

ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

FROM TRAINING-OF-TRAINERS TO YOUTH-LED INNOVATION: IMPLEMENTATION EVIDENCE FROM THE RISEUP-WB CAPACITY-BUILDING PATHWAY IN ALBANIA AND KOSOVO

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ABSTRACT

Multi-stage capacity-building programmes are often assessed at the end of a training event, even though their value depends on whether learning is tested, adapted, replicated and transferred to youth-facing practice. This article examines the early implementation of RiseUp-WB, an Erasmus+ capacity-building initiative linking Training of Trainers (ToT), local micro-pilots, cascade workshops, youth innovation labs and policy dialogue in Albania and Kosovo. A mixed-methods implementation case study used aggregated monitoring data and public project documentation generated between February and July 2026. The dataset covered 10 activities, 171 participation instances and 470 feedback submissions, corresponding to 99.8% of expected activity-stage responses. Descriptive analysis was combined with documentary thematic synthesis informed by implementation outcomes and adaptation theory. Acceptability and perceived appropriateness were consistently high. ToT #1 achieved a mean daily rating of 4.59/5, while ToT #2 daily means ranged from 4.25 to 4.65. Micro-pilots identified concrete adaptation needs, including slower pacing, local examples, step-by-step digital demonstrations, visual templates and offline alternatives. Three cascade workshops subsequently reached 49 attendance instances and collected 48 feedback forms. The same 20 young people completed two cross-border innovation labs, progressing from problem definition to digital project management, budgeting, prototypes and pitches. A first policy roundtable linked this learning pathway to municipal recommendations. The article proposes an Iterative Capacity-to-Innovation Pathway that distinguishes non-negotiable implementation functions from locally adaptable delivery features. The findings support feasibility and transferability, but do not establish causal effectiveness or long-term employment outcomes.

Keywords: training of trainers; youth work; digital facilitation; entrepreneurship education; Western Balkans; implementation research



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1. Introduction

Young people in Albania and Kosovo enter education, work and civic life in contexts marked by persistent labour-market exclusion, uneven access to practical digital learning and limited opportunities to influence local decision-making. The Western Balkans Social Scoreboard reported that the proportion of 15-29-year-olds neither in employment nor in education or training was 22.2% in Albania in 2024 and 37.6% in Kosovo in 2023, compared with an EU-27 average of 11.0% in 2024 (Employment and Social Affairs Platform [ESAP], 2025). These indicators do not describe every young person or every locality, but they underline why youth organisations and municipalities require approaches that combine employability, entrepreneurship, digital competence and meaningful participation.

Policy responses frequently emphasise the acquisition of skills. That emphasis is understandable, yet it also requires caution. Valiente et al. (2020) show how European lifelong-learning policy can “educationalise” youth unemployment by translating structural labour-market problems into individual deficits. A credible youth-capacity programme should therefore avoid implying that short training alone can solve unemployment. Its more defensible contribution is to expand agency, practical competence, networks, recognition of non-formal learning and the organisational capacity of local actors, while maintaining explicit links to institutions, employers, public authorities and follow-up opportunities.

The implementation problem is as important as the curriculum problem. Training may be well received in the room but fail to change later practice. Classic transfer research distinguishes immediate learning from the generalisation and maintenance of learning in real settings (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). Reviews of programme implementation likewise show that outcomes depend on delivery quality, contextual fit, provider capacity and support systems, not only on the intrinsic merits of a programme model (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Train-the-trainer approaches are intended to address scale and local ownership, but their effectiveness depends on practice, supervision, follow-up and opportunities for newly trained facilitators to apply the material (Pearce et al., 2012).

RiseUp-WB – Raising Innovation, Skills & Empowerment for Youth in the Western Balkans –

was designed around this transfer challenge. The 24-month Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Youth initiative connects five organisations from Albania, Kosovo, Italy and Spain. Its implementation pathway begins with two Training of Trainers courses, inserts local micro-pilots between the courses, requires cascade workshops, transfers ToT-trained staff into co-facilitation roles in youth innovation labs, and links youth-generated ideas to policy dialogue, a cross-border hackathon and follow-up mentorship. The logic is iterative: learn, test, adjust, replicate, apply and connect to wider systems.

This article analyses implementation evidence from the first completed stages of that pathway, from ToT #1 in February 2026 through the first policy roundtable in July 2026. It is not an impact evaluation and does not test whether the programme caused employment, entrepreneurship or civic outcomes. Instead, it examines implementation outcomes that are necessary precursors to later impact: acceptability, perceived appropriateness, feasibility, transferability, adaptation and early replication. It also asks whether the project created a visible bridge between organisational capacity building and youth-facing practice.

The study makes three contributions. First, it documents an unusually explicit sequence from trainer development to local testing and youth-level application in a cross-border Western Balkans setting. Second, it shows how daily feedback and micro-pilot evidence were converted into concrete delivery adaptations rather than retained only for reporting. Third, it proposes an Iterative Capacity-to-Innovation Pathway that separates core implementation functions from delivery features that can be adapted to language, confidence, digital access and local institutional context. For educational research, the central issue is how pedagogical support, shared tasks and evidence of competence can connect successive learning settings without treating participation as proof of mastery.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Background

The analysis connects non-formal learning and employability, digital and entrepreneurship competence frameworks, training transfer, and implementation outcomes and adaptation. It also draws on adjacent research on digital pedagogy, competence-based teaching, cooperative learning and intercultural education. These perspectives

support interpretation of the pathway without confusing positive reactions with demonstrated long-term impact. Evidence from schools and universities is used as a conceptual comparison, not as direct validation of a youth-work intervention.

2.1 Non-formal learning, employability and entrepreneurship

Non-formal youth work can provide learning environments in which participants practise collaboration, communication, initiative, problem solving and reflection outside conventional classroom assessment. Wochowska (2015) argues that non-formal learning and youth work can contribute to transversal and job-related skills, while Pigozne et al. (2019) identify participatory, experiential and work-connected methods as relevant to youth entrepreneurship and employability. The value of these settings lies partly in their capacity to make learners active producers of outputs rather than passive recipients of information.

European competence frameworks translate broad learning aims into observable practice. DigComp 2.2 defines digital competence across information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, content creation, safety and problem solving, with attention to confident, critical and responsible use of technology (Vuorikari et al., 2022). EntreComp conceptualises entrepreneurship as the capacity to act on opportunities and ideas and transform them into value for others through 15 interrelated competences (Bacigalupo et al., 2016). These frameworks are useful reference points, but they do not prescribe a single delivery method. In youth work, a short workshop on shared documents or a prototype exercise can be meaningful only if participants understand why the tool matters, can practise it and can connect it to a real task.

Recent research from Albania and Kosovo reinforces the relevance of agency, confidence and practical entrepreneurial exposure. Among Albanian university students, innovativeness, attitudes, perceived behavioural control and self-efficacy were associated with digital entrepreneurial intentions (Çela et al., 2025). Research with students in Kosovo similarly found that attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control were associated with entrepreneurial intentions, although reported entrepreneurship education was not itself related to intention (Hasani et al., 2023). These findings caution against treating course

attendance as sufficient. They support programme designs that combine structured learning with the experience of making decisions, producing outputs and receiving feedback.

Digital participation also has a civic dimension. Elshani and Rrecaj (2023) identify institutional and competence-development needs in Kosovo's digital-citizenship environment. For youth organisations, digital facilitation therefore concerns more than platform use. It includes safe participation, accessibility, responsible communication, critical judgement and the ability to move between online and offline formats when connectivity or confidence is uneven.

2.2 Train-the-trainer models and transfer of learning

Train-the-trainer models seek to create multipliers who can reproduce or adapt learning for new groups. Their practical appeal is strong in projects that operate across several countries or organisations because local facilitators can provide language access, cultural understanding and continuity. However, a systematic review by Pearce et al. (2012) found substantial variation in Train-the-Trainers delivery and reporting and highlighted the importance of trainer selection, active learning, assessment and ongoing support. The label "ToT" therefore does not guarantee transfer.

Transfer of training depends on the design of the learning experience, the characteristics and motivation of trainees, and the environment in which later application occurs (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). The opportunity to rehearse delivery is especially important. A participant who can explain a concept may still be unprepared to facilitate a group, manage time, respond to different confidence levels or collect evidence. Transfer is more plausible when a programme includes modelling, guided practice, feedback, application planning and a real occasion to use the learning soon after training.

The RiseUp-WB pathway can be understood as an attempt to operationalise these conditions. ToT #1 introduced foundations; micro-pilots required immediate local use; ToT #2 deepened areas identified through testing; cascade workshops required broader replication; and innovation labs placed ToT-trained staff alongside youth teams. The sequence creates multiple opportunities to move from declarative knowledge to facilitation behaviour. It also creates evidence at each step,

allowing the consortium to detect where transfer is straightforward and where additional scaffolding is needed.

2.3 Implementation outcomes and adaptation

Implementation research distinguishes the success of implementation from the ultimate outcomes of an intervention. Proctor et al. (2011) identify acceptability, adoption, appropriateness, feasibility, fidelity, cost, penetration and sustainability as conceptually distinct implementation outcomes. In an early-stage youth programme, participant satisfaction can indicate acceptability, while perceived relevance to local work can inform appropriateness. Completion of planned activities, response coverage and production of outputs provide feasibility signals. Evidence that trained staff delivered local activities indicates early adoption and transfer, although it does not establish long-term fidelity or sustainability.

Implementation quality is rarely a choice between exact replication and unrestricted adaptation. Durlak and DuPre (2008) show that effective implementation is shaped by provider, organisational, community and support-system factors. The FRAME developed by Wiltsey Stirman et al. (2019) provides a vocabulary for documenting what was modified, when, why and by whom. This is particularly relevant in cross-border youth work, where language, examples, digital access, institutional roles and group expectations differ.

A useful distinction is between functions and adaptable forms. The core function of a digital-collaboration activity may be shared task visibility and accountability; the form could be a Kanban platform, a paper board or a spreadsheet. The core function of an entrepreneurship exercise may be testing problem-solution fit; the form could be a simple canvas, a storyboard or a service-flow sketch. Protecting core functions while adapting examples, tools, pace and instructions can support both fidelity and contextual relevance.

2.4 Competence recognition and youth work

Recognition is part of transfer because participants need language and evidence to explain what they have learned. Youthpass uses the revised European Key Competences for Lifelong Learning to support reflection on digital, entrepreneurship,

citizenship, multilingual, personal and other competence areas (Council of the European Union, 2018; Youthpass, n.d.-a). For youth workers and team members, Youthpass also connects to the European Training Strategy competence model, including facilitating learning, designing programmes, managing resources, collaborating in teams, communicating meaningfully, intercultural competence, networking and advocacy, evaluation and civic engagement (Youthpass, n.d.-b).

Youthpass should not be treated as an external certification of occupational proficiency. Its value is reflective and documentary: it helps participants connect activities, roles and outputs to competence language and makes non-formal learning more legible. Within a multi-stage pathway, this reflective process can reinforce learning-to-learn and encourage participants to identify concrete evidence such as a session plan, prototype, pitch, task board or facilitation experience.

A competence-based perspective further clarifies the relationship between intended outcomes, learning tasks and evidence. Polz and Bećirović (2022) examine a basic-competence framework for English as a foreign language (EFL) in Austrian primary education, linking its implementation to teacher preparation, suitable materials and support. Although that setting differs from youth work, it offers a useful curricular analogy: naming a competence is insufficient unless participants have an opportunity to practise and demonstrate it. Session plans, prototypes and reflective accounts can make such opportunities visible without establishing standardised mastery.

2.5 Digital pedagogy, learner readiness and language access

Bećirović (2023) situates digital pedagogy within educators' digital competence, learner engagement, citizenship and barriers to technology integration. This perspective shifts attention from the availability of devices to the teaching decisions that make digital participation meaningful. For the present study, it supports examining the purpose of a tool, the explanation and practice surrounding it, and the support available when learners encounter difficulty. It does not imply that using a platform, or discussing one, demonstrates competence.

Regional evidence also cautions against assuming a uniform digital learner. In a survey of

330 university students in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bećirović and Dervić (2023) examined preferences for face-to-face, online and hybrid provision alongside readiness, satisfaction and computer anxiety. Preferences varied with educational context. These findings do not estimate readiness among the RiseUp-WB participants, but they justify treating delivery format and learner support as design questions rather than assuming that age or regular Internet use guarantees readiness for collaborative digital tasks.

Digital-learning research also separates constructs that short workshop evaluations can easily conflate. Bećirović (2024) examined learning management system (LMS) success using a multiperspective model that distinguishes quality, usefulness and satisfaction. In a separate university study, Bećirović et al. (2025) distinguished Internet habits, e-learning self-efficacy and academic achievement; satisfaction was not a significant direct predictor of achievement in their model. These studies support maintaining analytical distinctions among favourable reactions, confidence, system use and demonstrated performance. Their observational associations are not evidence of causal effects in RiseUp-WB.

Language access is another relevant consideration. Preis et al. (2023), studying digital EFL teaching among Austrian secondary-school students, found that English-language skills predicted self-reported improvement in digital skills. Their study concerns a particular classroom setting, not international youth work. Nevertheless, it raises a pertinent design question for cross-border provision: participants may need support with task language as well as with technology. Plain instructions, visual examples and clarification in a familiar language are therefore reasonable adaptations to examine, not outcomes established by that study for this programme.

2.6 Cooperative learning and intercultural participation

Cooperative learning offers a more precise account of teamwork than simply placing participants in groups. In a study of 211 Bosnian high-school EFL learners, Bećirović et al. (2022) identified individual accountability and interpersonal skills as predictors of motivation, while the overall cooperative-learning model did not significantly predict achievement. This distinction supports examining how tasks allocate responsibility,

invite constructive feedback and make individual contributions visible. It also cautions against inferring learning gains from an enjoyable group atmosphere alone.

Intercultural education supplies a complementary participation lens. Bećirović and Polz (2024), in a narrative review on education and peacebuilding, emphasise respect for diversity, equal opportunities and active participation across backgrounds. Applied as an interpretive lens rather than a tested causal model, this suggests that cross-border learning should be assessed through whose contributions are heard and how differences are handled. Mixed-nationality membership alone cannot establish intercultural competence or peacebuilding outcomes; those would require dedicated evidence.

Together, these perspectives identify the educational problem addressed here: how to connect trainer preparation, supported practice, local replication and youth-facing application while keeping competence evidence distinct from attendance or satisfaction. The cited school and university studies do not establish effectiveness in Albanian or Kosovar youth work. They instead sensitise the analysis to pedagogical support, learner differences, accountability and equitable participation. RiseUp-WB offers an implementation case through which those concerns can be examined across a connected sequence of non-formal learning settings.

3. Objectives and Research Questions

The purpose of the study is to examine the early implementation of the RiseUp-WB capacity-building pathway and to formulate transferable design principles for similar youth programmes. The analysis focuses on completed activities from February to 17 July 2026. The planned cross-border hackathon in Spain and subsequent mentorship are outside the observation period and are discussed only as future implementation stages.

The study addresses four research questions:

RQ1: What implementation outcomes were observed across the two ToTs, two micro-pilots, three cascade workshops, two youth innovation labs and the first policy roundtable?

RQ2: What adaptations emerged from daily feedback and local testing, and how were they integrated into later stages?

RQ3: How did ToT-trained staff bridge organisational capacity building and youth-level digital and entrepreneurial learning?

RQ4: What transferable design principles can be formulated for multi-stage, cross-border youth capacity-building initiatives?

mentorship. WP4 connects youth learning and prototypes to a Youth Advisory Board and policy dialogue.

The observed pathway contained six functional stages: (1) foundational trainer preparation, (2) local testing, (3) advanced trainer development, (4) local multiplication, (5) youth-level application and (6) early policy linkage. Daily feedback and reflection were intended to operate across the stages rather than as isolated end-of-event satisfaction exercises.

4. Methodology

4.1 Study design

A mixed-methods implementation case-study design was used. The unit of analysis was the RiseUp-WB implementation pathway rather than an individual participant. Quantitative evidence consisted of aggregate attendance, response-completion data and descriptive distributions from closed feedback questions. Qualitative evidence consisted of implementation narratives, documented improvement priorities, anonymised open comments reproduced in public reports, facilitator observations and the tangible outputs described for each activity.

The design is appropriate for an early implementation phase in which activities were delivered sequentially and the primary questions concern acceptability, appropriateness, feasibility, adaptation and transfer. It does not permit causal attribution. No control group, pre-specified counterfactual or objective employment outcome was available, and the same individuals participated in some stages. Accordingly, the article uses the term “implementation evidence” rather than “effectiveness evidence”.

4.2 Programme setting and intervention pathway

RiseUp-WB is a 24-month Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Youth action involving MUSIKART (Italy), EuropeYou (Spain), NECI Albania, the Municipality of Berat (Albania) and OBOTI (Kosovo). The programme addresses organisational capacity, digital and entrepreneurial competence, youth participation and cross-border cooperation. The WP2 pathway was designed around two five-day ToTs, local micro-pilots, three cascade workshops and an alumni/manual component. WP3 transfers ToT-informed facilitation into two youth innovation labs, a cross-border hackathon and follow-up

4.3 Data sources and implementation coverage

The analysis used public project deliverables, curricula, agendas, aggregate feedback tables and implementation summaries available through the RiseUp-WB results repository, together with aggregate monitoring records retained in the project reporting package. The relevant public deliverables are listed individually in the reference section. The data cut-off was 17 July 2026.

Across 10 completed activities, the records represented 171 participation instances. This is not a count of unique persons because the 20-person ToT cohort and the 20-person youth cohort participated in repeated stages. The monitoring system generated 470 feedback submissions. Based on scheduled daily or final forms and recorded attendance at each activity, 471 submissions were expected; response coverage was therefore 99.8%. The only shortfall was one response in the Municipality of Berat cascade workshop, which recorded 16 attendees and 15 completed forms.

4.4 Measures and data harmonisation

Feedback instruments were designed for operational use and varied by event. ToT daily forms included clarity, engagement, balance between theory and practice, relevance, confidence, transferability, trainer clarity, time management, learning environment and an overall day rating. Final ToT forms assessed expectations, objective achievement, perceived competence and readiness to replicate. The micro-pilots used a shorter set of module-understanding and satisfaction questions. Cascade workshops assessed project clarity, relevance, practical value, participation, facilitation, satisfaction and improvement priorities. Youth-lab forms assessed daily learning, engagement, teamwork, pacing and

Table 1.

Implementation stages, participation and feedback coverage through 17 July 2026

Stage and activity	Date and location	Participation instances	Feedback submissions	Implementation purpose
ToT #1	11-15 Feb 2026, Tirana	20	120	Foundational trainer preparation; five daily forms plus final assessment
Micro-pilot Albania	28 Feb 2026, Tirana	10	10	Local test of selected ToT #1 modules
Micro-pilot Kosovo	13 Mar 2026, Fushë Kosovë	10	10	Local test and refinement before ToT #2
Innovation Lab #1	26-29 Mar 2026, Tirana	20	80	Foundational digital and entrepreneurship application with youth
ToT #2	2-6 May 2026, Prishtina	20	100	Advanced trainer development; four daily forms plus final assessment
Innovation Lab #2	28-31 May 2026, Prishtina	20	80	Advanced digital project management and entrepreneurial planning
Cascade workshop – OBOTI	12 Jun 2026, Fushë Kosovë	15	15	Local replication with youth workers/ volunteers
Cascade workshop – NECI Albania	20 Jun 2026, Tirana	18	18	Local replication and practical application
Cascade workshop – Municipality of Berat	3 Jul 2026, Berat	16	15	Local replication with digital and civic applications
Policy Roundtable #1	17 Jul 2026, Berat	22	22	Policy dialogue and linkage to WP3 learning/ prototypes
Total	10 completed activities	171	470	99.8% of 471 expected activity-stage submissions

Note. Participation instances are not unique-person counts because cohorts participated in repeated stages.

overall quality, while the policy roundtable assessed relevance, dialogue, recommendation feasibility and future improvement.

Because response labels and scales were not identical, results were not pooled into a single composite effect size. The analysis preserved the terminology of each report and used three descriptive conventions: (a) reported mean daily rating where a 1-5 conversion had already been specified; (b) highest or top-two positive response distributions where counts were available; and (c) complete positive share when all responses fell within positive categories. Comparisons across stages are therefore interpretive rather than inferential.

4.5 Quantitative analysis

Counts, percentages, response coverage and reported means were extracted into a structured matrix. Arithmetic checks were performed on participant and response totals. For multi-day activities, daily data were presented

separately to preserve pacing and content-specific signals. No significance tests were conducted because instruments differed, sample sizes were small and observations were not independent across repeated cohorts.

4.6 Qualitative analysis

A documentary thematic synthesis was conducted on qualitative findings and anonymised comments reproduced in the public implementation reports. Following the logic of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), text segments were coded against five a priori domains: clarity and acceptability; local relevance and appropriateness; feasibility and transfer; adaptation needs; and cross-stage continuity. Inductive codes were added when recurrent implementation mechanisms appeared, including tangible artefacts, step-by-step digital support, cross-border teamwork and competence recognition. Themes were compared across stages to identify whether a concern emerged once, persisted or led to a documented adjustment.

The analysis did not re-code complete raw interview transcripts or all respondent-level comments. It should therefore be understood as a synthesis of project documentation rather than an independent qualitative dataset with inter-coder reliability.

4.7 Ethics, data protection and researcher reflexivity

The source data were generated through routine monitoring and evaluation of Erasmus+ activities rather than through a separately recruited research intervention. This article uses only aggregate, anonymised findings and public implementation documents. Names, signatures, contact details, individual feedback records, consent documents and copies of Youthpass certificates were excluded. Those records remain restricted to authorised project partners and the granting authority in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation and project consent procedures.

Formal research-ethics committee approval was not sought because the manuscript involved secondary analysis of aggregate programme-monitoring material and no new recruitment, intervention or processing of identifiable research data. This statement describes the basis used for this implementation study and should not be treated as a general exemption rule for other research contexts.

The researcher had professional involvement in the design, implementation and reporting of the programme. This provided detailed knowledge of the intervention sequence but also creates a risk of confirmatory interpretation. The mitigation measures were explicit use of public aggregate evidence, retention of negative and partial-response signals, avoidance of causal claims, transparent reporting of instrument differences and a dedicated limitations section.

5. Results

5.1 Implementation reach and completion

All 10 activities planned within the observed pathway were implemented: two ToTs, two micro-pilots, three cascade workshops, two innovation labs and one policy roundtable. The sequence covered four countries at partner level and physical delivery in Albania and Kosovo. The 470 feedback submissions provided near-complete operational

coverage. This high completion rate is relevant to feasibility because the monitoring approach depended on short, closed forms administered at the end of each day or event, with hosts checking response counts before closing.

The pathway also achieved its principal replication milestones. The two micro-pilots each involved 10 local youth workers or volunteers. The three cascade workshops reached 49 attendance instances, exceeding the combined minimum target of 45, and generated 48 feedback forms. The same 20 young people from Albania and Kosovo completed both innovation labs. Twenty-two participants, including two EU-partner ToT staff, completed the first policy roundtable and its evaluation.

5.2 Training of Trainers #1 and #2

ToT #1 in Tirana established the foundational curriculum for inclusive youth work, volunteer management and safeguarding, digital facilitation, creative engagement, employability and evaluation (RiseUp-WB Consortium, 2026j, 2026l). Across 100 daily responses, the reported daily means were 4.55, 4.52, 4.85, 4.65 and 4.40, producing an overall mean of 4.59/5. The final assessment reported positive results of 85% for expectations, objective achievement, inclusive-activity design, digital facilitation and evaluation; 90% for volunteer management and safeguarding; and 75% full readiness to deliver a local cascade workshop, with 25% reporting partial readiness.

The pattern is important: satisfaction and perceived understanding were strong, but replication readiness was lower than module-level confidence. The gap supports the programme's decision to insert micro-pilots and a second ToT rather than assume that one course had produced fully independent trainers.

ToT #2 in Prishtina was designed around lessons from ToT #1 and the two micro-pilots (RiseUp-WB Consortium, 2026k). It moved toward advanced volunteer coordination, employability evidence, cross-cultural youth engagement, e-learning design, monitoring and cascade planning. Daily means were 4.50, 4.65, 4.65 and 4.25. The digital-facilitation day was the lowest-rated and most adaptation-dependent: 10 participants considered the content easily transferable and 10 considered it transferable with adaptation, compared with a 14/6 split on each of the first three days.

Table 2.

Selected quantitative implementation signals from ToT #1 and ToT #2

Indicator	ToT #1 Albania	ToT #2 Kosovo	Interpretive signal
Daily overall ratings	4.55, 4.52, 4.85, 4.65, 4.40; overall 4.59/5	4.50, 4.65, 4.65, 4.25; overall 4.51/5	High acceptability; digital day required more support
Expectations met	85% reported positive result	95% reported positive result	Strong perceived fit, higher in advanced ToT
Volunteer coordination / safeguarding	90% positive	95% positive	Strong perceived competence development
Digital facilitation	85% positive	85% positive	Persistent refinement need despite high ratings
Evaluation / M&E	85% positive	90% positive	Improved confidence in evidence and reflection
Readiness to replicate	75% yes; 25% partial	80% yes; 20% partial	Application opportunities and mentoring remain necessary
Recommendation of format	Not reported in equivalent item	95% positive	Strong acceptability of advanced format

Note. Feedback instruments differed. Percentages are the positive results reported in the respective deliverables and should not be treated as directly comparable effect sizes.

The final ToT #2 assessment reported 95% positive results for expectations, objective achievement, advanced volunteer coordination, employability-session design and willingness to recommend the format; 90% for overall quality, cross-cultural engagement and monitoring and evaluation; 85% for advanced digital facilitation and e-learning; and 80% full readiness to replicate, with 20% partial readiness. Relative to ToT #1, the readiness result increased from 75% to 80%, but the persistent partial-readiness group confirms that follow-up mentoring and real delivery opportunities remained necessary.

5.3 Micro-pilot lessons and documented adaptations

The Albania micro-pilot produced uniformly positive results for expectations, quality, objectives, inclusive youth activities, volunteer management, creative engagement and employability. Digital facilitation received nine full-understanding responses and one partial response (RiseUp-WB Consortium, 2026g). Qualitative findings requested more time, screenshots, step-by-step tool guidance, local volunteering examples and shared materials after the workshop.

The Kosovo micro-pilot produced a more differentiated diagnostic (RiseUp-WB Consortium, 2026h). Expectations and overall quality were fully positive, but inclusive youth work and volunteer management each received seven full and

three partial-understanding responses. Digital facilitation received nine positive and one negative response. Creative engagement and employability each received nine full and one partial response. Participants valued the group atmosphere, creative methods and the CV-related block, while asking for slower explanation, more examples and visible templates.

These differences did not indicate rejection of the curriculum. They showed where a condensed local format required stronger scaffolding. The documented adjustment plan for ToT #2 included slowing concept-heavy sections; providing a concrete barrier-mapping example before group work; visualising the volunteer pathway from recruitment to safeguarding; demonstrating one digital tool per tool family; providing screenshot-based guidance and offline alternatives; inserting a micro-break; and using a model Mini-CV or worked example. The project therefore treated local testing as a design function, not merely as dissemination.

5.4 Local cascade workshop replication

The three cascade workshops demonstrate early adoption by local partners. NECI Albania delivered a workshop in Tirana with 18 participants and 18 feedback forms; OBOTI delivered a workshop in Fushë Kosovë with 15 participants and 15 forms; and the Municipality of Berat delivered a workshop with 16 attendees and 15 forms (RiseUp-WB Consortium, 2026d, 2026e, 2026f). The workshops

Table 3.
Micro-pilot signals and resulting adaptations

Priority area	Albania signal	Kosovo signal	Documented adaptation
Inclusive youth work	10/10 full understanding	7/10 full; 3/10 partial	Slow concept framing; show a barrier-mapping example before group work
Volunteer management	10/10 full; requests for examples	7/10 full; 3/10 partial	Visual recruitment-to-safeguarding pathway and local role examples
Digital facilitation	9/10 full; 1/10 partial	9/10 full; 1/10 no	Live demos, screenshots, one tool per purpose, offline fallback
Creative engagement	10/10 full; demand for more practice	9/10 full; 1/10 partial	Additional hands-on method lab and peer adaptation
Employability	10/10 full; business-idea value	9/10 full; 1/10 partial; CV block valued	Visible Mini-CV/CV template and worked example
Pacing and follow-up	Requests for more time and materials	Request for step-by-step guidance and micro-break	Longer practice/debrief blocks, micro-breaks and shared participant pack

Note. Counts refer to immediate understanding reported by 10 participants in each micro-pilot.

varied in emphasis, reflecting local contexts, but all presented the RiseUp-WB pathway and translated ToT content into practical youth-work applications.

NECI Albania obtained full positive distributions across all questions. Seventeen of 18 respondents selected the highest category for project clarity, practical value and overall satisfaction, and all 18 selected the highest category for participation. OBOTI also received only positive ratings; 14 of 15 selected the highest category for project clarity, usefulness, clarity of examples and overall satisfaction, while 11 of 15 selected “very practical”. The Municipality of Berat recorded 15 of 15 “very clear” ratings for examples and “very practical” ratings for the workshop, with

14 of 15 rating facilitation as excellent and overall satisfaction as very high.

The consistency of improvement responses is more informative than high satisfaction alone. In both the OBOTI and Berat workshops, eight of 15 respondents selected “more practical examples” as the main improvement priority and three selected more time for group activities. NECI participants were more divided: nine reported no major improvement, six requested more practical examples and three requested more materials or handouts. The cascade evidence therefore supports feasibility and acceptability while identifying a continuing need for worked examples, longer production blocks and local cases.

Table 4.
Local cascade workshop outcomes

Workshop	Attendance / forms	Selected strongest ratings	Main improvement priorities
NECI Albania	18 / 18	17/18 highest rating for project clarity, practical value and satisfaction; 18/18 for participation	More practical depth while preserving participatory delivery
OBOTI	15 / 15	14/15 highest rating for project clarity, usefulness, examples and satisfaction; 11/15 very practical	8 practical examples; 3 more group time; 3 no major change; 1 time management
Municipality of Berat	16 / 15	15/15 very clear examples and very practical; 14/15 excellent facilitation and very satisfied	8 practical examples; 3 more group time; 2 no major change; 1 discussion; 1 time management
Combined	49 / 48	All recorded responses were in positive categories	Deepen practice and local examples rather than return to lecture-based delivery

Note. The public reports contain aggregate results only; attendance lists and respondent-level data are retained separately.

5.5 Transfer to youth innovation labs

Innovation Lab #1 in Tirana involved the same cross-border youth cohort that would later attend Innovation Lab #2. Four mixed Albania-Kosovo teams moved through problem identification, a simple business-model logic, creative social innovation, prototype construction and final pitching. The implementation deliberately used tangible outputs – problem statements, canvases, posters, storyboards, service flows and pitch notes – so that progress could be seen and discussed (RiseUp-WB Consortium, 2026b).

All four daily forms reached 20 responses. The report calculated average positive daily rates of 91.5%, 93.5%, 97.5% and 100%. In the final evaluation, 18 participants were very satisfied and two satisfied with overall quality; all 20 rated trainer performance and the overall experience as excellent; 18 rated group activities very useful and two useful; 14 reported that their knowledge or skills improved a lot and six reported improvement; and all 20 would definitely recommend the lab.

Innovation Lab #2 in Kosovo deepened the pathway through digital project management, Kanban-style task allocation, e-collaboration, digital storytelling, basic budgeting and micro-finance, marketing and pitch refinement (RiseUp-WB Consortium, 2026c). The same 20 youth again completed all four feedback forms. Final overall quality was positive for all respondents: 15 were very satisfied and five satisfied. Sixteen rated trainers excellent, three good and one acceptable. Eleven reported improvement “a lot”, seven reported improvement and two moderate improvement. Sixteen would definitely recommend the lab and four probably would.

The main caution signal concerned pace. On Day 2, 55% considered the pace too fast or slightly fast and 40% appropriate. Day 3 remained demanding, with half reporting an appropriate pace and half reporting too fast or slightly fast, even though clarity, usefulness and engagement were strongly positive. This indicates that advanced entrepreneurship and finance content should be segmented into shorter worked examples and protected production time.

The cross-stage progression is more significant than any single satisfaction percentage. The first lab developed common language for problems, target groups, messages and basic

prototypes. The second required teams to allocate work, sequence tasks, consider resources and refine a marketing or funding proposition. ToT-trained staff supported group processes, daily feedback and cross-cultural participation. This provides early evidence of organisational-to-youth transfer: trainer learning was used in a youth-facing setting with concrete outputs and repeated reflection.

5.6 Emerging policy linkage

The first policy roundtable in Berat involved 20 local participants and two ToT staff, one from each EU partner. All 22 participants completed the feedback form and received Youthpass (RiseUp-WB Consortium, 2026i). The roundtable connected the project pathway to digital-skills policy, recognition of volunteering, coordination across municipal departments and meaningful youth participation.

All respondents selected the highest available rating for clarity of purpose, project presentation, relevance, stakeholder dialogue, linkage to project activities, facilitation and overall satisfaction. Sixteen rated the session very useful and six useful; 13 considered the recommendations very practical and nine practical. Improvement priorities were more youth participation (eight responses), greater local-authority involvement (six), more discussion time (four), no major improvement (three) and more project examples (one).

The resulting recommendations included practical digital learning, recognition of volunteering through Youthpass and portfolios, involvement of young people across the full policy cycle, coordination among municipalities, education providers, civil society and employers, and future review of innovation-lab and hackathon prototypes. This is early policy linkage rather than institutional adoption, but it demonstrates that the capacity-building pathway was beginning to connect training outputs with public dialogue.

5.7 Cross-stage implementation themes

Five themes were visible across the documentary evidence.

First, tangible artefacts functioned as transfer devices. Participants and trainers repeatedly worked with barrier maps, role descriptions, canvases, Mini-CVs, task boards, posters, service flows, prototypes and pitch notes. These artefacts reduced abstraction, supported peer review and

Table 5.
Youth innovation lab and policy-linkage outcomes

Activity	Cohort and feedback	Main outputs	Selected final signals
Innovation Lab #1 Tirana	Same 20 Albania/Kosovo youth; 80 forms	Problem statements, canvases, campaign messages, paper prototypes and pitches	18 very satisfied + 2 satisfied; 20 excellent trainer/experience ratings; 20 definitely recommend
Innovation Lab #2 Kosovo	Same 20 Albania/Kosovo youth; 80 forms	Kanban/task allocation, digital storytelling, budget/micro-finance work and refined pitches	15 very satisfied + 5 satisfied; 16 excellent trainers; 16 definitely + 4 probably recommend
Policy Roundtable #1 Berat	20 local + 2 ToT staff; 22 forms	Recommendations on digital learning, volunteering, youth participation and prototype-policy linkage	All highest ratings for purpose, dialogue, facilitation and satisfaction; 22 Youthpass certificates

Note. Innovation-lab results represent immediate self-reported learning and implementation outputs, not verified long-term employability outcomes.

provided evidence that could be reused in later sessions or portfolios.

Second, digital facilitation required more scaffolding than other modules. Digital content was consistently valued, but the micro-pilots recorded a partial-understanding response in Albania and a negative-understanding response in Kosovo. It also generated the lowest daily mean in ToT #2 and repeated requests for screenshots, live demonstrations, simpler tools and offline fallbacks. The pattern suggests that digital inclusion cannot be achieved by introducing more tools; it requires fewer tools, clearer purposes and supported practice.

Third, cross-border mixed teams supported collaboration and intercultural learning. The youth cohort remained together across the two labs, allowing the second activity to build on relationships and shared project language established in the first. ToT #2 similarly treated cross-cultural group dynamics as a facilitation competence rather than an incidental benefit of travel.

Fourth, reflection and recognition reinforced continuity. Daily forms made pacing and transfer problems visible, while Youthpass sessions helped participants connect activities to competence language. Anonymised examples in the reports show participants moving from an abstract understanding of inclusion to a clearer distinction between equality and equity, from a hobby or idea to a business-model next step, and from generic CV advice to a more concrete account of skills and evidence.

Fifth, the feedback loop produced observable design decisions. The pathway did not remove core content after partial responses. Instead, it changed pacing, examples, visual supports, practice time and templates. This is consistent with adaptation that preserves function while modifying form.

6. Discussion

6.1 Interpretation through implementation outcomes

The evidence supports strong acceptability. Across ToTs, micro-pilots, cascades, youth labs and the roundtable, satisfaction and quality ratings were overwhelmingly positive, and response completion was nearly universal. Acceptability is not equivalent to effectiveness, but it matters in voluntary youth and community settings because continued participation and willingness to replicate are prerequisites for later outcomes.

Perceived appropriateness was also strong. Participants repeatedly described the content as relevant to youth work, employability, volunteering, digital participation and local policy. The strongest modules were those that connected concepts to immediate tasks, such as role pathways, CV evidence, canvases, prototypes and pitches. This aligns with EntreComp's emphasis on transforming ideas into value and with training-transfer research that stresses similarity between training tasks and application contexts (Bacigalupo et al., 2016; Baldwin & Ford, 1988).

Feasibility is supported by completion of the planned sequence, near-complete feedback

coverage, successful local replication and continuity of the youth cohort across two labs. The cascade target was exceeded. However, feasibility was conditional rather than automatic. Dense digital content, short one-day formats and concept-heavy modules required adaptation. The evidence therefore supports a practical conclusion: the pathway is feasible when delivery includes active facilitation, simple evidence systems, protected practice time and local support.

Early adoption and transfer are visible in the movement from ToT to micro-pilot, cascade and lab co-facilitation. These are stronger indicators than end-of-course confidence alone because participants and organisations actually delivered activities. Yet the analysis cannot determine the fidelity or quality of every facilitator interaction. Nor can it establish sustainability. The alumni community, final manual (RiseUp-WB Consortium, 2026a), hackathon and mentorship are designed to support continuation, but those outcomes require later observation.

6.2 Fidelity and adaptation

The micro-pilot stage was central to balancing fidelity and adaptation. The Albania and Kosovo tests identified different levels of understanding without requiring a different curriculum for each country. Subsequent changes concerned the form of delivery: examples, sequencing, visualisation, time, templates and digital demonstrations. The underlying functions – inclusion, safe volunteer practice, accessible digital participation, creative engagement, employability and evaluation – were retained.

This pattern is compatible with the FRAME principle that adaptations should be documented according to their timing, rationale and level (Wiltsey Stirman et al., 2019). In RiseUp-WB, adaptations occurred before and during broader implementation, were motivated by participant understanding and local transfer, and were made by trainers and partner organisations. The strongest practical rule emerging from the study is to define the non-negotiable function of each activity before selecting the tool or format. A paper Kanban board can serve the same shared-workflow function as an online board; a storyboard can test a digital-service concept before technical development; and a printed Mini-CV can make competence evidence visible before it is transferred to an online profile.

The results also show that adaptation should not be equated with simplification in the sense of lowering expectations. Participants continued to produce outputs and make decisions. The adaptation reduced unnecessary cognitive and technical load so that the central task – collaborative planning, safe participation, problem solving or communication – remained visible.

The distinction between function and format is also pedagogical. Read through Bećirović's (2023) account of digital pedagogy, a paper-first exercise can reduce an entry barrier while preserving collaborative planning. It cannot, however, demonstrate independent operation of the corresponding digital tool. Consistent with the separation of usefulness, satisfaction and system success in Bećirović (2024), future evaluation should record both the task completed and the degree of support required. This would make the boundary between accessible participation and demonstrated digital performance more explicit.

6.3 Organisational-to-youth transfer

A distinctive feature of the pathway is its attempt to bridge organisational capacity and direct youth learning. Many projects train staff and young people in parallel, leaving the relationship between the two strands implicit. Here, ToT-trained staff were expected to test content, deliver local workshops and co-facilitate youth labs. The pathway therefore treated staff development as an implementation mechanism for youth outcomes rather than as a separate output.

The two labs provide the clearest early transferevidence. Youth teams moved from problem definition to project management, budgeting, communication, prototypes and pitches, while facilitators applied group-management, inclusive-participation, reflection and digital-support methods developed through WP2. This does not show that every competence was transferred with equal strength. The persistent digital-scaffolding signal indicates that co-facilitators need continued technical and pedagogical support. Nevertheless, the repeated cohort, tangible outputs and daily feedback created a credible chain from trainer learning to youth-facing practice.

Co-facilitation also appears to have distributed expertise effectively. EU partners contributed specialised inputs in innovation, digital tools and creative communication, while

local partners provided language support, contextual examples, safe-space management and continuity. This arrangement reduced the risk that external expertise would remain detached from local implementation, but it requires clear role allocation and preparation to avoid duplication or inconsistent instructions.

The cooperation findings are compatible with, but do not test, the mechanisms discussed by Bećirović et al. (2022). Shared prototypes can encourage interdependence, while assigned roles and peer explanation can make responsibility visible. The present documentation does not measure individual accountability or interpersonal skills as validated constructs. A useful next step would therefore be to examine who performs each task and whether every participant can explain the team's choices, rather than treating a completed group product as evidence of equal individual learning.

6.4 Employability and competence recognition

The project treated employability as the ability to recognise and communicate evidence of competence, not only as preparation for a specific vacancy. Mini-CVs, portfolios, project artefacts, role descriptions and pitches helped participants name teamwork, initiative, digital collaboration and problem solving. Youthpass added a structured reflection framework linked to European key competences (Council of the European Union, 2018; Youthpass, n.d.-a).

This approach is consistent with non-formal learning research but should be interpreted within the limits identified by Valiente et al. (2020). Better self-presentation and entrepreneurial confidence do not remove structural constraints such as labour demand, regional inequality, migration pressures or access to finance. The appropriate claim is that the pathway created practice and evidence that may strengthen employability and civic agency. Whether this leads to employment, enterprise creation or institutional change requires follow-up data.

The policy-roundtable recommendations suggest a useful continuation: municipalities, employers and youth organisations should recognise not only attendance but demonstrable outputs and roles. A prototype, facilitation plan, budget, task board or documented volunteering

role can make non-formal learning more concrete than a generic participation certificate alone.

Polz and Bećirović (2022) provide an adjacent competence-based rationale for connecting stated outcomes with tasks and implementation support. In this case, the relevant implication is to pair each claimed competence with an observable contribution and a reflective explanation. A team prototype may document participation in problem solving; it does not automatically establish the same competence level for every member. Individual accounts of decisions, revisions and support received would strengthen the educational value of the portfolio without overstating what Youthpass certifies.

6.5 Implications for cross-border youth work in the Western Balkans

The Albania-Kosovo sequence suggests that cross-border capacity building benefits from continuity. Repeated participation allowed the second ToT and second innovation lab to build on shared terminology, relationships and outputs. The approach also enabled local difference to become a learning resource: the Kosovo micro-pilot exposed needs for greater scaffolding that were less visible in the Albania pilot, while the cascade workshops showed different emphasis and practical expectations across locations.

Cross-border work can nevertheless magnify barriers. English proficiency, confidence with technology, travel, institutional roles and facilitation norms vary. The evidence supports plain language, bilingual or visual resources, mixed teams, explicit ground rules, multiple participation modes and offline alternatives. These are not peripheral accessibility measures; they are part of implementation quality.

This interpretation is consistent with the participation emphasis of Bećirović and Polz (2024) and the language-access issue raised by Preis et al. (2023). For RiseUp-WB, it points to a practical distinction between bringing national groups together and ensuring that participants can contribute on comparable terms. The records support discussion of facilitated cooperation and accessible instructions, not a claim that intercultural attitudes or language proficiency improved. Later evaluation could examine whose ideas entered team decisions and whether participants experienced barriers to contributing.

The emerging policy link is also relevant. Youth innovation can remain isolated if municipalities and local organisations do not have a structured process for reviewing ideas. The first roundtable created an interface between young people, youth workers, municipal actors and EU-partner staff. Future analysis should examine whether prototypes or recommendations receive endorsement, resources or pilot opportunities rather than only presentation time.

7. Proposed Model: The Iterative Capacity-to-Innovation Pathway

The findings support an Iterative Capacity-to-Innovation Pathway (ICIP) with six stages and a continuous feedback loop.

Stage 1 – Build foundations. A ToT establishes common concepts, safe-space standards, facilitation methods and basic digital and employability tools. Participants practise as learners and begin designing as facilitators.

Stage 2 – Test locally. Short micro-pilots expose whether content remains clear and useful in a condensed local setting. The purpose is diagnostic: identify barriers, partial understanding and contextual needs before scaling.

Stage 3 – Deepen and adapt. A second ToT integrates micro-pilot findings, adds advanced practice and requires participants

to produce session plans, demonstrations, evaluation tools and cascade outlines.

Stage 4 – Multiply. Local cascade workshops allow partner organisations to deliver the approach to wider groups, verify local demand and collect evidence on practical usefulness and remaining improvement priorities.

Stage 5 – Apply with young people. ToT-trained staff co-facilitate innovation labs in which youth teams produce tangible outputs. Organisational learning is tested through real group processes rather than self-report alone.

Stage 6 – Link to policy and scale. Youth outputs and learning are brought into policy dialogue, cross-border hackathons, mentorship and potential local pilots. This stage connects competence development to institutions and opportunities.

The model is iterative because each stage generates evidence for the next and may require return to an earlier stage. A digital activity that proves too complex in a cascade workshop should be simplified before the next youth lab. A prototype that fails to communicate value should return to problem definition and user feedback. The pathway therefore combines progression with correction.

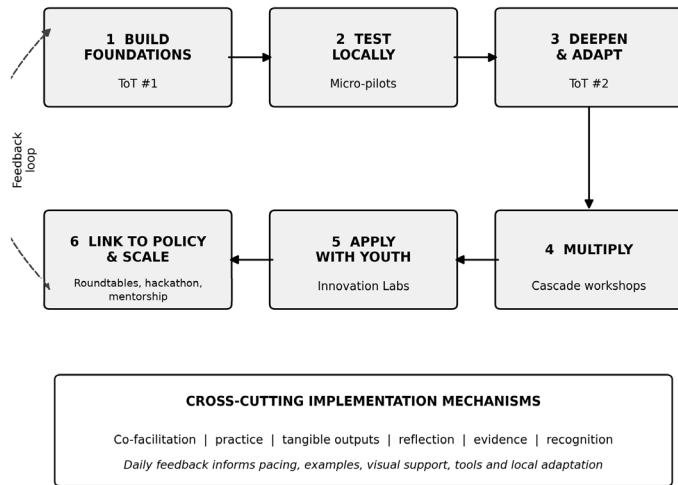
Table 6.

Core functions and adaptable delivery features in the Iterative Capacity-to-Innovation Pathway

Core implementation function	Non-negotiable requirement	Adaptable delivery feature
Inclusive and safe participation	Ground rules, barrier awareness, safeguarding and meaningful roles	Language, group size, visual support, room format and participation mode
Practice and tangible production	Participants create an observable output and revise it	Canvas, poster, storyboard, service flow, task board or digital prototype
Digital inclusion	Clear purpose, safe use, guided practice and accessible alternative	Specific platform, device arrangement, screenshot guide or paper fallback
Entrepreneurial learning	Problem-user-value logic, testing and iteration	Business canvas, social project plan, campaign, service or venture concept
Transfer and multiplication	Real application opportunity after training with feedback	Micro-pilot length, cascade topic, local case and co-facilitator composition
Reflection and recognition	Structured reflection linked to evidence of learning	Youthpass, portfolio, Mini-CV, project page, pitch notes or reflection card
Monitoring and adaptation	Response coverage, improvement prompt and documented decision	Survey platform, daily form, exit ticket, debrief or artefact review

Note. The distinction protects programme functions while allowing cultural, logistical and digital adaptation.

Figure 1.
Iterative Capacity-to-Innovation Pathway (ICIP)



Note. The completed evidence in this study extends through the first policy roundtable. The cross-border hackathon and mentorship are shown as planned scaling stages and are not analysed as completed outcomes.

8. Practical Implications

Organisations wishing to reproduce the pathway should begin by specifying implementation functions rather than compiling a long list of topics. For each module, the programme should define what participants must be able to do, what artefact will demonstrate that ability, and how the artefact will be tested in a later activity.

At least one real application opportunity should follow each ToT quickly. Micro-pilots can be short, but they should use a structured feedback instrument and record what was changed as a result. ToT #2 or follow-up mentoring should respond to those findings explicitly.

Digital facilitation should use a small number of tool families and one live demonstration per family. Screenshot guidance, clear task instructions, device-sharing options and an offline equivalent should be prepared in advance. Digital inclusion is improved by reducing cognitive and technical load, not by maximising the number of platforms introduced.

Cascade workshops should protect practice time. The repeated request for more practical examples indicates that demonstration should be followed by production, peer review and revision.

Local cases should be selected with participants, especially for volunteering pathways, public services and employability.

Monitoring should be proportionate. Ten closed questions can provide useful daily signals when hosts verify response counts, but they should be complemented by at least one structured improvement prompt and a short facilitator debrief. Reports should distinguish participation instances from unique participants and immediate perceived learning from demonstrated later application.

Finally, competence recognition should be linked to evidence. Youthpass reflection is stronger when participants can point to a prototype, task board, facilitation plan, pitch, policy recommendation or documented role. Recognition should close the learning cycle rather than appear only as a certificate ceremony.

9. Implementation Quality Considerations

The study identifies several operational quality standards. First, public reports should contain only aggregate data, while signatures, contact details and individual forms remain restricted. Second, response completion should be checked on the day of the activity because retrospective collection is less reliable. Third, adaptation decisions should be logged with the evidence that prompted them. Fourth, the same terminology should be used across agendas, feedback forms, reports and Youthpass reflection so that the implementation chain is traceable.

Quality also requires attention to burden. High response coverage was achieved through short forms, but repeated questionnaires can become routine and reduce reflection. Alternating closed daily items with facilitated debriefs, exit tickets or artefact review can preserve usefulness. For future stages, objective indicators such as prototype completion, use of project-management tools, mentor follow-up and stakeholder response should complement satisfaction data.

Public transparency and double-blind research also require careful separation. Project results can be openly disseminated while respondent-level evidence remains protected. A blinded manuscript should not contain names or identifying metadata, even when the project itself is named because it is the object of study.

10. Limitations

The findings should be interpreted with six limitations. First, the study is based primarily on programme-monitoring instruments designed for quality improvement, not validated research scales. Differences in wording and response categories limit comparison and preclude pooled statistical analysis.

Second, most outcomes are self-reported and immediate. Positive ratings may reflect social desirability, gratitude, group atmosphere or the novelty of international activities. The study does not include independent observation of facilitation quality, objective digital-skill tests, business performance or employment outcomes.

Third, participation instances are not unique-person counts. The same ToT and youth cohorts took part in repeated stages, which is a strength for continuity but means the 171 participation instances cannot be interpreted as 171 independent beneficiaries. Individual-level longitudinal linkage was not used because the analysis relied on aggregate data.

Fourth, the qualitative synthesis is based on selected anonymised comments and report-level findings rather than complete raw transcripts. A single researcher conducted the synthesis, and no inter-coder reliability assessment was possible.

Fifth, the researcher had professional involvement in the programme. Transparent reporting of partial and negative signals, aggregate data and non-causal language reduces but does not eliminate the risk of favourable interpretation.

Sixth, the observation period ends before the cross-border hackathon, two-month mentorship, later policy roundtables and final sustainability outputs. The paper therefore describes early implementation and transfer readiness. Future research should examine whether prototypes progress, whether cascade facilitators continue to deliver activities, whether policy recommendations are acted upon and whether participants report sustained competence or employability changes.

The external education literature introduced in this article also has transfer limits. Much of it concerns formal schooling, EFL classrooms or university e-learning, rather than non-formal youth work. Those sources inform pedagogical interpretation and future evaluation priorities;

they do not supply missing participant-level measurements, establish that the programme tested their theoretical models, or justify generalising their effect estimates to Albania and Kosovo.

11. Conclusion

RiseUp-WB provides early evidence that a capacity-building programme can create a traceable pathway from trainer preparation to local testing, replication, youth innovation and policy dialogue. The strongest evidence concerns implementation rather than impact: activities were completed, participation and feedback coverage were high, local partners replicated the approach, the same youth cohort progressed across two labs, and feedback generated concrete delivery adaptations.

The study also identifies a consistent caution. Digital and concept-heavy content required slower pacing, live examples, visual guidance and offline alternatives. High satisfaction did not remove the need for continued mentoring or practical examples. The pathway worked best when participants produced tangible artefacts, practised in mixed teams, received feedback and connected their work to competence recognition.

The proposed Iterative Capacity-to-Innovation Pathway offers a transferable design for youth organisations and municipalities: build foundations, test locally, deepen and adapt, multiply, apply with young people, and link outputs to institutions and scale. Its core value is not a fixed sequence of slides or digital tools, but a disciplined feedback loop between training and real use. Longer-term evidence is still required to determine whether the pathway contributes to sustained facilitation practice, youth employability, enterprise development or policy change.

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Ethics and Data Availability Statement

The manuscript uses aggregate and anonymised monitoring and evaluation data generated through routine project implementation. No personal names, signatures, contact details, individual feedback records or copies of certificates are included. Formal research-ethics committee approval was not sought because no new participants were recruited and no identifiable research data were processed for this secondary implementation analysis. Consent and data-protection records are retained by the responsible project partners in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation and project procedures. The public project reports and aggregate deliverables underlying the analysis are available through the RiseUp-WB Results and Deliverables repository at <https://www.riseupwb.eu/results>. Raw attendance lists, respondent-level feedback records, consent documentation and individual Youthpass files are not publicly available because they contain personal data. Access, where legally and contractually permissible, is subject to approval by the relevant data-controlling project partner.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author had professional involvement in the design, implementation and reporting of the RiseUp-WB project. This relationship is disclosed as a potential non-commercial conflict of interest. The manuscript reports aggregate evidence, retains negative and partial-response signals, and avoids causal claims.

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