technology
- Languages (English, Ukrainian, speaking clubs)
- Arts (handmade crafts workshops, dancing, drawing, music, literature, design, etc.)
- Physical development (healthy nutrition and healthy lifestyle)
- Knowledge of the world (different cultures, religions, history of cities and arts)
- Civic engagement and improving community life
- Ecology and environment protection
- Psychology and mental health
- Grant writing and applying for funding
- Law and rights

Finally, the respondents mentioned the opportunity to receive free consultations to be an important component of a modern youth center. Young people expressed the desire to receive expert consultations in several fields, particularly psychological support (56%), business (35%), law (25%), professional orientation (24%), and social initiatives (22%). Interestingly, when youth were asked about key features in a youth space they would like to visit again, vulnerable and underrepresented youth mentioned "psychosocial support" three times more than the general sample (23% vs 7%). Policy actors should consider providing consultations in these areas, tailored to the needs of diverse youth, as an integral part of youth center standards.