M.I.Y.O

Measuring Impact: with, for and by Youth Organisations

Phase 2 Summary Report and Recommendations

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1. INTRODUCTION

We are proud to present the second phase report of the MIYO project. This phase marks a significant leap forward in our efforts to empower youth organizations to independently assess their impact. Unlike the first phase, which heavily relied on professional research support, this phase entrusts full responsibility for data collection and analysis to youth workers and volunteer consultants. This approach is reflected in the work of Scouterna Sweden, Scouting North Macedonia, and YMCA Netherlands, who have successfully carried out this task with the help of trained consultants.

A key innovation in this phase is the independent leadership of the youth organizations in conducting their own impact studies. This shift offers a more realistic picture of what can be expected when youth organizations evaluate their impact on the personal development of young people using the MIYO toolkit, without the assistance of a professional research team.

In preparation for this phase, the Maynooth University team, MIYO academic partner, diligently refined the methodology, drawing from the experiences and feedback of the first pilot partners. These refinements have resulted in questionnaires and data collection which are better aligned to the needs and capacities of youth organizations. The MIYO toolkit, a central resource in this process, has provided our pilot partners with the necessary tools to independently assess and understand their impact.

This report highlights the results from the second phase pilot studies, offering valuable insights into various aspects of youth development within the SPICES framework—Social, Physical, Intellectual, Character, Emotional, and Spiritual development.

As we delve into the findings of this phase, we celebrate the power of youth-led research and its potential to transform how youth organizations comprehend and communicate their impact. This report is not just a collection of data; it is a story of empowerment, innovation, and the potential of youth workers to lead the way in understanding and enhancing youth development.

2. MIYO METHODOLOGY REFINEMENT

Following the first pilot studies, and in collaboration with our partners, the Maynooth team made a series of enhancements to the data collection protocols. These adjustments aim to refine our methodological tools for the future impact studies. This chapter outlines the modifications to the survey instrument and our approach to focus group discussions, with specific examples to illustrate these changes.

MIYO Phase 2 Survey

The survey for Phase 2, while retaining the overall structure of Phase 1, includes several key improvements:

* ❖ **Survey Structure:** The survey has two parts - Section 1 for demographic data and Section 2 with 36 Likert statements related to six SPICES dimensions, totaling 45 questions.

* ❖ **Response Options:** Most questions require a single response, with an exception of Q9 (religion), which allows multiple responses.

* ❖ **Wording and Inclusivity:** Adjustments in wording cater to various settings, including Scouting, YMCA, or other youth organizations. For instance, a question might be rephrased to use the term "Scouting/YMCA/youth organization" as members see fit.

* ❖ **Expanded Likert Scale:** The Likert scale in Section 2 is expanded to a 10-point scale to capture a more nuanced range of responses.

* ❖ **Clarity and Translation:** Some statements have been rephrased for ease of understanding and translation, such as in Q3(a), which now reads "I am confident in taking the lead in group or team activities" / "I'm comfortable stepping up and leading in group or team activities."

Section 1 includes refined demographic questions and a new question on the frequency of participation in youth programs. In Section 2, while the core layout is retained, specific changes in wording have been made to enhance clarity. To view the revised survey in its entirety, please refer to the MIYO Toolkit.

MIYO Phase 2 Focus Groups

The focus group methodology for Phase 2 has been thoroughly revised:

- ❖ **Gender Dynamics**: Based on Phase 1 experiences, it's now recommended to organize separate focus groups for females, males, and a combination of both genders.

- ❖ **SPICES Framework Emphasis:** The discussion guide concentrates on the SPICES framework. For example, prompts might include "How does your experience in Scouting/YMCA impact you socially, physically, intellectually?" to delve into these dimensions.

- ❖ **Projective Techniques:** Techniques like hypothetical case studies or creative exercises are encouraged. For instance, designing a recruitment poster for Scouting/YMCA could be used to explore what young people learn about themselves.

- ❖ **Facilitation Skills:** The importance of effective facilitation is highlighted to manage group dynamics and encourage diverse views.

MIYO Toolkit includes a comprehensive guide for conducting focus groups, which highlights these refinements in detail.

In summary, these methodological enhancements, detailed through specific examples, demonstrate our commitment to enhancing our tools to produce high quality, youth work relevant research evidence. By implementing these changes, we ensure that the data collected is not only systematic and reliable but also rich and insightful.

3. SECOND PILOT STUDIES

In this chapter, we explore the unique experiences and outcomes of the pilot studies conducted by Scouterna Sweden, Scouting North Macedonia, and YMCA Netherlands. This chapter provides an in-depth look at how each organization implemented the MIYO toolkit, detailing their methods of data collection, participant involvement, and the key findings of their respective studies.

The analyses offer valuable insights into the practical application of the toolkit and its impact on understanding youth development within the diverse contexts of these organizations.

Physical Development

Social Development

Intellectual Development

Spiritual Development

Characther Development

Emotional Development

3.1 Scouterna, Sweden

In November 2023, Scouterna successfully piloted the MIYO methodology in Sweden, which included the organization of four focus groups and the deployment of an online survey among a selected group of Scouts.

The survey, translated into Swedish, included an additional question clarifying how and why respondents' answers would be handled and shared within the MIYO project. Although the translation process was generally straightforward, adapting certain questions, such as the one about the main household income earner, posed challenges due to differences in the Swedish context.

Scouterna utilized its standard communication tool, Ungapped, to distribute the survey. This choice was made for efficiency and to ensure familiarity for the members, as well as to comply with GDPR rules regarding data collection and storage. The survey targeted a randomly selected sample of 600 individuals from the total population of 14-18-year-olds, which amounted to 7067 in the central membership system. This sampling approach aimed to represent the overall population and was specifically designed to include a greater proportion of individuals who identify with non-binary or alternative gender identities, in addition to those who identify as male or female.

The survey was open for 14 days, and two reminders were sent out. However, the response rate was only 12%. The low participation was attributed to the survey's length, possibly unsuitable format for the target group, and issues with parental email addresses being the primary contact for many Scouts.

Since there were no central Scouterna events in late fall, a special event was created to facilitate the focus groups. This approach not only provided a suitable setting for recordings but also allowed for additional activities to better understand the needs and wants of this age group within scouting. The focus groups included 30 young people aged 14-18 from nine different Scout groups, with a mix of participants from both the capital and smaller cities. The groups, which were gender mixed, consisted of 6-9 scouts each, reflecting the inclusive nature of scouting and education in Sweden.

During the focus groups, volunteers at the national level facilitated discussions. To engage participants in discussing the SPICES framework, a creative method was employed: a "poster" with an illustration of two young people at a campfire, surrounded by statements reflecting how scouting impacted them. This visual aid helped stimulate conversation about various aspects of scouting.

The sessions were recorded using Dictaphones and filmed with phones. The transcription and translation into English were initially done by software and subsequently verified by a person, ensuring accuracy and authenticity of the data.
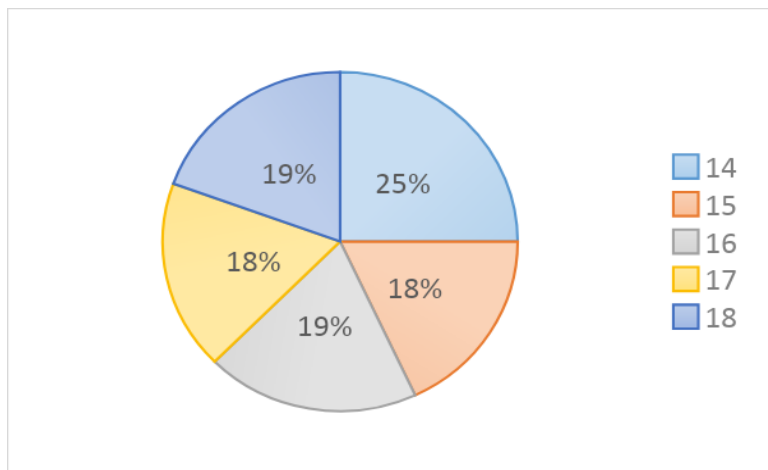
3.1.1 Survey Results

Section 1: Demographic and contextual information

Sample size and age range

In the Swedish online survey, we received a total of 72 responses, representing a 12% response rate from the selected sample. The age range of the respondents was 14 to 18 years old. Notably, the response rate among 14-year-olds was marginally higher compared to the other age groups, which exhibited relatively equal response rates. These details are further illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Age of respondents

Gender

The survey data shows a significant skew towards respondents identifying as females, who comprised 42% of the total responses. In contrast, those identifying as males accounted for 24% of the respondents. Additionally, 3.4% of participants described themselves as belonging to a gender category other than male or female, and another 3.4% chose not to disclose their gender. These gender distribution details are depicted in Figure 2.
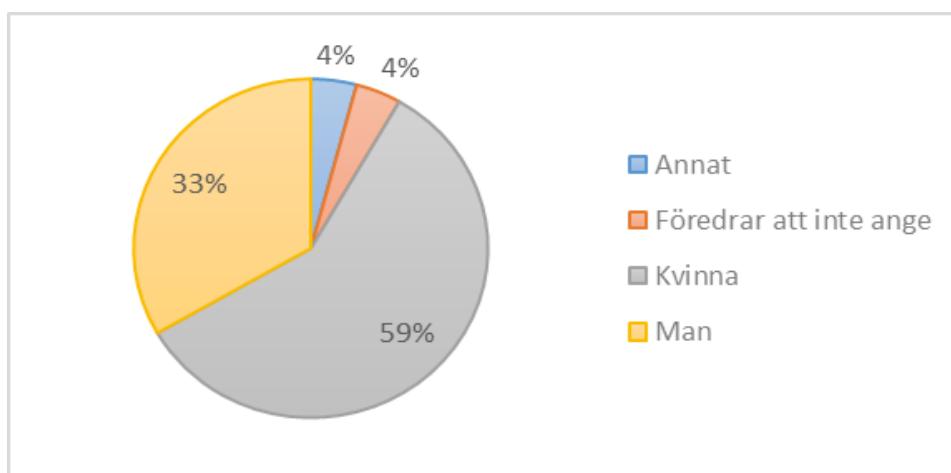

Figure 2: Gender of respondents

Duration of involvement in Scouting

The majority of survey respondents in Sweden reported having extensive experience in scouting. Notably, a substantial portion (32%) indicated that they have been involved in scouting for nine to ten years. In contrast, only a small fraction of respondents, about 4%, reported being involved in scouting for less than one year. These details regarding the duration of scouting involvement among the respondents are further illustrated in Figure 3.
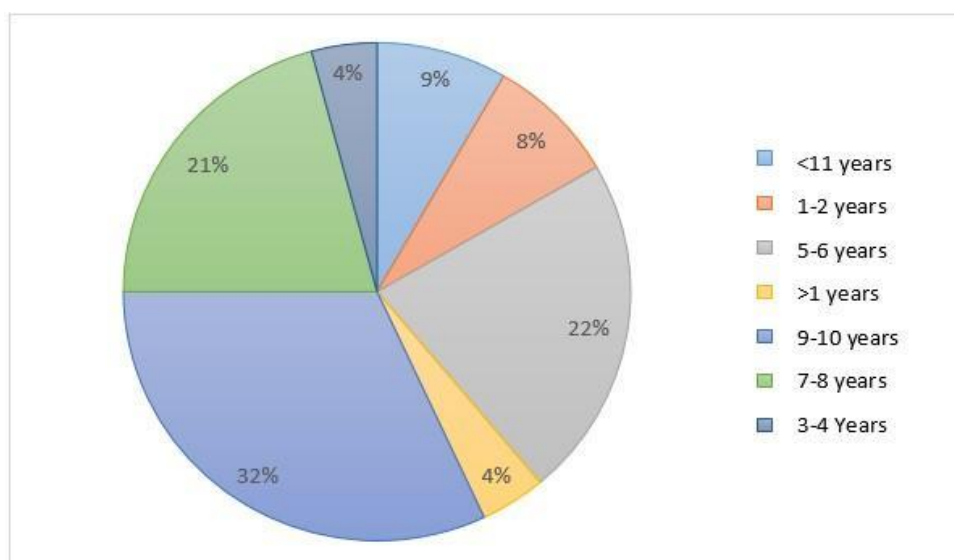

Figure 3: Duration of involvement in scouting

Area of residence

Half of the survey respondents in Sweden resided in smaller cities or suburban areas of larger cities. Combined with those living in larger cities, this group accounts for 89% of the total respondents. Consequently, only a small percentage of participants, approximately 11%, reported living in rural or countryside areas.

Row Labels	Reponses	%
A farm or home in the countryside	4	5,56%
A country village	7	9,72%
The suburbs or outskirts of a big city	23	31,94%
A town or a small city	26	36,11%
A big city	12	16,67%
Grand Total	**72**	**100%**

Table 1: Area of residence

Long standing illness or disability

Out of the total respondents in the Swedish survey, six individuals reported having a longstanding illness or disability. This specific demographic detail is visually represented in Figure 4.
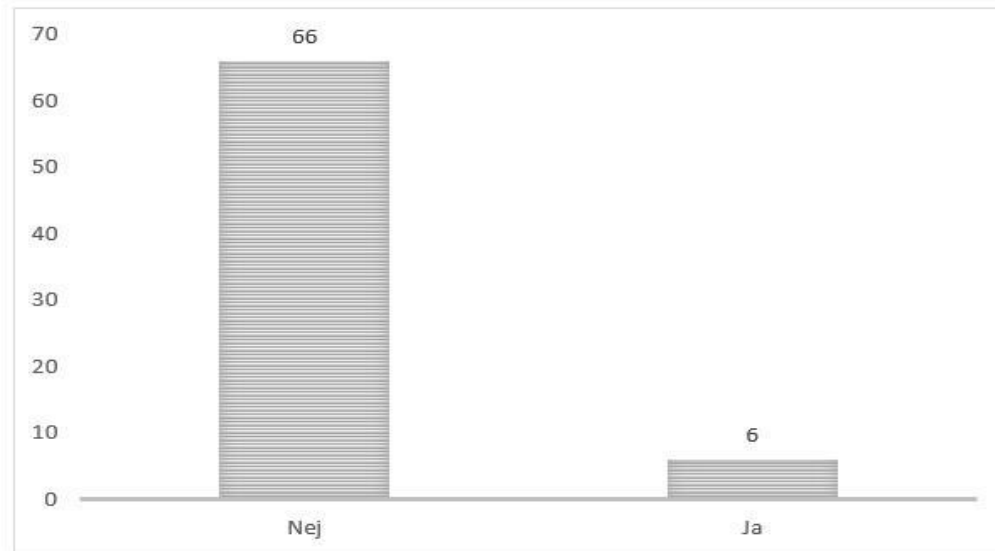

Figure 4: Long-standing illness or disabilities

Religion

Among the 72 respondents, 30 individuals, representing a significant portion, indicated that they do not affiliate with any particular religion. Of those who reported a religious affiliation, the majority identified as Christian, accounting for 31% of the total respondents. This breakdown of religious affiliations among the survey participants is detailed in Table 2.

Row Labels	Reponses	%
(no answer)	30	41,67%
Judaism	11	15,28%
Christianity	31	43,06%
Grand Total	**72**	**100,00%**

Table 2: Religion

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Occupation of main income earners

Regarding the occupation of the principal income earner in their families, 28 respondents identified this person as being in professions such as "doctor, engineer, teacher…", while 21 respondents indicated occupations like "administrator, business executive…". Together, these two categories comprise 68% of the total responses. Other occupational groups, specifically A, D, K, J, G, and E, each had only 1 to 4 respondents. This distribution of occupations among the principal income earners of the respondents' families is depicted in Figure 5.
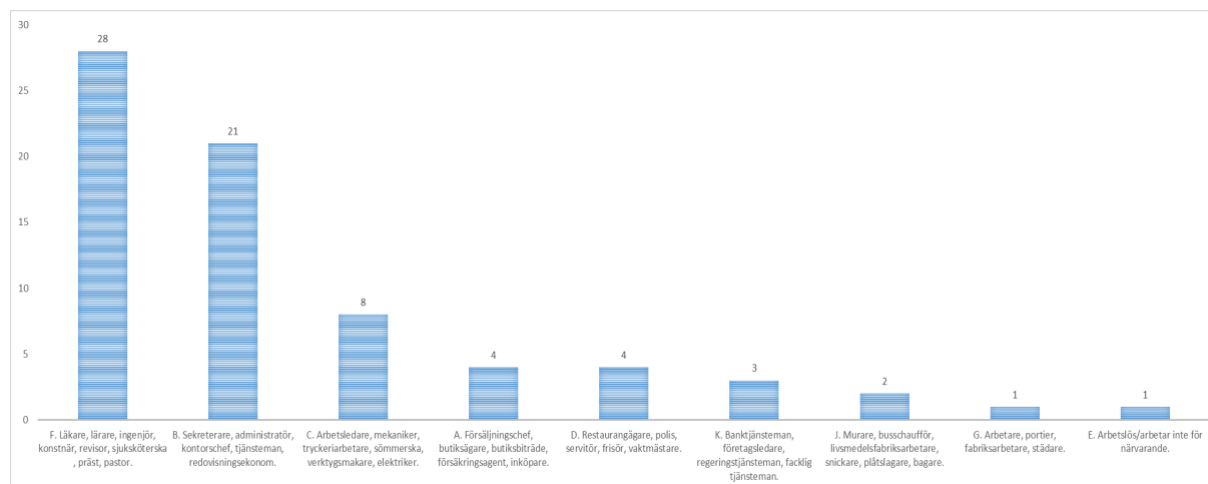

Figure 5: Occupation of principal income earner

It is important to note that most young people in Sweden have two working parents. When respondents were asked to categorize the occupation of the other income earner in their household, the responses were somewhat more dispersed, especially in groups A and E. Despite this variation, the overall distribution pattern was similar to that of the principal income earners. Notably, 9 respondents chose not to answer this question.
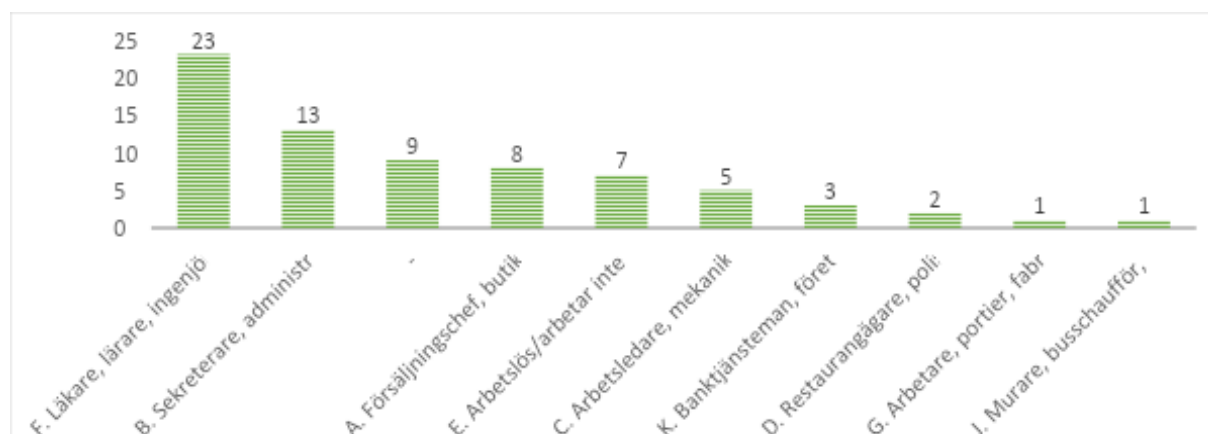

Figure 6: Occupation of the second income earner

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Section 2: Perceptions of Self and of Scouting

In the second part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to evaluate a series of statements related to certain characteristics or personal qualities. They provided a score ranging from 1 to 10 for each statement, where 1 signified "not at all" and 10 indicated "absolutely true." Following each statement, there was a linked question asking whether they believed scouting contributed to their development in that specific quality or characteristic. The results of these self-perception and scouting-related evaluations are detailed in Table 3.

A & B Statements by male/female - SWEDEN	Female A	Male A	Female B	Male B
1a I try to live my life in a healthy way (diet, sleep, exercise).	7,66	7,19	7,37	7,00
2a I am curious about what is going on around me and enjoy discovering new things.	8,44	7,72	8,14	7,78
3a I am comfortable stepping up and leading in group activities.	7,97	6,88	8,17	7,53
4a There are people in my life with whom I feel comfortable sharing my feelings.	8,82	8,24	8,31	6,35
5a I am aware of how my behaviour (my actions and my lifestyle/way of life) affects my mood and emotions.	8,06	6,65	8,06	4,93
6a When I face challenges and difficulties, I draw strength from my belief that life has a purpose.	6,54	5,75	5,40	5,40
7a I am aware of how what I do and say may affect other people's feelings and emotions.	9,14	8,06	7,38	6,25
8a There are people in my daily life whom I admire and respect.	9,03	8,69	8,18	7,13
9a I have a sense of respect and wonder for nature.	8,94	8,31	8,83	7,63
10a I have a good understanding of the human body and how it works.	7,94	7,53	6,44	4,82
11a I can determine which sources of information are reliable and which are not.	7,69	7,44	5,16	3,13
12a I see the value for me in having a quiet place for reflection, away from the usual activities at school, work or in the family.	8,19	7,67	7,16	6,56
13a I feel confident in thinking for myself and solving problems.	8,28	7,56	8,37	6,14
14a Before I act, I try to think about how my actions might affect others.	7,41	6,19	7,35	6,17
15a I choose to engage in unpaid activities in my community for the benefit of others or the environment.	7,25	4,50	7,51	5,59
16a I think my friends would say that I am consistent in what I believe, what I say, and what I do.	6,85	5,82	6,31	5,35
17a I choose to engage in physical activity (other than at school) at least once a week.	7,64	9,12	6,36	6,18
18a I believe that everyone should be respected and treated equally, regardless of where they come from or who they are.	9,67	9,29	8,97	7,18
Total	**8,02**	**7.36**	**7,36**	**6,19**

Table 3: A and B Statements –mean scores for females and males

In analyzing the responses to the A statements, it was observed that females scored higher than males in all but one item (question 17). The most notable differences were seen in the following questions:

- 3a "comfortable leading group activities" with a difference of 1.09
- 7a "aware of the effect on others" with a difference of 1.08
- 14a "aware of my actions" with a difference of 1.22
- 16a "I am consistent" with a difference of 1.03
- The largest gap was in 15a "I engage in unpaid activities for the community," showing a difference of 2.75.

Male respondents scored higher only in:

- 17a "engage in physical activity" with a score of 9.12.

For respondents who identified with genders other than male or female, or preferred not to disclose their gender, each group had only 3 respondents. Due to the large variability in their responses across different statements, their data was not included in the gender-based analysis.

Regarding the B statements, which assess the perceived benefits of Scouting in relation to each quality or characteristic, females scored higher in all items. The most significant differences were observed in:

- 4B: "I know some people I can share my feelings with through scouting," with a difference of 1.96.
- 5B: "I have learned about the link between behaviour and feelings through Scouting," with a difference of 3.13.
- 10B: "Participating in Scouting has added to my understanding of the human body and how it works," with a difference of 1.62.
- 11B: "What I have learned through Scouting helps me to tell the difference between reliable and unreliable sources of information," with a difference of 2.03.
- 18B: "Scouting has helped to shape my belief that everyone should be treated the same," with a difference of 1.79.

Benefits of Scouting

Table 4 showcases the rankings assigned by Swedish scouts to their B statements, reflecting their perceptions of how participation in scouting has benefited them. The statement that received the highest ranking was number 9, "sense of respect and wonder at the natural world," with an average score of 8.84. Conversely, the statement with the lowest ranking was number 11, "ability to discern reliable information sources," scoring an average of 4.49.

Rank order of B statements	
9 (b)Scouting develops and sustains my sense of respect and wonder at the natural world	8,48
18(b) Scouting has helped to shape my belief that everyone should be treated the same.	8,47
2(b) Scouting provides opportunities to satisfy my curiosity and learn new things.	8,05
8(b) I have met some people that I admire and respect scouting.	8
3(b) has developed my confidence in my leadership skills.	7,93
4(b) I know some people I can share my feelings with through scouting.	7,77
13(b) Scouting contributed to the development of my thinking and problem-solving skills.	7,76
1(b) Scouting encourages and supports me to live healthily.	7,37
12(b) Scouting provides me with a quiet place/space for reflection/	7,1
7(b) Scouting has helped me to become aware of how I can affect other people's feelings and emotions.	7,09
14(b) Scouting encourages me to consider the effect of my actions on others.	7,05
15(b) Scouting enables and supports me to engage in activities for the benefit of others or the environment.	6,96
17(b) Scouting offers chances and support to engage in regular physical activity.	6,29
5(b) I have learned about the link between behaviour and feelings through Scouting	6,15
16(b) I have learned through Scouting the importance of being consistent in what I believe, what I say and what I do./	6,1
6(b) Participating in Scouting strengthens me in the belief that life has meaning	5,91
10(b) Participating in Scouting has added to my understanding of the human body and how it works.	5,89
11(b) What I have learned through Scouting helps me to tell the difference between reliable and unreliable sources of information	4,49

Table 4: B statements

SPICES Framework

The different 18 areas of the SPICES framework consist of a couplet and are found within the survey.

Figure 7 presents the findings for Sweden. In all cases respondents give a higher score on the A statement than the B statement even though the difference is quite small for Social development.
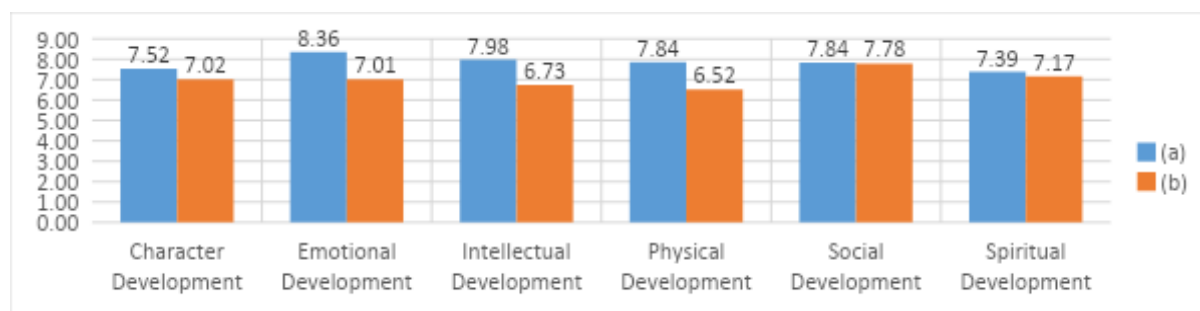

Figure 7 SPICES categories

SPICES dimension and duration of involvement in Scouting

Table 5 illustrates the mean scores for the SPICES dimensions (Social, Physical, Intellectual, Character, Emotional, Spiritual) in the Swedish survey, categorized by the respondents' length of involvement in the scout movement. These scores are based on the B statements from the survey, which reflect the perceived benefits of participation in scouting.

Years	Social	Physical	Intellectual	Character	Emotional	Spiritual
< 1	5,83	6,88	6,28	4,61	5,78	4,28
1-2	6,58	6,78	6,52	5,15	5,38	6,87
3-4	5,50	6,17	5,75	4,80	6,33	5,56
5-6	7,82	7,43	7,67	7,81	7,52	7,84
7-8	7,99	7,18	7,27	7,49	8,06	7,56
9-10	8,26	7,22	7,68	7,59	8,48	7,15
> 11	9,03	7,10	7,40	8,57	8,20	8,10
TOTAL	**7,81**	**7,17**	**7,35**	**7,27**	**7,67**	**7,28**

Table 5: SPICES mean scores by duration of involvement in Scouting

As indicated in the table, there is a general trend that the longer one is involved in scouting, the higher their SPICES scores tend to be, except for a slight dip among those with 3-4 years of involvement. The scores notably increase for scouts with 5-6 years of involvement, a trend that warrants further investigation. For those involved the longest, particularly over 11 years, the scores are significantly higher, especially in the Social, Character, Emotional, and Spiritual dimensions. Interestingly, the highest Physical scores are observed in the 5-6 year group, followed by a gradual decline. This might be attributed to older scouts in Sweden having more autonomy in planning their programs, possibly opting for less physically demanding activities than their younger counterparts. Notably, for those involved for more than 11 years, the Intellectual dimension is the only one scoring below 8, whereas the Social dimension stands out with a score over 9. This contrast with the score of 5.83 for newcomers highlights how a sense of friendship and community is fostered through prolonged involvement in scouting.

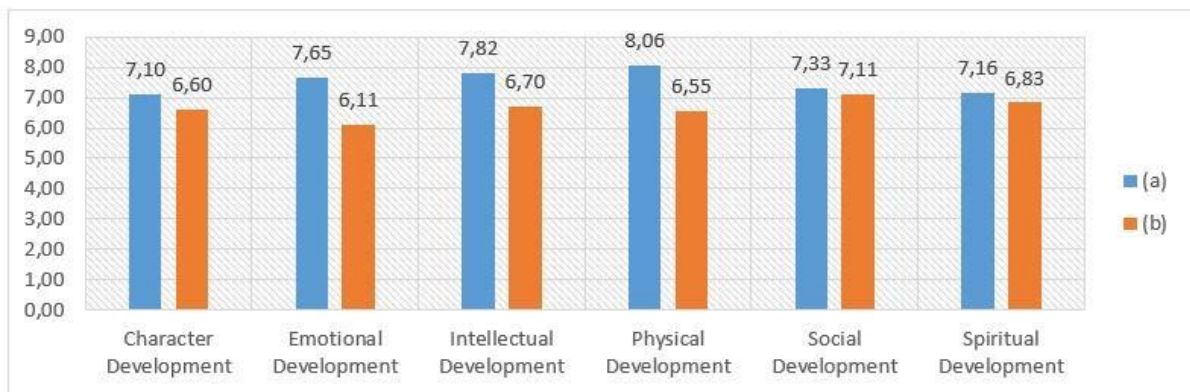## SPICES dimensions and age

Figure 8: SPICES dimensions mean scores – respondents aged 14
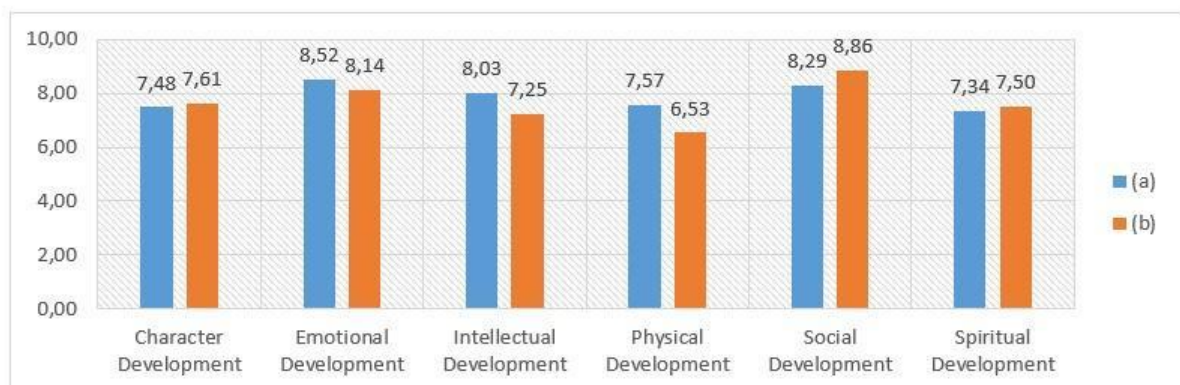

Figure 9: SPICES dimensions mean scores – respondents aged 18

Generally, the data reveals that younger scouts tend to attribute less of their development to scouting compared to older scouts, who assign higher scores to the B statements. This trend is understandable, considering that older scouts are not only more mature but also have had more time to engage with scouting and its various programs. A notable difference is observed in the way younger scouts prioritize Physical development over the 18-year-olds, while in all other SPICES dimensions, the 18-year-olds report higher scores.

Particularly striking is how 18-year-olds rate their Social development significantly higher, even scoring the related B statement higher than the corresponding A statement. This indicates that they attribute a substantial portion of their social development to their scouting experiences.

A similar, though less pronounced, pattern is seen in Character and Spiritual development, where the B statements also receive higher scores than the A statements. In contrast, among the 14-year-old scouts, none of the B statements score higher than the A statements, highlighting a different perspective on the impact of scouting on their personal development.

3.1.2 Focus Group Analysis

The analysis presented below aims to summarize the initial results from our study, employing the principles of thematic analysis. The methodology for this analysis involved coding all interview transcripts using Atlas.Ti, a software designed for processing qualitative data. Following this, the generated codes were grouped into broader categories, which were then mapped onto the dimensions of the SPICES framework. This framework was selected as the guiding structure for the MIYO project. Consequently, the findings highlighted below are an attempt to encapsulate the most prominent themes consistently identified within each SPICES dimension.

Furthermore, this analysis delves into the perceptions of the respondents regarding the image and role of their leaders within the Swedish Scout organization. It also includes insights and reflections on the scout movement in general, offering a comprehensive view of its impact and significance.

Social development

Throughout the focus group discussions, the theme of social development consistently emerged as the most significant. Participants frequently highlighted that their involvement in Scouting primarily served as a means to meet new people and forge close friendships:

> *"You get very close friends who are very important in a way that you don't get in other contexts." (FG 1, 17-years boy)*
> *"You get to know a lot of people, especially if you go to outside events and stuff like that. I've got to know my best friends from events that I've been to. I'm very grateful for that." (FG 1, 18-years girl)*

In several instances, participants spoke about forming friendships that extend beyond their local troop or club. They described making connections across the wider organization and even internationally, facilitated by their participation in national and international Scouting events. This aspect of social development was eloquently captured by an 18-year-old girl in the second focus group, who commented on this experience:

> *"There is also a very large community. You notice that at international events. You can meet someone from the other side of the world and just as soon as you meet them. We are friends because we are both Scouts. It works."*

Participants identified two key factors that foster close relationships within their club or troop. First, they emphasized the significance of growing up together as part of a collective, experiencing numerous shared adventures and activities. Second, they noted the importance of collaborative problem-solving, as they are often required to work as a team to tackle various tasks and challenges encountered during Scouting activities. This perspective was insightfully articulated by a 15-year-old boy in the first focus group, who observed:

> *"You are put in quite different situations than you do in school and then you grow a lot as a group. Like if you go on a hike. You wouldn't really have been able to do that at school. It's a completely different thing. You get close to each other in a different way."*

A 15-year-old girl from Focus Group 4, for example, had a similar feeling:

> *"Well, we have many things that are fun, but camping and stuff like that, it's kind of fun because it creates a community among all of us who are with each other."*

For numerous respondents, Scouting primarily symbolizes a sense of belonging, a feeling of being an integral part of a special community. They expressed that within this community, they experience comfort and inclusivity, where everyone is made to feel welcome. This sentiment was particularly well-expressed by a 16-year-old girl from the first focus group, who succinctly captured this notion:

> *"But I think a pretty big thing in scouting is that everyone should feel welcomed and that you should have a good community."*

Physical development

Physical development was a recurring theme in the focus groups, particularly in the context of hiking and engaging with nature. Participants viewed Scouting as an opportunity to be more physically active. However, as illustrated by the example of a 16-year-old girl from the third focus group, Scouting was not generally seen as a sport-oriented or performance-based organization:

> *"Before, when I was a little younger, I didn't like nature, I was like this. Ugh, insects and little things. But then when you started and as she said,*

you got to know it. So it just made it much easier and it wasn't as dangerous as you think. You also feel better physically and get to know nature."

Consequently, many respondents expressed appreciation for having supportive friends within their group, emphasizing that this camaraderie, combined with the opportunity to face and overcome challenges, allowed them to explore their physical limits. Activities such as completing a challenging hike were frequently cited as examples of this. This aspect of physical development in Scouting was aptly described by a 15-year-old boy in the third focus group, who shared the following statement:

"In our corps, we have a hike every year where we try to walk as many steps as possible. And the times we have done it, we have always increased compared to what we did last year. And in this way, we see that we are increasing our physical limits."

Possibly using the example of a girl (age unknown) from focus group 2:

"We tried, or I tried to climb Kebnekaise with the Scouts this summer. We are planning now, but I don't have mine up. I challenged myself. It was one of the hardest things I've done in my life. It took both physically and mentally because I didn't get up. So it was a challenge in that way. But this was also the experience. I was like. I would have given up if I was alone a long time ago. But then I had such a fantastic group that cheered me on. This is how I came anyway. I got there anyway. So I'm still satisfied. And this is where I've learnt to feel my physical limits."

Respondents emphasized that pushing beyond their comfort zone and discovering their physical limits in Scouting was not about earning grades or medals. Instead, they viewed it as an opportunity to overcome obstacles, even if only by a small margin, and to revel in the sense of progress and achievement. This perspective on physical development within Scouting was clearly articulated by an 18-year-old girl from the second focus group, who shared the following insight:

"We should challenge ourselves and not give up at the first second. In other words, to try anyway and try and try again. That's exactly how you won't succeed in crossing over. If you don't dare to walk on the balance beam, just try to walk on the balance beam and walk 01:02 steps. That alone is enough. But then if you don't reach the goal, that's another matter."

Intellectual development

The theme of intellectual development in the focus groups predominantly manifested at a practical level. Participants expressed significant appreciation for the fact that, in their view, Scouting embraces a "learning by doing" approach. This hands-on learning style was highly valued among the scouts, as they reflected on their experiences:

> *"But as you said, how you learn it in school. If you were to learn how to do it on a hike, you would lock yourself in a classroom and then you would think and how would we do it? Just in case hypothetically. We were on a hike while you go on a hike several times and in the end you know it because you have experienced it and. That's how you actually learn things." (17-years old boy, FG 1)*

In contrast to the more theoretical learning environment often found in schools, the approach to acquiring new skills in Scouting was frequently highlighted by participants as being predominantly practical. This hands-on method is typically characterized by the active and full involvement of the leaders in the activities, offering a distinct and engaging learning experience compared to traditional educational settings.

Participants noted that Scouting had been instrumental in teaching them a variety of practical skills. These skills include essential survival techniques in nature, camping fundamentals, problem-solving strategies, team management, and event organization. Through their involvement in Scouting, they acquired these competencies, which they considered valuable and applicable in various real-life situations:

> *"Now that I'm a scout, it's easier for me to go out into nature and when we have camps, for example. I can be out in nature and feel so comfortable there because I've learnt to know nature and what it's like. And I can set up tents and light fires. So yes, I agree." (16-years old girl, FG 3)*

> *"Not knowing where you are in a dark forest is not much fun. Are they turning? I end up at a waterworks. I don't know how I got there, but I got there and found my way home anyway. Found the bus. So I caught the last bus." (18-years old girl, FG 2)*

> *"And you learn things that are very important but that you don't learn in school. For example, leadership, how to function in a group. And so on." (17-years old boy, FG 1)*

"I organise events and stuff like that. And it has made me learn new things from that as well. And that's how I get involved in the scout community."
(18-years old girl, FG 1)

Character development

Character development within Scouting was notably characterized by learning to overcome obstacles collectively. This process not only strengthens individual resolve but also fosters self-confidence. The significance of this aspect of character development was eloquently captured by a 16-year-old girl from the first focus group, who shared her perspective:

"You learn to become a better person by overcoming challenges and working together."

Furthermore, several participants emphasized the value they found in the reflective activities that often follow Scouting events. They appreciated that these moments of reflection provided an opportunity for ongoing personal development, allowing them to introspect and continue working on themselves:

"I also think a big part of reflecting. I've learned a lot lately, how to reflect on yourself and gain new insights about yourself." (girl, unknown age, FG 2)

Emotional development

Emotional development was a less prominent theme in the focus group discussions. However, when it was mentioned, it typically related to the respondents' overwhelmingly positive feelings about being part of the Scouting organization. An important aspect for them was the perception that the Scouting program is largely founded on principles of enjoyment and a sense of safety. This sentiment was echoed by a 15-year-old boy in the third focus group, who remarked:

"You feel that you can trust all the people who are there and that they will not judge. And you can talk about whatever you want."

Additionally, the role of the Scouting environment in fostering individuality was highlighted by a 14-year-old girl from the fourth focus group. She emphasized how Scouting provides a space where she feels comfortable being herself.

> *"In Scouting you can be a bit more yourself without being judged or anything."*

A notable observation regarding emotional development was shared by a participant from the first focus group. She reflected on how Scouting has equipped her with the skills to not only take care of herself but also to support others facing psychological challenges. This ability, she emphasized, was something she had never learned in school, highlighting the unique contribution of Scouting to her emotional skill-set:

> *"You know how to take care of yourself and others who get fatigue or stress attacks and so on. You have to learn how to take care of that. And I can't stand that at school. The school would never want to teach how to deal with someone with a panic attack. No, no, that doesn't happen. No, it doesn't."*

Spiritual development

Spiritual development was acknowledged as an important element in the focus groups, particularly in the context of fostering a relationship with nature. While many participants concurred that Scouting played a role in enhancing this connection, they did not necessarily perceive it as leading to a deeper spiritual bond with the natural world. Instead, for many, Scouting served as an avenue to begin spending meaningful time in nature, engaging in activities such as hiking or camping. This perspective was effectively conveyed by a 15-year-old girl from the third focus group, who shared her experience:

> *"I think about what my relationship with and feeling for nature has been through scouting. So I agree very much with that. Because before I joined the scouts, I didn't spend much time in nature. Or not so much. So when you start in the scouts, it's natural that you spend a lot of time outdoors and get to know nature on hikes and stuff like that."*

However, several participants noted that Scouting had led them to a deeper appreciation of the richness and beauty of nature. This discovery was particularly highlighted by a 17-year-old boy from the first focus group, who described his experience of connecting with the natural world through Scouting:

> *"I've always liked nature before, but you really get to experience it through treasure."*

Some participants also shared that their close friendships within their Scout troop, forged through shared experiences, often led to discussions about significant life topics. However, they clarified that these conversations were not necessarily a direct result of being Scouts. Instead, they attributed the openness of these discussions to the bonds of friendship that had developed through their shared Scouting experiences. This deep trust and camaraderie enabled them to comfortably discuss a wide range of subjects. This perspective was notably expressed by a 17-year-old boy from the second focus group, who reflected on his experiences:

> *"I know that I personally have had a lot of talk when I've stayed up late on scout hike evenings talking about everything from heaven to earth with someone who you may not even have known very much before. And sometimes it really is like this. No, I love these people. They are very nice but not something that I would like to talk about because it is very different from time to time. Sometimes it is, sometimes it's not. But it's not that particular issue. Not necessarily that it's linked to the scouts, rather it depends on the people around you."*

Leaders in Scouting

The portrayal of leaders within Scouting, as depicted in the focus group discussions, was overwhelmingly positive. Participants described the role of a leader primarily in terms of being a respected figure who is also approachable, friendly, and supportive. This characterization highlights the balance between authority and informality that leaders in Scouting seem to embody:

> *"So, our leaders are a bit like our friends. They are nice, very, very nice and they are like. They are there and you have fun with them. And it's not that they're not allowed to do this, they just say okay, don't burn down the house because okay, just don't destroy anything and go for it. They are more like they are, not like that. They are not as strict as the teachers. The teachers are our leaders. They are also so nice and exactly like that. But there are also limits too. When they are now I am your leader, then you can listen to me and then there is this if we are friends. It's like a relationship, but you still have some respect for them."* (18-years old girl, FG 2)

Many participants drew comparisons between their Scout leaders and school teachers, noting key differences in their approaches. They appreciated that Scout leaders maintain a protective oversight and set the direction of the program, while also actively participating in various activities alongside the scouts. This dual role of leadership and involvement was seen as a unique and positive aspect of Scouting. A 15-year-old boy from the first focus group articulated this experience:

> *"Our leaders are also usually involved in the activities that we do and it's very fun because then they become part of the community. Really because they are involved in things that others have planned and that also contributes to security."*

In focus groups that included older participants, a recurrent theme was the increasingly equal relationship between them and their leaders. This shift was attributed to the older scouts often taking the lead in creating the program, with the leaders serving primarily as background support, ready to assist when needed. Alternatively, the leaders were seen as partners who value the opinions of the scouts, can be trusted with important matters, and are available to address any issues that arise. This more collaborative and respectful dynamic was exemplified by a 16-year-old girl from the first focus group, who shared her perspective:

> *"I would say it depends on your age. When you were younger, it was that they were there to help and teach you. But then when you get a bit older, adventurers and challengers. Now it's more that they are there as a support, that they can be there and help if we need help. But that. I felt especially like a challenger when you have become a little older. Then it's also that your leaders can be a bit like your mates sometimes too, because they are there as support. But they are there to play an adult role. But you can talk to them anyway. If we talk about it."*

Some participants highlighted the significance of leaders having strong relationships among themselves, as it sets a positive example for the scouts and contributes to a welcoming atmosphere within the troop. A 16-year-old girl from the second focus group elaborated on this point, noting, *"I think also the relationships between the leaders also play a lot of roles. We already have a good relationship with each other. Then it becomes kind of general that people or the scouts come and say oh, but the leaders have fun, they're nice here and there. Then we will also be influenced in a good way. Unlike if the leaders don't have the best relationship, if you say so and then come and teach it, then it's not the same atmosphere."* Additionally, participants valued the creation of a safe space for sharing within the troop, one that does not favor any individual but instead ensures that everyone feels included and welcome:

> *"You can just walk away and talk to them without it being weird. It's nothing."* (15-years old girl, FG 3)

> *"It's really like someone you know won't judge them or something like that. They're a little bit like that."* (14-years old boy, FG 3)

Scouting as an organization

General reflections on Scouting as an organization were infrequent, but when mentioned, they often related to the sense of belonging and community fostered by being part of such a large organization. For instance, an 18-year-old girl from the second focus group expressed her amazement at the size of Scouting, saying:

> *"It feels exactly like it's so crazy how big it is and how you can get to know people from Belgium because you were in one place or during a camp once because of the scouts."*

When discussing the broader purpose and benefits of Scouting, participants emphasized the role of the movement in teaching them to be part of a community. They recognized that the approach to education within Scouting, as well as its inclusive nature, were key strengths, making everyone feel welcome and at home. Some interviewees, particularly those who had been involved in Scouting for a significant portion of their lives, described Scouting as a part of their identity.

For these individuals, the principles of Scouting had become deeply ingrained, influencing their perspectives and actions even outside Scouting activities. As an example, a participant from Focus Group 2 highlighted the emphasis on calm problem solving and overcoming obstacles as key principles learned through Scouting:

> *"…also with this not seeing the problems as an obstacle as you said and always finding the solution and not complicating things. And take it slowly and calmly but still manage the problem. I thought about that a bit. Scouting affects me a lot as a person because now it feels to me, at least, that it will go from being a leisure activity to becoming a lifestyle. Because now it feels like I'm more than ever and you can laugh so many times a week and so on. Therefore thinking about it kind of all the time and all the time. Have that little half-scout mindset."*

3.2 Sojuz na Izvidnici na Makedonija, North Macedonia

For Scouting North Macedonia, with its membership of around 360 scouts aged 14-18, selecting a sample and planning the survey distribution was a manageable task. The organization regularly updates its membership lists, which provide detailed demographic data essential for this study. After consulting with the project team and professors from Maynooth University, it was decided to target all eligible members within the specified age group from these lists. The goal was to achieve a minimum of 150 respondents, with an optimum target of 200, to ensure the survey's success.

The next crucial step for Scouting North Macedonia was to select a suitable platform for distributing the survey. Despite the availability of various youth-friendly online platforms, it was decided to opt for a platform familiar to the target demographic to ensure maximum participation and engagement. Therefore, Google Forms was chosen as the survey platform.

Given the anonymity of the survey, Scouting North Macedonia needed a strategy to monitor the response rate effectively. The approach involved distributing the survey link to a different scout unit each week, using their email addresses and social media groups such as Viber and WhatsApp. Scout leaders and adults in these units assisted in this process. At the end of each week, the team reviewed the responses and sent reminders to both adults and scouts. This process lasted approximately six weeks. Despite rigorous efforts to encourage participation, the final tally stood at 138 responses, with one individual declining to participate from the outset.

While the response rate did not meet expectations, the overall process was smooth. The experience of Scouting North Macedonia suggests the importance of choosing user-friendly platforms and establishing effective response monitoring methods to encourage participation and achieve impactful results.

Additionally, Scouting North Macedonia conducted three focus groups in different regions, each varying in terms of age, duration of involvement in Scouting, gender, and role/experience.

- FG1 included 10 participants, both boys and girls aged 15-17, who were patrol leaders with varying years of Scouting experience.
- FG2 was composed of 6 boys, aged 15-18, with diverse Scouting backgrounds.
- FG3 had 9 girls, aged 15-17, from different scout units with a range of Scouting experience.

Each group was facilitated by a primary focus group leader (FGL), assisted by a secondary leader (FGL2) who handled note-taking and monitored the discussion progress.

3.2.1 Survey Results

Section 1: Demographic and contextual information

Sample size and age range

The online survey in North Macedonia garnered a total of 138 responses, with participants ranging in age from 14 to 18 years. The distribution of ages was relatively even across the spectrum, with nearly half of the respondents being either 15 or 16 years old. This age distribution is further detailed in Figure 1.
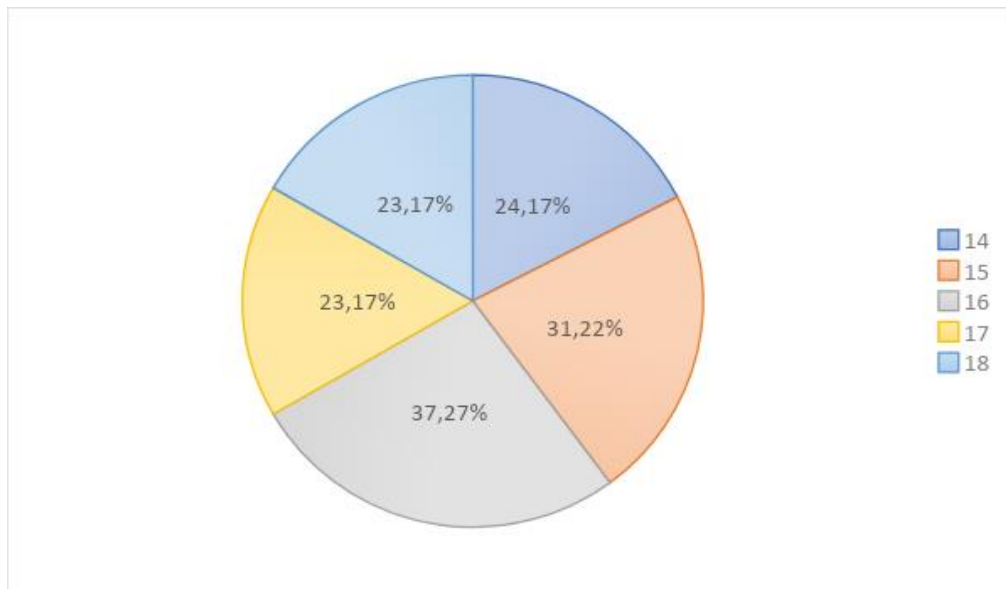

Figure 1: Age of respondents

Gender

In the survey, a majority of respondents, constituting nearly two-thirds (59%), identified themselves as female, while 37% reported being male. Additionally, one respondent selected 'other' as their gender identity, and four respondents chose the option 'prefer not to say.' The details of this gender distribution are illustrated in Figure 2.
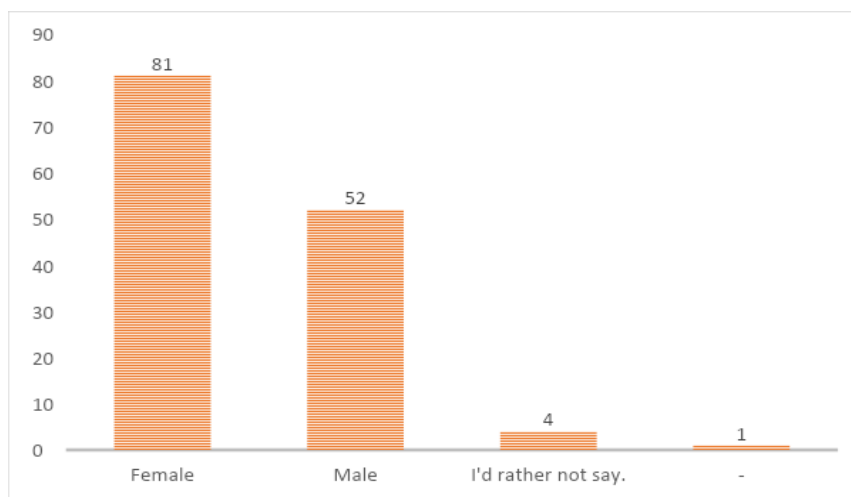

Figure 2: Gender of respondents

Duration of involvement in Scouting

A significant portion of the survey respondents, accounting for 75.36%, had been actively involved in Scouting for at least three years. Conversely, a smaller group of 10 respondents, representing 7.25% of the total, had been involved in Scouting for less than one year. This distribution of involvement duration is in Figure 3.
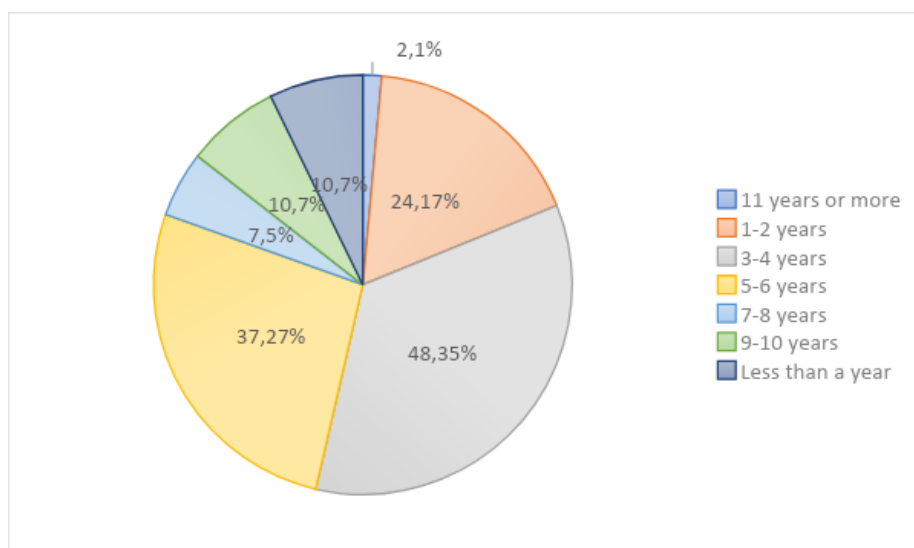

Figure 3: Duration of involvement in Scouting

Area of residence

The survey responses were predominantly from young people residing in urban areas. When combining the categories of big city, town/small city, and suburbs, they represent over 90% of the total respondents. In contrast, a smaller number of participants, specifically seven individuals (5.07%), reported living in a village, and only one respondent (0.72%) came from the countryside. This distribution of respondents based on their living areas is detailed in Table 1.

Type of area	N	%
A big city	74	53.62%
A country village	7	5.07%
A farm or home in the countryside	1	0.72%
A town or a small city	47	34.06%
The suburbs or outskirts of a big city	9	6.52%
Grand Total	**138**	**100,00%**

Table 1: Area of residence

Long-standing illness or disability

In the survey, only three respondents reported having a longstanding illness or disability. This specific demographic information is visually represented in Figure 4.
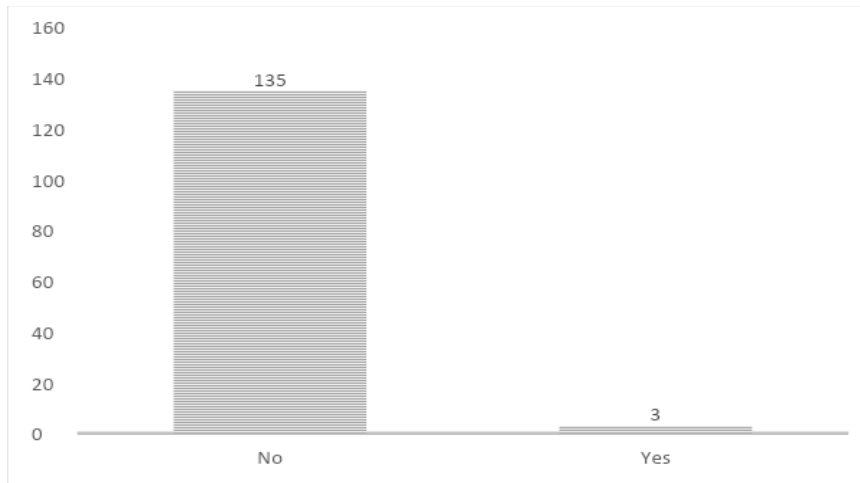

Figure 4: Any long-standing illness or disability?

Religion

An overwhelming majority of the survey respondents, accounting for 85.51%, indicated that they belong to a particular religion or denomination.

Row Labels	N	%
No	20	14.49%
Yes	118	85.51%
Grand Total	**138**	**100.00%**

Table 2: Any religion/denomination

Occupation of main income earner(s)

When respondents were asked about the occupation of the principal income earner in their family or household, 32 indicated professions such as 'doctor, teacher, engineer…[etc]', classified under the 'professional' category. Additionally, 4 respondents specified occupations in the 'upper administrative' category, such as 'banker, business executive…[etc]'. Together, these two categories represent just over 26.09% of the total respondents, placing them in class 1 (the 'salariat') of the European Socio-economic Classification (ESeC) 3-class model as defined by Rose & Harrison (2007).

Furthermore, 27 respondents identified clerical occupations like 'secretary, clerk, office manager…[etc]'. Along with those in occupational groups such as 'sales manager, shop owner, shop assistant…[etc]', 'foreman, motor mechanics…[etc]', and 'restaurant owner, police officer…[etc]', almost half of the respondents (44.9%) fall into class 2 of the ESeC 3-class model. A smaller proportion, less than two in ten respondents (17.4%), belong to ESeC class 3, the least socio-economically advantaged group. It's important to note that this classification does not include the unemployed, who accounted for 14 responses in the survey.
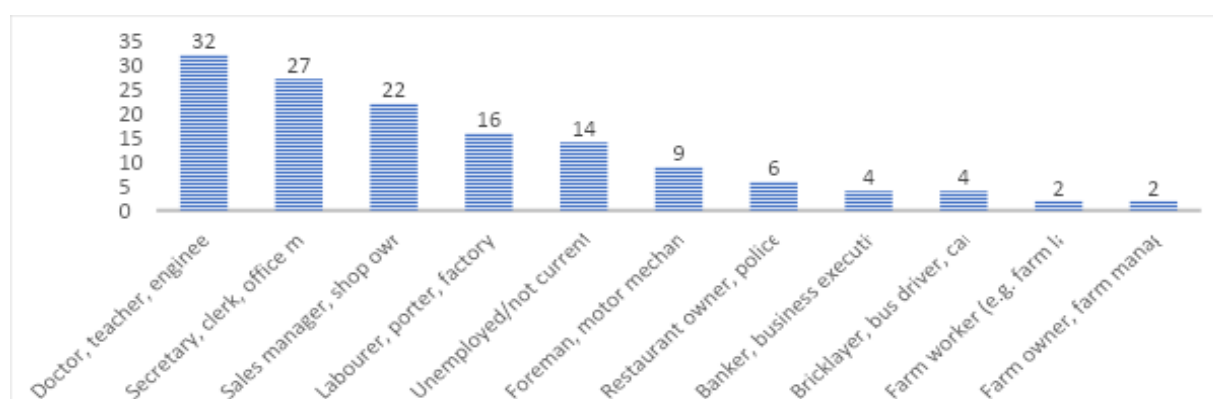

Figure 5: Occupation of principal income earner

In cases where there were two earners in a family or household with roughly equal earnings, respondents had the option to select a second occupational group. Figure 6 displays the responses for those whose primary earner was categorized in the professional occupational group, which includes professions like 'doctor, teacher, engineer…[etc]'. Among respondents in this category who identified a second earner, the same professional group was the most commonly reported, with 46% of these respondents (79 out of 172) indicating that the secondary earner also belonged to occupations such as 'doctor, teacher, engineer…[etc]'.
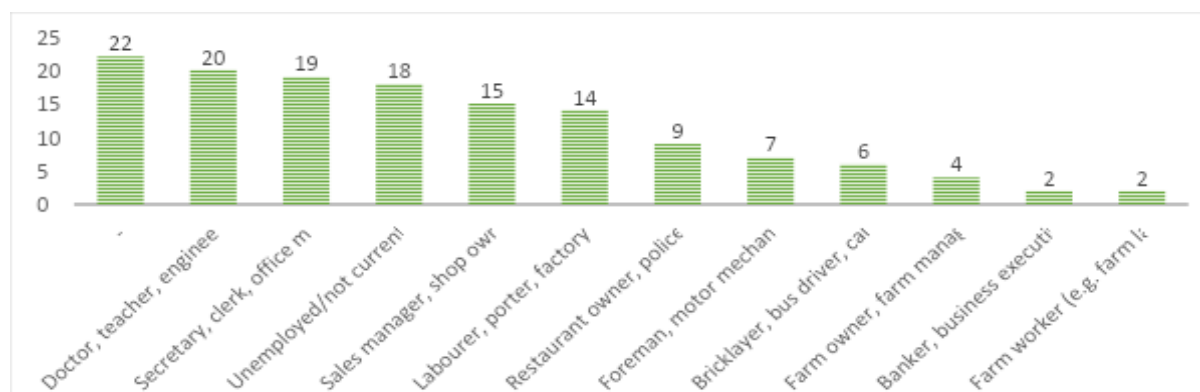

Figure 6: Occupation of second income earner, where first earner is professional

Section 2: Perceptions of self and of Scouting

Part 2 of the survey questionnaire required respondents to evaluate a series of 18 statements, referred to here as the 'A statements.' These items focused on self-perception, where respondents rated each statement on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 indicating very little applicability and 10 indicating a high degree of applicability to themselves.

Following each 'A statement,' respondents were asked to complete a corresponding 'B statement.' Here, they similarly rated on a scale from 1 to 10 how much they believed Scouting contributed to their development in relation to the specified quality or characteristic.

In the responses to the 'A statements' (self-perception), female scores were higher in 17 of the 18 items, with differences ranging from 0.10 to 1.54. Notably, in 15 questions, the margin was 0.3 or greater, and in 4 cases, it was over 1.0. Examples of these statements with significant gender differences include:

- *4a: 'There are people in my life with whom I'm comfortable sharing feelings and emotions' (Difference of 1.03)*
- *6(a): 'When facing challenges and difficulties, I draw strength from my belief that life has meaning.' (Difference of 1.54)*

- *9(a): 'I have a sense of respect and wonder at the natural world.' (Difference of 1.08)*
- *15(a): 'I choose to be involved in activities in my community (unpaid) for the benefit of others or the environment.' (Difference of 1.17)*

A & B statements by male/female	Female A	Male A	Female B	Male B
1(a) I try to live my life in a healthy way (nutrition, sleep, exercise).	7,62	7,31	8,98	7,88
2(a) I am curious about the world around me and enjoy learning new things.	8,98	8,00	9,30	7,81
3(a) I am confident in taking the lead in group or team activities.	8,43	8,33	8,89	8,04
4(a) There are people in my life with whom I'm comfortable sharing feelings and emotions.	9,28	8,25	8,36	7,10
5(a) I'm aware of how my behavior (my actions and my lifestyle/ the way I live) affects my mood and my feelings.	9,04	8,60	7,98	6,81
6(a) When facing challenges and difficulties, I draw strength from my belief that life has meaning.	7,96	6,42	8,49	7,00
7(a) I'm aware of how the things I do and say can affect other people's feelings and emotions.	9,57	8,83	8,80	7,60
8(a) There are people in my daily life that I admire and respect.	9,64	8,69	9,09	7,88
9(a) I have a sense of respect and wonder at the natural world.	9,68	8,60	9,57	8,71
10(a) I have a good understanding of the human body and how it works.	8,51	8,02	7,96	6,85
11(a) I know the difference between reliable and unreliable sources of information.	8,63	8,17	8,04	6,62
12(a) I find comfort in having a quiet space to relax and reflect, away from the regular activities of school, work, or family.	8,94	8,02	8,58	6,75
13(a) I feel confident thinking for myself and solving problems.	8,78	8,56	8,74	7,62
14(a) Before I act, I try to think about how my actions might affect others.	8,17	7,54	8,36	7,46
15(a) I choose to be involved in activities in my community (unpaid) for the benefit of others or the environment.	9,23	8,06	9,38	8,73
16(a) I think my friends would say that I'm consistent in what I believe, what I say and what I do/ and true in my beliefs, words, and actions.	8,56	8,08	8,89	7,90
17(a) I choose to engage in physical activity (other than at school) at least once a week.	8,56	8,81	8,96	7,69
18(a) I believe everyone should be respected and treated the same, no matter where they're from or who they are. / I believe all people should be treated with respect and equality, no matter who they are or where they're from.	9,68	8,81	9,43	8,08
Mean	**8,85**	**8,17**	**8,77**	**7,59**

Table 3: A and B Statements – mean scores for females and males

In the case of the 'B statements,' which assessed the perceived contribution of Scouting to personal development, females consistently scored higher across all questions. The margins of difference ranged from 0.65 to 1.83, with the majority of margins exceeding 1, except in 5 questions. The three statements with the largest gender difference were:

- 12(a): 'I find comfort in having a quiet space to relax and reflect, away from the regular activities of school, work, or family.' (Difference of 1.83)
- 2(a): 'I am curious about the world around me and enjoy learning new things.' (Difference of 1.49)
- 6(a): 'When facing challenges and difficulties, I draw strength from my belief that life has meaning.' (Difference of 1.49)

Rank order of benefits of Scouting

Table 4 presents in rank order the items in the survey's B statements, indicating the ways in which North Macedonia respondents perceive themselves to be benefiting from their involvement in Scouting, from the highest ranked ('Scouting has helped me to become aware of how I can affect other people's feelings and emotions.', 9.2) to the lowest ('Participating in Scouting strengthens me in the belief that life has meaning', 7.9).

Statements from survey	Mean	Female	Male
7(b) Scouting has helped me to become aware of how I can affect other people's feelings and emotions.	9.2	9.57	8.83
8(b) I have met some people that I admire and respect through Scouting.	9.16	9.64	8.69
9(b) Scouting develops and sustains my sense of respect and wonder at the natural world.	9.14	9.68	8.6
5(b) I have learned how behavior and feelings are connected through my time in Scouting	8.82	9.04	8.6
18(b) Scouting has helped to shape my belief that everyone should be treated the same.	8.75	9.43	8.08
13(b) Scouting helped to shape/ contributed to the development of my thinking and problem-solving skills.	8.67	8.78	8.56
15(b) Scouting enables and supports me to engage in activities for the benefit of others or the environment.	8.645	9.23	8.06
2(b) Scouting provides opportunities to satisfy my curiosity and learn new things.	8.55	9.3	7.81
12(b) Scouting gives me a peaceful spot where I can have some quiet time to think.	8.48	8.94	8.02
3(b) Scouting/YMCA/CJV has developed my confidence in my leadership skills.	8.46	8.89	8.04

1(b) Scouting encourages and supports me to live healthily.	8.43	8.98	7.88
11(b) What I have learned through Scouting helps me to tell the difference between reliable and unreliable sources of information.	8.4	8.63	8.17
17(b) Scouting/YMCA/CJV provides opportunities and encouragement/ offers chances and support to engage in regular physical activity.	8.32	8.96	7.69
10(b) Participating in Scouting has added to my understanding of the human body and how it works.	8.26	8.51	8.02
14(b) Scouting encourages me to consider the effect of my actions on others.	7.85	8.17	7.54
4(b) I know some people I can share my feelings with through Scouting.	7.73	8.36	7.1
6(b) Participating in Scouting strengthens me in the belief that life has meaning.	7.19	7.96	6.42

Table 4: B Statements in rank order

The SPICES dimensions

The figure below illustrates the composite mean scores for each of the six SPICES dimensions, comprising both A and B statements. It presents a diagrammatic representation of these scores, highlighting the overall performance across the dimensions. The difference between the mean total scores of the A and B statements is relatively small, deemed acceptable at 0.3.
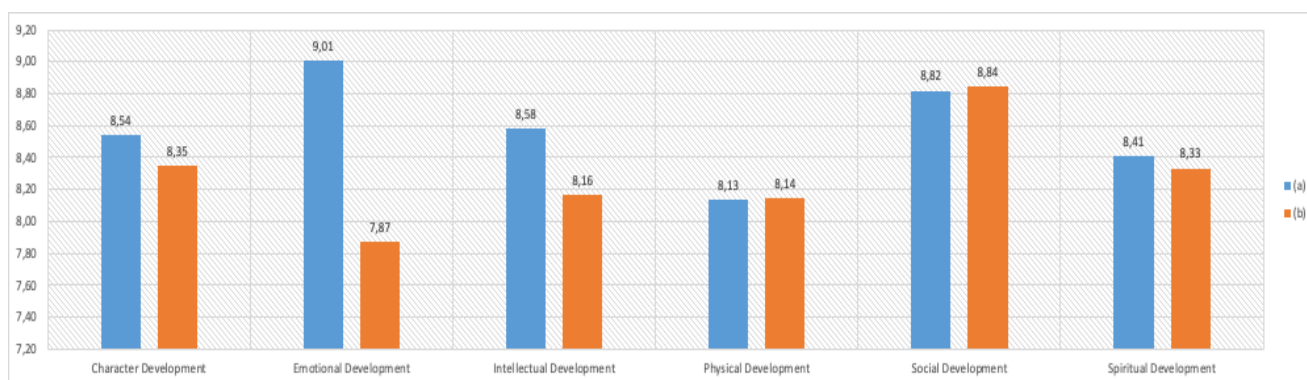

Figure 7: SPICES dimensions mean scores

SPICES dimensions and involvement in Scouting

Figure 8 presents the mean scores for the six SPICES dimensions in the North Macedonia survey, broken down by the length of time that the respondents have spent in Scouting. Note that this analysis takes account of B statements.
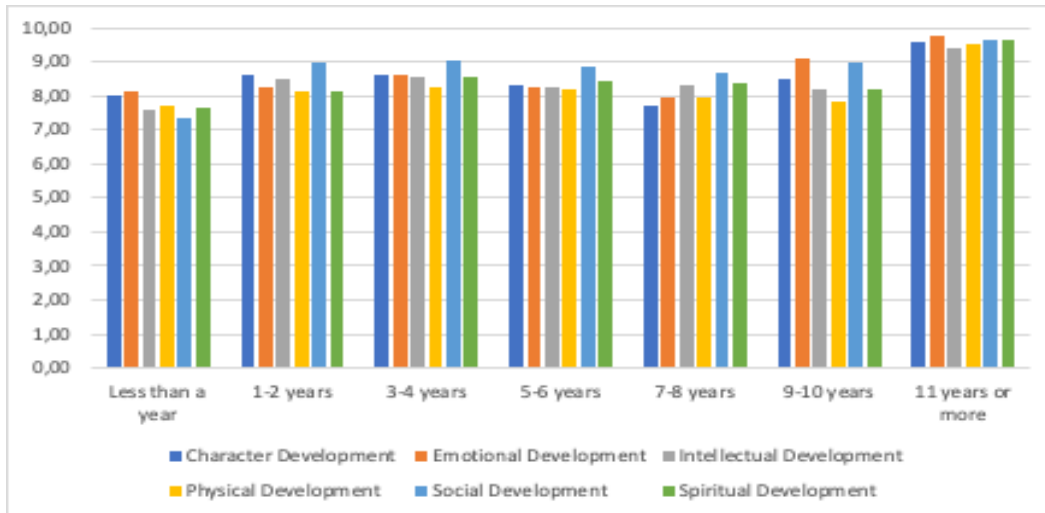

Figure 8: SPICES dimensions mean scores depending on duration of involvement

The analysis reveals a consistent pattern in the distribution of mean scores across the SPICES dimensions for those involved in Scouting ranging from 1 year to 10 years. Notably, the highest mean scores in all SPICES dimensions are observed among respondents who have participated in Scouting for more than 11 years. Furthermore, as depicted in Figure 9, the frequency of participation in Scouting activities tends to be clearly reflected in the pattern of SPICES scores. In essence, the more regularly a young person attends Scouting sessions, the higher their SPICES score tends to be.
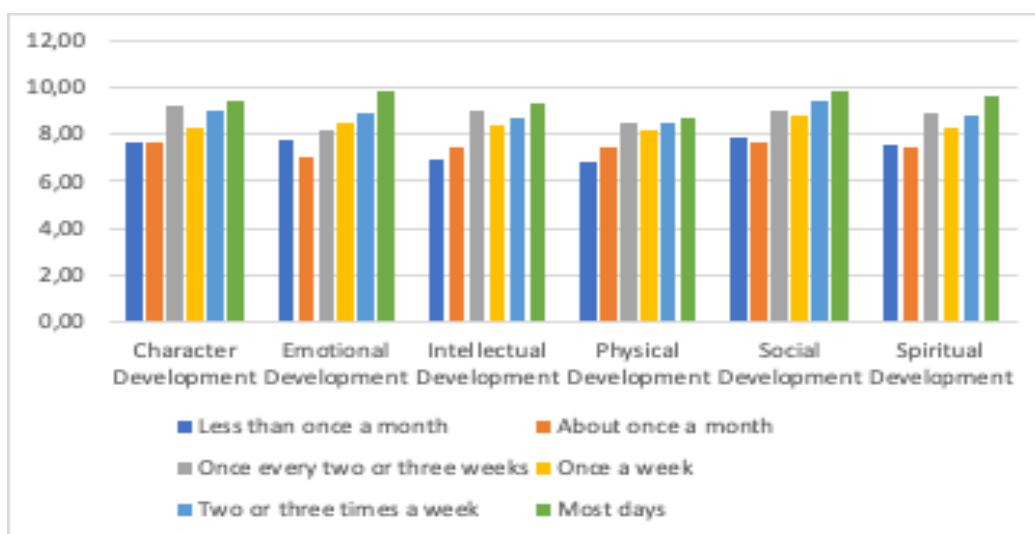

Figure 9: SPICES dimensions mean scores depending on frequency of involvement

3.2.2 Focus Group Analysis

Social development

In Focus Group 1, two statements from 16-year-old participants shed light on an interesting aspect of social development in Scouting. Beyond fostering social interactions, their experiences with Scouts from different cities and countries prompted introspection and self-discovery, contributing to their emotional development. Boy 4 from FG1 highlighted the impact of interactions during competitions with Scouts from various places:

"For example, when there is a competition, when they come from other cities, other countries, you learn how to communicate with them, it's easier for you. You find yourself more often with people you can communicate with."

This safe and supportive environment in Scouting encourages young people to open up, communicate, and collaborate, contributing significantly to their social development. Many participants from all focus groups mentioned how they transformed from being shy and reserved to becoming more open and confident within the Scout setting. Girl 5 from FG1 reflected on this transformation:

"Before I started going to scouts, I was much more withdrawn and thought that no matter what I did I would do something wrong, but through scouts, I learned that no matter what I say, no matter how I do it, I will be accepted in some way and when someone notices a mistake, he will tell me and I will learn from the mistake."

In Focus Group 2, when discussing the unique benefits of Scouting, Boy 2 observed a difference in socialization patterns between Scouts and non-Scouts:

"I think it's the friendship itself, because with the newer generations, everyone is more online and they don't socialize like us. Our generations are probably the last ones that were playing in the streets and now the new generations are more at home and don't really socialize with the rest of the youth."

Scouting programs typically encompass problem-solving skills, teamwork, and open-mindedness. When asked about the impact of Scouting on their social development, Boy 2 and Boy 5 from FG2 shared their perspectives:

Boy 2 mentioned, *"As we said at the beginning we are more responsible, that we can speak publicly, in front of an audience,"* and Boy 5 added, *"Sometimes we may have a different and faster way of thinking in certain situations, in certain challenges, we function faster."*

Focus Group 3 had extensive discussions on this topic. Girl 3 from FG3 shared her personal experience:

> *"For me personally, yes, I used to have social anxiety before joining scouts. I can say that regarding public speech and confidence in a group of people, thanks to scouting now I am much more free/relaxed."*

Girl 2 from the same group described her journey towards finding real friendship through Scouting: *"As part of a friend squad if one of us doesn't like or do something we all follow. And so one of them didn't enjoy scouting and then we all followed. I wasn't pleased with my decision so when I distanced myself from that squad and got closer to the scouts, I met a lot more people, and eventually, learnt real friendship."*

Participants in FG3 emphasized the importance of developing communication skills in overcoming social fears and insecurities. Girl 2 from FG3 elaborated on her experience:

> *"Towards better. For example, I was never the person to speak first, or right away. Whenever I was part of a larger group of people, people I wasn't acquainted with, I wouldn't be the extrovert, the person always replying. I always waited for the others to speak, to set the tone of the conversation. The more I went to scouting activities, the more people I met, and not just from here but from the Balkans, and Europe as well. I started to feel more confident and relaxed, mostly because I met people with the same fears as me, people new to scouting who also felt shy at first. Now I know to always find a way to allow them to express themselves."*

Physical development

In FG1, one participant highlighted the link between physical development and character building in young people. He regularly organizes hikes for his patrol, promoting not only physical endurance but also the importance of perseverance and commitment. Boy 3 from FG1 shared:

> *"I, for example, practice this with my patrol, we often go to the mountains, and this develops their physical health, but they also build their character,*

because as I said before, everything they start they need to finish, how difficult."

Girl 4 from FG1 also discussed the physical benefits of regular outdoor activities:

"We know that at least once a week, when the children go to a meeting, they are outside in nature and moving, and I don't know, for example, we go on hikes in the mountains, fresh air, all this helps their physical development."

In FG2, participants associated the competitive spirit in Scout competitions and activities with physical development. Boy 2 from FG2 observed:

"No, even the energizers that we have are 99% with some physical activity, whether by playing, with some sport. And so, for example, building a shelter in nature, you need to be quite physically ready. And to prepare for competitions, there is a competitive spirit that encourages you to prepare more both physically and mentally."

The variety of Scouting activities offers opportunities for physical development across different interests. When asked about this in FG2, one participant responded:

"Yes, since it provides you with, for example, water activities, mountain activities. You are in nature and whether it's swimming, hiking, or even paragliding, everyone can find their place here."

In FG3, a participant who usually avoids physical activities shared her experience of engaging in them within a Scouting context. Girl 4 from FG3 commented:

"I haven't been doing too many physical activities because my knees hurt, but if you take me to a scouts hike or competition I can hike for 10 hours without problems."

Girl 2 added:

"I think that we developed physically because, for example, our scout unit organizes quite a lot of hikes, often, so you attend those hikes and you don't have fitness on the 1 hike, 2, but on the 3, you already acquire that fitness, so yes definitely."

Another participant in FG3 connected her spiritual and physical development, explaining how introspection led to an awareness of the need for physical growth. Girl 2 remarked:

> "Personally, when I hear spirituality, I think of improving myself, of trying a way to develop myself, as much as I can, physically, mentally, of course. And spirituality gave me a great chance to think about myself and my place in the world, which in general, even at school, we don't have that much time for us to think."

Intellectual development

In FG1, participants shared various skills they acquired through Scouting, emphasizing their importance for intellectual development. Boy 5 mentioned "Leadership," while Boy 3 added "Responsibility." Girl 2 highlighted the significance of "Self-confidence, posture and presentation," noting:

> "We learn through scouts, not as leaders but also the others who are in younger categories. Those presentation skills are very important qualities because they are necessary in employment and later in life."

Boy 4 brought up "Time management," and Boy 1 and Boy 4 both mentioned "Making projects, realizing projects" and "Presentation skills," respectively.

One male participant from FG1 drew a parallel between educational approaches in Scouting and school, observing the more hands-on, self-driven learning in Scouting:

> "In school, everything is handed to us on a platter... And for scouts, we have to try to achieve the goal by ourselves."

In FG2, participants discussed specific Scout activities contributing to their intellectual development. Boy 2 described the variety of skills programs and themed camps, such as those focusing on swimming, cycling, or biodiversity. Boy 5 underscored the role of partnership and teamwork:

> "There is intellectual development perhaps through working with someone, using tools, such as for building a camping site, perfecting work with different tools, with resources that we find in nature or in the surroundings."

Noticing that SIM office team consists of scouts, Boy 4 from FG2 reflected on the intellectual development within the organization:

> *"I still think there is intellectual development, because as a non-formal organization, we have a General Secretary, we have a President, we have people... who must have developed some kind of consciousness, to see a little bit out of the box, some knowledge."*

In FG3, the discussion on intellectual development was extensive. Girl 3 shared her growth in open-mindedness and logic:

> *"I am very open-minded, more than when I started scouting... And logic also develops a lot more somehow, since you don't know how, you have to find a way to find out."*

The focus group leader prompted further reflections, to which participants unanimously agreed and listed learned skills such as cooking, responsibility, leadership, organizational skills, and communication. Girl 4 added:

> *"Everyone who has attended leadership school knows what a challenge it is to plan a seven-day camp in two days."*

Reflecting on skills beneficial for future life roles, Girl 5 from FG3 connected her Scouting experiences to potential motherhood:

> *"And also, like we learn to take care of ourselves, we learn to take care of the kids... So that is a bonus for us. Tomorrow we will be more prepared as mothers."*

This insight reveals how Scouting fosters interpersonal values like care and devotion, contributing to both emotional and character development.

Character development

Character Development in Scouting was a recurring theme throughout the focus groups, often described using terms like family and community. Participants noted that mutual teamwork and support were key factors that not only kept them engaged in Scouting but also fostered their personal growth. Some participants shared how taking care of younger scouts cultivated feelings of care and responsibility, traits they observed were less common among non-scouts. Striving to be good role models for their patrols, they learned endurance and made better choices, overlapping with aspects of physical development. These values also intersect with emotional development and leadership.

In FG1, participants underscored traits such as endurance, responsibility, and a sense of service to society as key aspects of character development obtainable through Scouting. Boy 3 from FG1 expressed:

> *"Scouting has taught me to never give up on anything, something that I will start to finish no matter how difficult it is, and since I have been a leader, I have been trying to pass it on to my children all the time."*

Girl 4 added:

> *"You have responsibility and let me say... When society gives you some duties and responsibilities, you should help and influence something to change."*

FG2 delved deeper into character development discussions. Boy 5 stated:

> *"I like to participate in environments where I develop my personality/character alongside others."*

When comparing themselves to non-scouts, FG2 participants felt they had an advantage in certain life situations, being able to think and react promptly. Boy 5 said:

> *"In some cases, we may have a different and faster way of thinking in certain situations, in certain problems, we function faster."*

Character maturity in FG2 was also reflected through selflessness and service. Boy 3 noted:

> *"To develop and perfect myself, and as much as I can, to help others to accomplish their goal."*

Other traits of character development emerged through statements like Boy 4's emphasis on punctuality and respect for others' time, and Boy 5's reflection on personal growth, maturity, and newfound confidence. In FG3, the importance of teamwork in character building was highlighted by Girl 3:

> *"Us as scouts, even though we work on developing ourselves and building our character, we rarely work alone on any topic or issue, the team spirit is engraved within us. One without the other is no good."*

Another participant, Girl 2, reflected on her experiences:

> *"Not only my leaders, but the patrol I was in, as well. My leaders were of course really invested in us... they were much more dedicated to building our characters, to teaching us to be good people."*

Overall, the FG discussions illustrated how Scouting fosters character development through teamwork, responsibility, service, and self-improvement, with participants sharing personal experiences that reflect this growth.

Emotional development

Emotional development in Scouting, especially in the context of North Macedonia, takes place during the trial period before becoming a scout leader and taking on a patrol of cub scouts for the first time. These young leaders quickly learn important lessons hidden within the skills and values they acquire. The following discussion from FG1 illustrates this. Boy 4 emphasized the need for self-control when dealing with younger children, stating:

"For example, when you are with a child you cannot be so vulgar."

Girl 3 added:

"We should be calm with children... and that they should react most consciously."

Participants acknowledged the importance of emotional regulation, with Girl 3 highlighting the awareness of needing to remain calm and steady when dealing with younger scouts.

When asked what advice they would give to kids just starting in Scouting, participants in FG1 expressed values of emotional maturity gained through their experiences. Boy 2 emphasized friendship over competition, saying:

"For example, when small children, small scouts, when they go to a competition, they should not see others as opponents, but should be friends with each other."

Girl 2 advised patience, stating:

"For the little scouts, I would say, every beginning is difficult and they should know that they cannot learn everything at once; it takes time."

FG2's discussion on emotional development wasn't extensive, but one participant, Boy 5, shared his personal growth and increased self-awareness, stating:

"After joining scouting, I changed a lot personally and character-wise. I was very shy at the beginning, and now I am not anymore. I am more responsible, mature. I even found out I can be funny sometimes."

In FG3, the girls had extensive discussions about emotional challenges and growth. They emphasized the role of their scout community in overcoming emotional difficulties and supporting one another. Girl 5 highlighted the mutual mental and emotional support within their organization, contrasting it with non-scout peers facing similar challenges. She shared how Scouting provides a positive outlet for dealing with negative thoughts and crises, offering a sense of belonging and emotional well-being.

Additionally, participants in FG3 expressed frustration with teachers in middle and high schools who sometimes engage in harsh criticism and yelling, which can negatively impact youth. Scouting was mentioned as an environment with positive role models that contribute to problem-solving skills and offer mental support. Girl 3 explained:

> "That is direct criticism, what we get... If I am facing this problem, it doesn't mean that I alone must solve it. Of course, I should be the initiator, but I am allowed to ask for support... mental support goes a long way, and that is something I haven't received from my teachers or sport coaches, etc."

Overall, the FG discussions highlighted how Scouting fosters emotional development by teaching emotional regulation, patience, and providing a supportive community, especially when contrasted with the challenges faced in other educational settings.

Spiritual development

A common trend across all the focus groups was the participants' difficulty in articulating their experiences and thoughts on spiritual development in Scouting. This could be attributed to the infrequent programs and activities related to spirituality in North Macedonia's Scouting. Unlike some scout organizations worldwide where spirituality is often tied to specific religious beliefs, North Macedonia's scouting is open to spirituality in a broader sense, encompassing various religions due to its multiethnic and multireligious environment.

When asked about spiritual development in FG1, Boy 4 expressed the belief that spiritual development is fostered through intercultural interactions during competitions, emphasizing the importance of learning how to communicate with people from different cities and countries.

In FG2, there was a discussion about the nature of spirituality, with Boy 4 stating:

> "When we talk about spirituality, for example, I start from me. I still understand spirituality as a religion... But often spirituality is human-to-human connections. It can affect us emotionally, also spirituality is a connection with an animal or object."

Boy 4 shared a personal perspective that spirituality can involve emotional connections with others, animals, or objects, even if he initially associated it with religion.

FG3's responses regarding spirituality were more closely related to Scouting's reality. Girl 3 associated spirituality with campfires, reflecting the unique experiences and traditions within Scouting. Another participant in FG3 provided a deeper perspective on spirituality:

> "Personally, when I hear spirituality, I think of improving myself, of trying to develop myself, as much as I can, physically, mentally... Spirituality gave me a great chance to think about myself and my place in the world."

This response highlighted how spirituality in Scouting can be a means of self-improvement and self-reflection, offering participants an opportunity to contemplate their personal growth and connection to the world.

In summary, the discussions on spiritual development in Scouting touched on various aspects, including intercultural interactions, personal connections, and self-improvement, reflecting the diverse and open approach to spirituality within North Macedonia's Scouting.

Leadership skills and qualities

Leadership skills are a prominent outcome of Scouting in North Macedonia, particularly among scouts who have been actively involved for more than three years, as represented by the focus group participants in this study. The discussions shed light on the profound impact of scout leaders, the development of strong interpersonal relationships, and the parallel drawn between scout leaders and school teachers.

In FG1, participants shared valuable insights into their admiration for their scout leaders and how these leaders inspired them to aspire to leadership roles themselves. Boy 3 expressed how his trust in his leader served as an inspiration for him to become a leader and continue with Scouting. In addition, Boy 1 conveyed a deep sense of respect and idolization for his scout leader, highlighting the leader's pivotal role in shaping his Scouting experience. Boy 2 mentioned the influence of a leader who achieved championship status, setting a goal for him to strive towards. Girl 4 referred to her scout leader as a "safe place" during her patrol period, emphasizing the leader's role in broadening her perspective on the world. Girl 3 drew a parallel between scout leaders and school teachers, highlighting how leaders, being only a few years older, fostered a closer, more open connection with the scouts compared to the distant relationship often perceived with teachers.

In FG2, participants were asked to describe what leadership looks like, and their responses revolved around taking initiative, embracing risks, and assuming

responsibility. They highlighted leadership school, camps, and jamborees as activities that contributed significantly to their leadership skills development.

FG3 participants shared detailed accounts of their experiences at leadership school and the enduring impact it had on them. They emphasized the profound connections and pride they felt as leaders. One participant highlighted how leadership extended beyond Scouting, influencing their ability to organize and lead in other aspects of life, such as managing chores in a boarding school. Additionally, FG3 participants recognized the importance of positive leadership examples and identified the negative effects of a strict and authoritarian approach in leadership.

In summary, the focus group discussions illuminated the significant role of scout leaders in inspiring scouts to aspire to leadership roles. The development of leadership skills was closely tied to personal growth and the ability to take on responsibilities, and the lessons learned in Scouting extended beyond the organization into other areas of life.

Scouting as a movement and organization

Throughout the focus group discussions, scouting emerged as a remarkable movement that provides youth with essential life skills, values, and lessons in a way that even pedagogical figures may fall short. Many participants expressed that scouting had become a community and a home where they felt respected and appreciated. Among the numerous comments made in the three focus groups, two stood out as particularly powerful and impactful:

In FG1, Boy 3 highlighted the distinctive approach of scouting in fostering leadership skills compared to traditional education:

"Scouting also helps with these leadership skills because, for example, in school, everything is handed to us on a platter. Professors teach, we learn from a book and that's it. And for scouts, we have to try to achieve the goal by ourselves. Without someone handing it to us on a platter."

In FG3, Girl 6 shared a profound contrast between her experiences in school and scouting, emphasizing the unique support and sense of belonging she found in the scouting community:

> *"I think that both teachers and adults in scouting keep doing what they do because they decided to work with kids and youth, but we can't look at these categories the same way. Personally I was also bullied in middle school, for the whole time I was there... And so I did, and the answer I got was - if you can't handle it on your own, don't come to me... On the other hand, since I joined scouting I truly found myself, and one of the adults in my unit, a person who did so much for my development and growth, besides being there for me as a sister and a friend, in one occasion told me: If you can't handle this on your own, I will push you. I don't think I will get that support and dedication again, from adults like her... I would much rather be accepted and cherished in scouting, than in school or even home, which is a bonus for me."*

These testimonials underscore the role of scouting as a transformative movement that empowers youth with skills, values, and a sense of belonging, offering an alternative and impactful educational experience beyond traditional schooling.

3.3 YMCA Netherlands

Between October 2023 and January 2024, YMCA Netherlands organized two focus groups and conducted a hybrid survey as part of its data collection efforts for the MIYO pilot phase. These research methods aimed to gather insights and feedback from young people between the ages of 14 and 18.

Engaging local associations and their volunteers played a key role in the success of the survey. However, it was noted that some local associations were not fully aware of the ages of the youth they served regularly. This lack of awareness made it challenging to ensure that the survey reached the intended target audience.

Completion rates of the surveys varied, with a significant portion being deemed unfit for the purposes of MIYO. Some surveys were either incomplete or filled out by individuals outside the target age group. This highlighted the difficulties in engaging the specific demographic and ensuring that they completed the survey accurately.

Another significant challenge was the length of the questionnaire. Participants found the survey to be quite lengthy, and this may have discouraged some from completing it in its entirety. The lengthy nature of the survey raised concerns

about participant engagement and retention. Language complexity was another obstacle encountered. Volunteers from local associations reported that participants, particularly those in the target age group, found the language and sentence structure in the survey to be challenging. This linguistic complexity may have created a barrier for some respondents, affecting their ability to provide accurate and meaningful responses.

The survey process also shed light on the complex interplay between local YMCA associations and the main office of YMCA Netherlands. Understanding this dynamic was crucial for the project team and highlighted the need for effective communication and coordination.

In addition to the survey, YMCA Netherlands also conducted two focus groups which provided a platform for in-depth discussions and qualitative insights from young participants. The data collected from the focus groups complemented the survey results and added a qualitative perspective to the research.

The first focus group, held in October 2023, included a large group of youth aged between 16 and 24 years old. While this group included participants who fell outside the scope, it served as a test for YMCA Netherlands' team, allowing them to pilot the qualitative method. The second focus group, which took place in January 2024, included four young people aged 16 to 18. For the purpose of this pilot phase, only the second focus group's insights are considered.

Each focus group meeting consisted of two parts. After introductory questions and an explanation of the SPICES framework, attendees were asked to provide comments on six large posters, each representing one of the dimensions of the SPICES framework. These comments were meant to reflect how each dimension resonated with them personally. Participants had 20 minutes for this task, and the Focus Group mediator was available to provide further explanations if needed. Following the poster activity, participants engaged in a plenary group discussion, during which the moderator highlighted the most striking insights and comments from the posters. This group discussion allowed for a deeper exploration of the participants' perspectives and experiences related to the SPICES framework.

Overall, both the survey and the focus groups were essential components of YMCA Netherlands' data collection efforts. They provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of engaging young people in a study and shed light on the complexities of reaching the target demographic.

3.3.1 Survey Results

Section 1: Demographic and contextual information

Sample size and age range

In the Netherlands, a total of 25 individuals completed the survey. The age range of participants spanned from 14 to 18 years, with the most prominent representation being individuals aged 16, comprising a total of 10 respondents. Additionally, more than half of the survey participants fell within the age bracket of 15 to 16 years, as illustrated in Figure 1.
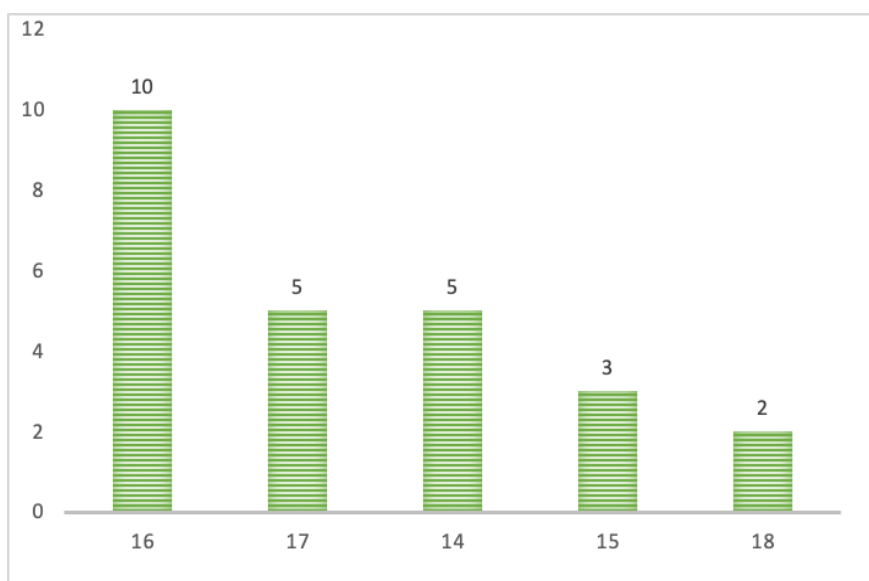

Figure 1: Age of respondents

Gender

Among the survey respondents, the majority, consisting of 17 participants, identified themselves as female, while 6 participants identified as male. Additionally, two individuals chose the response option 'preferred not to say,' as depicted in Figure 2.
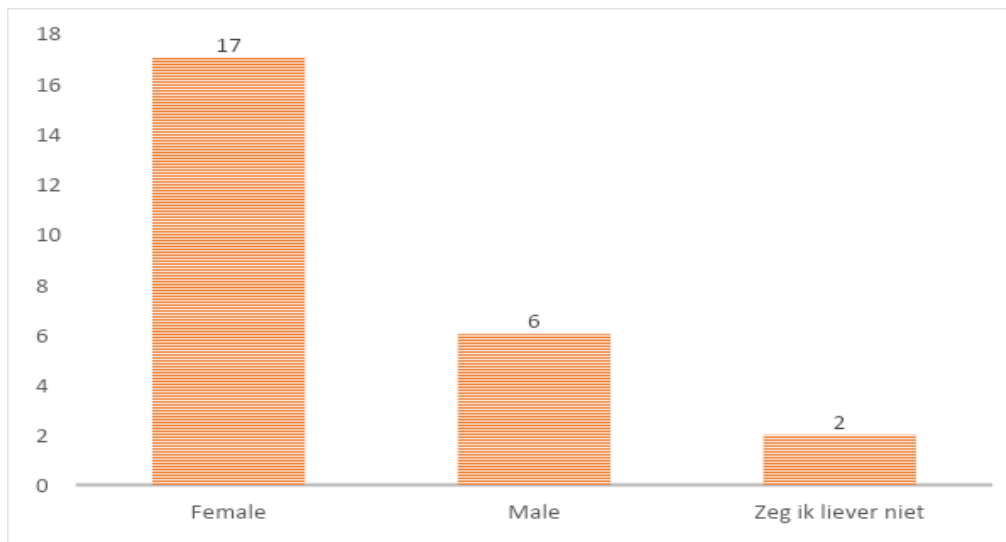

Figure 2: Gender of respondents

Duration of involvement

The data indicates that a significant portion of the respondents, specifically 76%, had participated in YMCA programs for a minimum of three years. In contrast, a smaller fraction, comprising 12%, had less than one year of involvement, as shown in Figure 3.
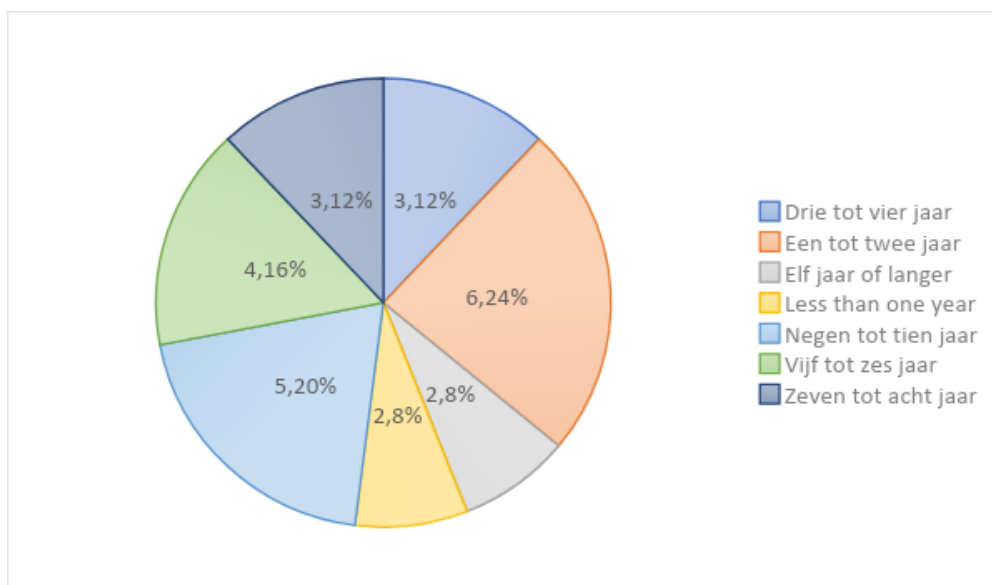

Figure 3: Duration of involvement in YMCA

Area of residence

The survey responses primarily originated from young individuals residing in urban areas, as detailed in Table 1. When considering the combined categories of big city, town/small city, and suburbs, they encompassed over 90% of the respondents. In contrast, only two participants hailed from rural areas, representing 8% of the total.

Types of residence areas	Responses	%
A (small) town or village in an urban area	7	28%
A big city	7	28%
A farm or home in the countryside	2	8%
The suburbs or outskirts of a big city	9	36%
Grand Total	**25**	**100%**

Table 1: Area of residence

Long standing illness or disability

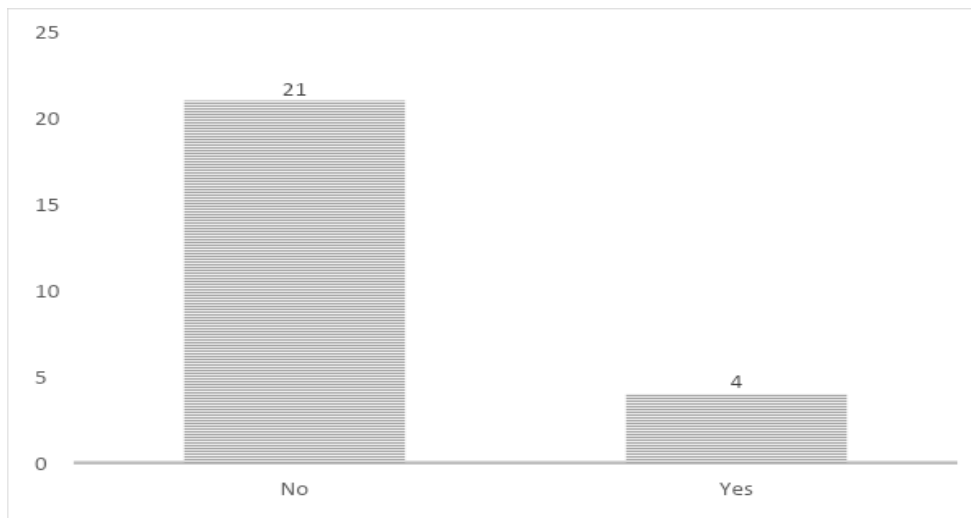A total of four respondents reported having a longstanding illness or disability, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Any long-standing illness or disability?

Religion

A very large majority of respondents (18) said they do not belong to a particular religion or denomination.
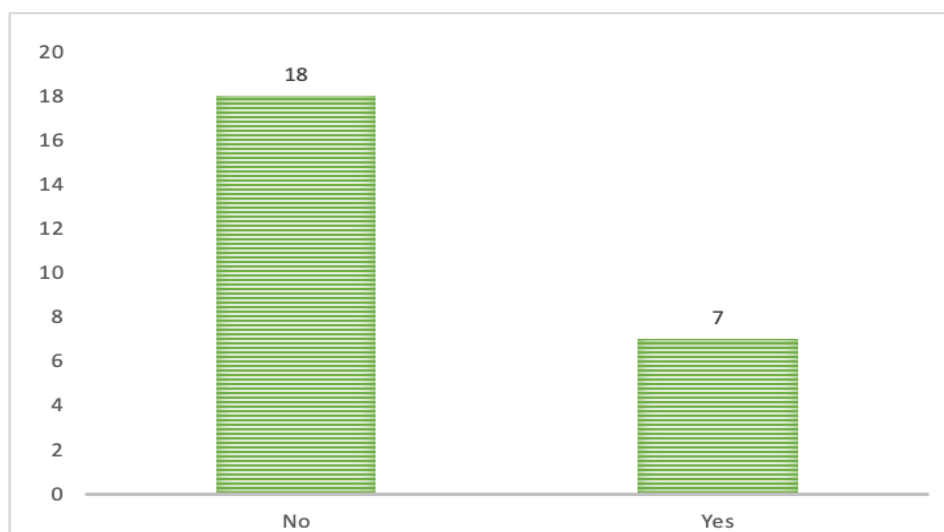

Figure 5: Any religion/denomination?

Occupation of main income earner(s)

When asked about the occupation of the primary income earner in their family or household, 10 respondents mentioned professions such as doctors, teachers, engineers, and others falling into the "professional" category. Additionally, 4 respondents indicated occupations in the "upper administrative" category, including bankers and business executives. Combining these two categories, slightly over 56% of the total respondents were classified into class 1, known as the "salariat," within the European Socio-economic Classification (ESeC) 3-class model.

One respondent mentioned clerical occupations like secretary, clerk, or office manager. When this category is combined with respondents in the occupational groups of sales manager, shop owner, shop assistant, foreman, motor mechanics, and restaurant owner, police officer, nearly one third of the respondents (28%) were classified into class 2 of the ESeC 3-class model.

One respondent belonged to ESeC class 3, which represents the least socio-economically advantaged group, but it's worth noting that this classification does not include the unemployed, which was indicated by 1 respondent. Two respondents did not specify the occupation of the principal income earner.
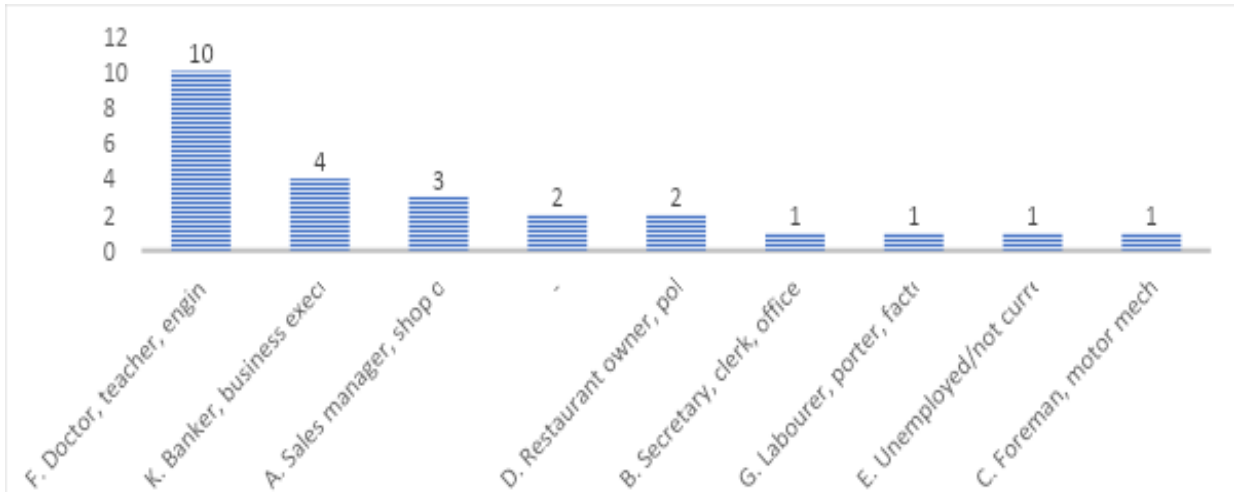
Figure 6: Occupation of principal income earner

Respondents had the option to select a second occupational group if there were two earners in their family or household with roughly equal earnings. Figure 7 illustrates the responses for those whose primary earner was in the professional occupational group of 'doctor, teacher, engineer...[etc]'. Among respondents in this category who nominated a second earner, the most commonly identified occupational group was also 'doctor, teacher, engineer...[etc]', making up 25% of the total (6 out of 24).
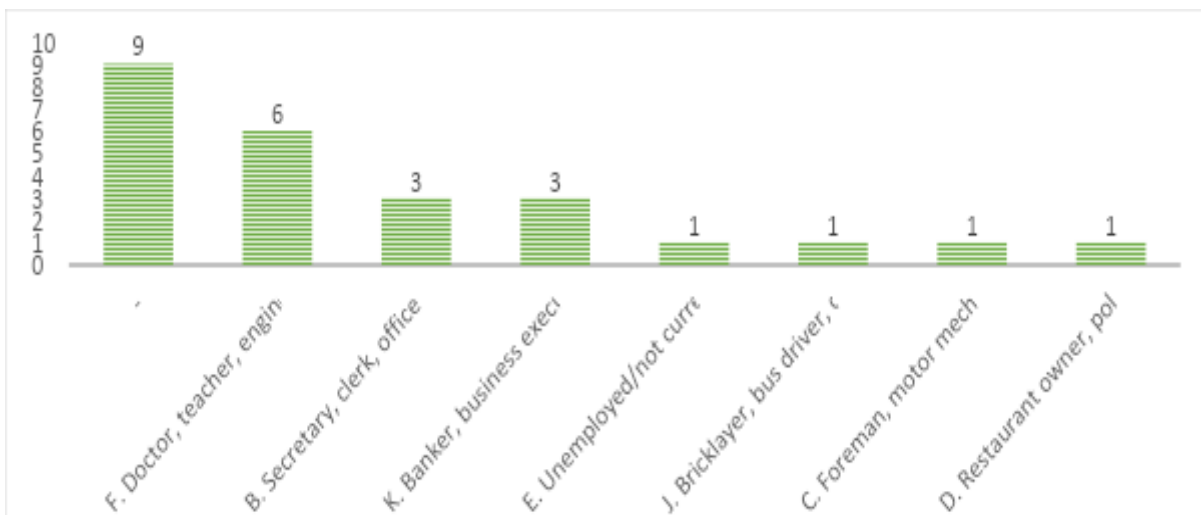

Figure 7: Occupation of second income earner, where first earner is professional

Section 2: Perceptions of self and of YMCA

In Section 2 of the survey questionnaire, respondents were presented with a series of 18 statements, referred to as the 'A statements.' These statements were designed to assess their self-perception by rating how much each statement applied to them on a scale from 1 (indicating it applies little) to 10 (indicating it applies much). Subsequently, they were asked to complete corresponding 'B statements,' rating how much YMCA contributed to their development in relation to the same qualities or characteristics on the same 1 to 10 scale.

It's worth noting that in the case of the A statements, which represent self-perception, male respondents tended to assign higher scores in 16 out of the 18 items. The margin of difference ranged from 0.15 to 1.65, with 14 questions having a margin of 0.3 or more, and 5 of them having a margin higher than 1.5. These items include:

1(a) I try to live my life in a healthy way (1.62).

3(a) I am confident in taking the lead in group or team activities (1.65).

4(a) There are people in my life with whom I'm comfortable sharing feelings and emotions (1.52).

6(a) When facing challenges and difficulties, I draw strength from my belief that life has meaning (1.65).

7(a) I'm aware of how the things I do and say can affect other people's feelings and emotions (1.51).

These findings highlight the differences in self-perception between male and female respondents in various aspects of their lives and personal qualities.

Item	Female	Male	Female	Male
1(a) I try to live my life in a healthy way (nutrition, sleep, exercise).	7.71	9.33	6.12	8.17
2(a) I am curious about the world around me and enjoy learning new things.	7.88	9	7.29	8.33
3(a) I am confident in taking the lead in group or team activities.	7.18	8.83	7.53	8.17
4(a) There are people in my life with whom I'm comfortable sharing feelings and emotions.	7.65	9.17	7.47	7.5
5(a) I'm aware of how my behaviour (my actions and my lifestyle/ the way I live) affects my mood and my feelings.	7.06	7.83	5.76	7.5
6(a) When facing challenges and difficulties, I draw strength from my belief that life has meaning.	6.35	8	6.47	7.83

7(a) I'm aware of how the things I do and say can affect other people's feelings and emotions.	7.82	9.33	5.94	7.67
8(a) There are people in my daily life that I admire and respect.	8.76	8.67	7.35	7.83
9(a) I have a sense of respect and wonder at the natural world.	8.06	8.67	6.65	7.67
10(a) I have a good understanding of the human body and how it works.	7.41	8	4.76	4.83
11(a) I know the difference between reliable and unreliable sources of information.	7.71	8.5	4.59	4.83
12(a) I find comfort in having a quiet space to relax and reflect. away from the regular activities of school, wor, or family.	8.35	8.5	6.29	6.67
13(a) I feel confident thinking for myself and solving problems.	8.19	8.33	6.82	7.17
14(a) Before I act. I try to think about how my actions might affect others.	7.35	8.5	6.18	6.83
15(a) I choose to be involved in activities in my community (unpaid) for the benefit of others or the environment.	7.06	7.5	7.06	8.17
16(a) I think my friends would say that I'm consistent in what I believe, what I say and what I do/ and true in my beliefs, words, and actions.	7	6.83	6	6.83
17(a) I choose to engage in physical activity (other than at school) at least once a week.	8.35	9.33	5.65	7.83
18(a) I believe everyone should be respected and treated the same, no matter where they're from or who they are. / I believe all people should be treated with respect and equality, no matter who they are or where they're from.	9.12	9.67	7.76	7.5
Mean	**7.72**	**8.56**	**6.43**	**7.30**

Table 2: A and B Statements – mean scores for females and males

In the case of the B statements, which relate to how YMCA contributed to respondents' development in various qualities or characteristics, male respondents tended to assign higher scores in 17 out of the 18 items. The margin of difference ranged from 0.07 to 2.18, with margins exceeding 1.5 in 4 items. The three questions with the most significant margin differences are:

17(a) I choose to engage in physical activity (other than at school) at least once a week (2.18).

1(a) I try to live my life in a healthy way (2.05).

5(a) I'm aware of how my behavior (my actions and my lifestyle/the way I live) affects my mood and my feelings (1.74).

These findings indicate that male respondents attributed a higher level of influence to YMCA in contributing to their development in these particular qualities or characteristics compared to female respondents.

Rank order of benefits of YMCA

Table 3 displays B statements in a descending rank order. This arrangement effectively illustrates the diverse benefits perceived by Dutch participants as a result of their engagement with YMCA. The table begins with the highest-ranked item, 'YMCA has developed my confidence in my leadership skills,' which scored an impressive 7.85, signaling a strong impact in this area. On the other end of the spectrum, the item with the lowest rank, 'What I have learned through YMCA helps me to tell the difference between reliable and unreliable sources of information,' received a score of 4.71, indicating a more moderate perception of benefit in this aspect. This detailed ranking provides insightful perspectives on the areas where YMCA involvement is seen as most and least beneficial by the Dutch respondents.

Item	Female	Male	Mean
3(b) YMCA has developed my confidence in my leadership skills.	7.53	8.17	7.85
2(b) YMCA provides opportunities to satisfy my curiosity and learn new things	7.29	8.33	7.81
18(a) I believe everyone should be respected and treated the same, no matter where they're from or who they are.	7.76	7.5	7.63
15(b) Scouting enables and supports me to engage in activities for the benefit of others or the environment.	7.06	8.17	7.62
8(b) I have met some people that I admire and respect through YMCA.	7.35	7.83	7.59
4(b) I know some people I can share my feelings with through YMCA.	7.47	7.5	7.49
9(b) YMCA develops and sustains my sense of respect and wonder at the natural world.	6.65	7.67	7.16
6(b) Participating in YMCA strengthens me in the belief that life has meaning	6.47	7.83	7.15
1(b) YMCA encourages and supports me to live healthily.	6.12	8.17	7.15
13(b) YMCA helped to shape the development of my thinking and problem-solving skills.	6.82	7.17	7.00
7(b) YMCA has helped me to become aware of how I can affect other people's feelings and emotions.	5.94	7.67	6.81
18(b) YMCA has helped to shape my belief that everyone should be treated the same.	5.65	7.83	6.74
5(b) I have learned how behavior and feelings are connected through my time in YMCA.	5.76	7.5	6.63
14(b) YMCA encourages me to consider the effect of my actions on others.	6.18	6.83	6.51
12(b) YMCA gives me a peaceful spot where I can have some quiet time to think.	6.29	6.67	6.48
17(b) YMCA provides opportunities and encouragement/ offers chances and support to engage in regular physical activity.	6	6.83	6.42
10(b) Participating in YMCA has added to my understanding of the human body and how it works.	4.76	4.83	4.80
11(b) What I have learned through YMCA helps me to tell the difference between reliable and unreliable sources of information.	4,59	4,83	4,71

Table 3: B Statements in rank order

The SPICES dimensions

The survey instrument was constructed so that the 18 items - each a 'couplet' consisting of an (a) statement and a (b) statement – reflected the six headings of the SPICES framework, with three items relating to each dimension. The dimensions are all types of development that are intended and expected for young people through YMCA: social, physical, intellectual, character, emotional and spiritual. The items were randomly distributed within the survey questionnaire and the SPICES framework was not mentioned in the survey at all.

The figure below presents in diagrammatic form the composite mean scores for each of the six SPICES dimensions consisting of A and B statements. Difference between the mean total score of A and B statements is 1.27 points.
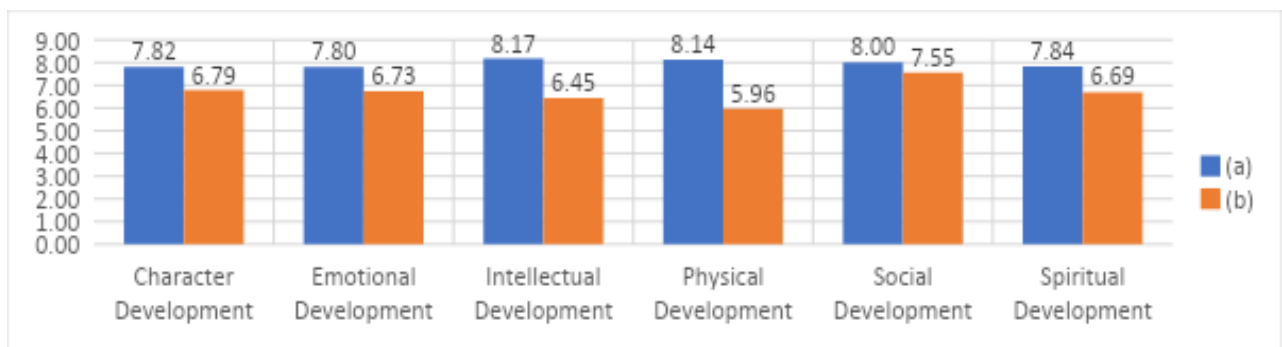

Figure 8: SPICES dimensions mean scores

SPICES dimensions and duration of involvement in YMCA

Figure 8 presents the mean scores for the six SPICES dimensions in the Dutch survey, broken down by the length of time that the respondents have spent in YMCA. Note that this analysis takes account of B statements.

The distribution of SPICES averages is similar for involvement in YMCA less than one year to 8 years. We see that all SPICES dimensions have the highest averages for involvement in YMCA between 9 and 10 years. However, Figure 9 shows that the frequency of participation in YMCA does not influence the mean SPICES score.
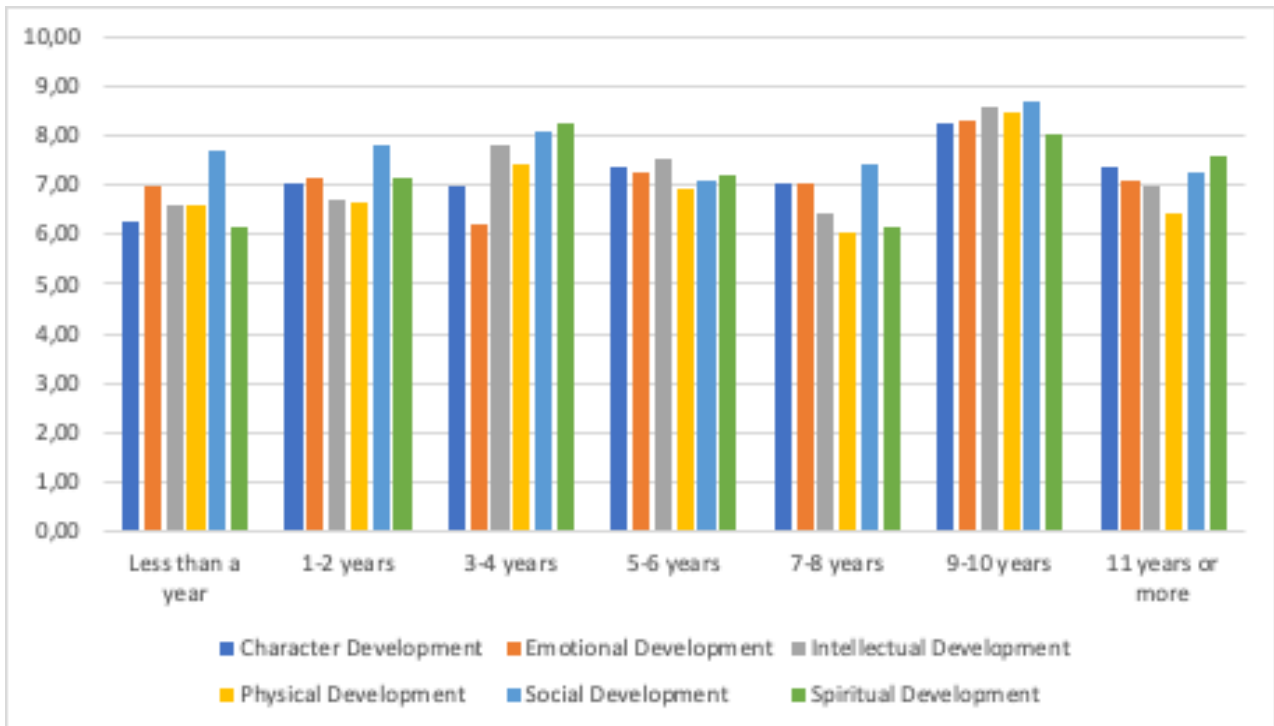
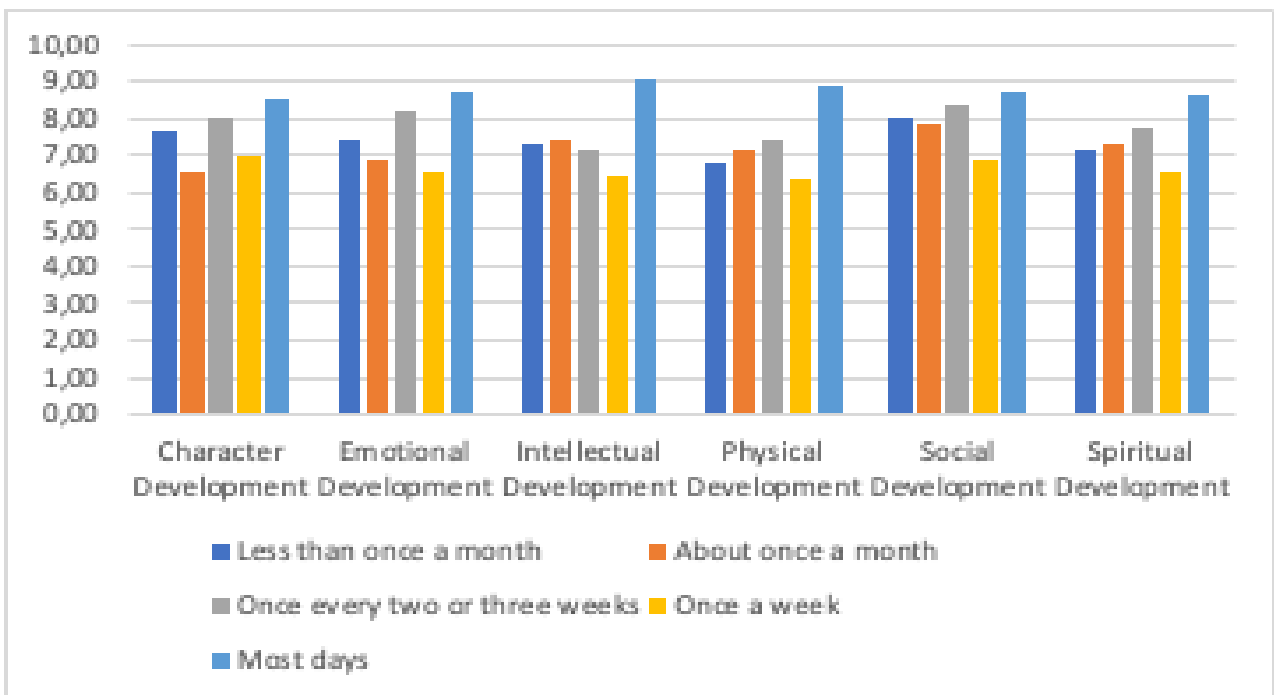*Figure 9: SPICES dimensions mean scores depending on duration of involvement*

Figure 9: SPICES dimensions mean scores depending on frequency of involvement

3.3.2 Focus Group Analysis

This analysis includes excerpts from the focus group discussions (denoted as D) and participant-created posters (denoted as P). The excerpts provide insights into the participants' perspectives on social development through their involvement with YMCA.

Social development

The unanimous consensus among participants was that their social skills had significantly improved due to their experiences with YMCA. This improvement was particularly evident in their increased ability to initiate and maintain contact with peers. YMCA played a crucial role in this development, especially for those who were initially hesitant or apprehensive about social interactions but chose to continue their involvement after receiving a warm and welcoming reception at YMCA. One participant reflected on this growth (P):

"I feel that I have become more social and dare to talk more with people I don't know, which I found pretty difficult at first,' and 'YMCA helped me make more contact with my fellow volunteers."

This sentiment was echoed and reinforced by others in the group.

When participants were asked to delve deeper into their experiences, one elaborated (D):

> "'I feel that I have become more social and dare to talk more with people I don't know, which I found pretty difficult at first.'"

Another participant provided a tangible example of this newfound social confidence (D):

> "…And then I just ended up being quite social. And in the end, I was social, but I found it scary to talk to people I didn't know. And I do feel like I can now just go up to someone I don't know and say 'Hey, hello, how are you?' and then start a conversation. (…) [It is a place] where you think, well, I feel safe enough here to approach someone.'"

These excerpts vividly illustrate how YMCA has been instrumental in fostering social development among participants, enabling them to overcome initial social anxieties and engage more confidently in social interactions.

A safe place

The participant's remarks highlighted above are representative of a broader sentiment shared among the group. YMCA is consistently described as providing a nurturing environment where young people can forge friendships, hone their social skills, and acquire new knowledge. This setting is characterized by its supportive nature, allowing participants the freedom to experiment, learn, and even fail without fear of judgment. This unique atmosphere at YMCA can be aptly encapsulated by the term 'safe place.' One participant eloquently described this feeling of safety and camaraderie (D):

"So what do you like best? Or what do you think... Just how people treat each other here. Because yes, everyone is very nice to each other. And there's no talking behind one's back or things like that. All are kind to each other. It's just a huge group of friends. And that's just really nice. I feel very safe at YMCA."

This sentiment of YMCA as a safe haven was reiterated by other participants as well, with one stating (D):

"When I'm at YMCA. Yes, it's always fun. And I just like that. It's just a safe place at the YMCA.'" When probed about what contributes to this sense of safety, another participant responded, "'The people. Because everyone cares about each other. And I can always go there. With what I want to say. Yes, it's always fun."

The consensus appears to be that the sense of safety at YMCA is fostered by the people themselves. It's not attributable to a single individual or those in specific roles but rather the collective presence of patient, attentive, and supportive members. This community spirit is further echoed in the posters created by participants, as one wrote (P):

"When you sit with something you can always talk about it. If you have a question or are against something, you can always go to someone."

Another poster reinforced this sentiment (P):

"You can always go to YMCA with questions. When you sit with something you can always talk about it…"

These insights paint a picture of YMCA as a welcoming and secure environment, where mutual respect, care, and support are fundamental, contributing to its perception as a 'safe place' for personal growth and social development.

Physical development

The focus group discussion revealed that references to physical development within the YMCA context were often intertwined with other aspects of personal growth. Participants specifically highlighted the experiences of pushing personal boundaries, discovering individual limits, and stepping out of their comfort zones. A key benefit of YMCA in this regard is the reduced pressure to perform, particularly when compared to other settings such as school. One participant described this difference in approach (D):

> *"Well, just in the past, for example, with school and stuff, I had to go to gym and I always had something, actually, and then I had to. (…) And even if I said I can't do it now, yeah, okay, then you get a failing grade and then you can't finish it. So then, yes, I was made to participate anyway. While, actually, I knew very clearly that I simply couldn't do it better and I completely feel that space at YMCA to also be able to say, well, I can do this now. No, I'm just not going to do this.'"*

This sentiment of reduced pressure and greater autonomy was echoed by another participant (D):

> *"And that almost never happens, that you are told that you have to do it or, in fact, everyone thinks: 'oh, annoying, can we do something for you'"*

Another participant reaffirmed the sense of freedom and comfort in being able to decline participation without negative consequences (D):

> *"It's a very nice, safe feeling, so to speak, that you can just say no."*

These reflections underscore YMCA's supportive environment, where physical activities are seen as opportunities for personal exploration and growth, rather than as obligations to perform or achieve good grades. This approach fosters a sense of empowerment and respect for individual choices and capabilities, contributing to participants' overall physical and personal development.

Intellectual development

YMCA offers a supportive environment for young people to learn, grow, and improve themselves. A significant aspect of this environment is the encouragement to ask questions and seek guidance without fear of judgment (P):

> *"You can always go to YMCA with questions. When you sit with something you can always talk about it."*

When in challenging situations, YMCA helps young people to develop problem-solving skills and find solutions independently (D):

> *"Okay, look, you have a child and he accidentally steps on a nail, then you have to act immediately. Yes. And so it's more a question of, okay, you have this situation, how are you going to solve it?"*

This approach fosters a mindset of solution-oriented thinking, encouraging young people to actively engage with and reframe problems. The practical nature of these challenges contrasts with the theoretical focus often found in schools (D):

> *"And that is part of it, I think, that solution-oriented thinking, which you develop more quickly if you really work on it. Because at school you are like, yes, you have to be able to think like that and you have to be able to come up with solutions. But when you're really in the middle of it, it's more*

difficult than it seems. But you also learn more if you ultimately succeed. Or fail."

While such situations could potentially increase stress, YMCA helps participants to approach challenges calmly and thoughtfully (P):

"Normally I quickly panic in difficult situations, but YMCA helped me take a step back and look at solutions, which still helps me enormously in daily life."

The social environment of YMCA plays a crucial role in this process, offering a safe space where problems are not faced alone, but rather addressed collaboratively (P):

"As mentioned, together with other YMCA'ers you can solve almost every problem, you never do it alone at YMCA."

Finally, one participant highlighted how YMCA specifically fueled their intellectual curiosity (P):

"Due to the diversity in activities and people you are dealing with, I get encouraged to find out what moves people. From my studies, I learn to look for the motives of others. Within the YMCA, I get the chance to investigate how people work. Something I am curious about."

These insights demonstrate YMCA's multifaceted impact, providing a nurturing environment for personal, social, and intellectual development.

Character development

The focus group discussions revealed a unanimous perspective among participants regarding the character-building impact of YMCA programs. These programs foster a sense of personal responsibility and proactivity, emphasizing the importance of self-awareness and the ability to operate effectively within a group. Contrary to promoting isolation in problem-solving, YMCA encourages the recognition of one's own strengths and limitations, advocating for initiative in seeking clarity and assistance when needed.

YMCA serves as a supportive environment where participants can experiment, make mistakes, and learn without fear of reprimand or discouragement. This nurturing atmosphere is crucial in fostering resilience and a positive approach to learning and problem-solving, as evidenced by various statements on YMCA posters (P):

"At YMCA, I learned to take initiative. If something isn't working, YMCA helps sort it out."

"YMCA teaches that there are always multiple solutions to a problem, and that seeking help is okay."

"Persistence is key. Don't give up after the first try, and remember, it's alright to ask for help."

This theme of perseverance and resilience was reiterated throughout the focus group discussions, particularly emphasizing its importance for new members joining YMCA. One participant (D) shared:

"Setbacks are part of the process. It's about discussing them, moving forward, and enjoying the journey. Temporary difficulties pave the way for future enjoyment."

Participants openly discussed the challenges they encountered in their YMCA experiences, yet felt empowered to confront and overcome these obstacles, thereby enhancing their confidence and problem-solving abilities. This sentiment was aptly summarized by a participant (D):

"Everyone faces setbacks, but there should never be a reason to give up."

In conclusion, the YMCA programs effectively cultivate a sense of personal responsibility, resilience, and proactive problem-solving, contributing significantly to the character development of their participants.

Emotional development

The focus group discussions highlighted the significant role YMCA plays in the emotional development of its volunteers, who are primarily engaged as youth workers. For many, their involvement in YMCA marked their first experience in a leadership role, influencing their perception of and interaction with youth. A key aspect of this emotional growth is the development of empathy.

Participants reported a deeper understanding of emotions, particularly in relation to children. One participant (P) noted:

"I started to understand how emotions work, especially with children."

This enhanced empathy involves recognizing and respecting the diverse backgrounds and experiences of others. As another participant (P) shared:

"YMCA has taught me to consider how different home situations affect people's responses."

Moreover, participants observed a personal transformation in their ability to understand and express their own emotions. They learned the importance of not suppressing emotions, attributing this growth to the supportive environment provided by YMCA Netherlands. One participant (D) shared a personal experience:

> "I used to keep my emotions to myself, crying alone. But now, I don't hesitate to express how I feel, knowing I won't be judged."

This non-judgmental atmosphere at YMCA encourages participants to openly express their emotions and seek help when needed. Another participant (D) remarked:

> "YMCA taught me it's okay to show emotions and to ask for help instead of panicking."

A common sentiment among participants was the value of YMCA as a safe space for emotional exploration and expression. One participant (P) summarized this, saying:

> "YMCA has helped me understand emotions better and approach them differently. It's a place where you can always find support and guidance."

In conclusion, the YMCA provides a nurturing environment that fosters significant emotional development in its volunteers. This development encompasses both an increased capacity for empathy towards others and a healthier approach to understanding and expressing one's own emotions.

Spiritual development

In the process of analyzing the focus group discussions, it became apparent that assessing spiritual development among YMCA participants posed a distinct challenge. Unlike topics like emotional and character development, where participants provided concrete examples and clear narratives, discussions around spiritual development were less straightforward and more abstract. Participants often conflated spiritual development with emotional growth or problem-solving skills, making it difficult to isolate and identify purely spiritual aspects of their experiences. Their comments frequently overlapped with other areas of personal development, lacking the specificity and depth that might be expected in a discussion about spirituality.

For instance, when prompted to discuss spiritual development, participants tended to revert to discussing their emotional experiences or practical problem-solving approaches. This pattern suggests either a different interpretation of spirituality among the participants or a possible integration of spiritual growth with other aspects of their personal development.

Further probing in the discussions yielded limited additional insight, as participants largely echoed sentiments already captured in written statements or previously expressed views. This repetition indicates a potential gap in understanding or articulating spiritual experiences, highlighting the need for more nuanced approaches to explore this aspect of personal growth.

In summary, the focus group findings underscore the complexity of assessing spiritual development in a setting like YMCA. The intertwining of spiritual growth with emotional and practical problem-solving skills suggests a holistic approach to personal development, albeit one that is challenging to dissect and analyze in isolation.

YMCA as a movement and organization

The focus group discussions illuminated a key element that underpins the YMCA's impact as a movement and organization: the role of trust in creating a supportive and enriching environment for young people. This trust manifests in the relationships formed within YMCA, where members find a community of like-minded individuals who provide support and understanding in times of challenge.

YMCA excels in offering a space where young people can engage in experiential learning—embracing the process of trying, failing, and improving. Participants highlighted the opportunities they received to experiment with new activities, seek guidance, and reattempt tasks in a nurturing setting. This environment is crucial for their development, as it encourages open communication and mutual support.

However, adapting to this supportive culture is not always immediate. Participants noted that feeling comfortable enough to seek advice and openly discuss challenges was a journey, one that required time and personal growth. This process of acclimatization to the YMCA culture is an integral part of the experience, leading to deeper engagement and development.

The unanimous advice from participants to new YMCA volunteers encapsulates the essence of this supportive culture (D):

> "Talk. Find someone within the YMCA to discuss everything, no matter how small. Chances are, they've experienced similar challenges. This open

communication is key to staying engaged and making the most of your time, especially during the initial days of your first year."

In conclusion, YMCA as a movement thrives on a foundation of trust, fostering a unique environment where young people can develop personally and socially. This environment encourages open communication, mutual support, and a willingness to embrace challenges, making YMCA a transformative experience for its members.

4. CONCLUSION

The second phase of the MIYO research has provided insights into youth development through the impact studies conducted by Scouterna Sweden, Scouting North Macedonia, and YMCA Netherlands. The findings from these pilot studies offer a nuanced understanding of the impact of youth organizations on the personal development of young people, aligning with the SPICES framework. As we look to the future, several recommendations emerge to enhance the effectiveness of such studies and the use of the MIYO toolkit:

❖ **Enhanced Survey Dissemination:** There is a need for more effective strategies in survey distribution. Consideration should be given to creating incentives,e.g. an online raffle prize, where participants receive a small reward for completing the survey. This approach could potentially increase response rates.

❖ **Legal and Ethical Considerations:** When engaging minors in research, it is crucial to be aware of different legal contexts, particularly regarding GDPR compliance. Obtaining parental or guardian consent is essential to ensure ethical research practices.

❖ **Attention to Power Dynamics:** Attention must be given to the power and gender dynamics when organizing focus groups. It's important to create an environment where no gender or ethnic group feels privileged or marginalized during discussions.

- ❖ **Familiarity with MIYO Manual:** Prior to starting their own impact study, organizations are advised to thoroughly familiarize themselves with the MIYO manual. This will ensure a clear understanding of the methodology and tools provided.

- ❖ **Random Sampling:** For results to be generalizable over the entire population or sampling frame, random sampling is preferable. This approach allows organizations to confidently communicate their findings and the potential impact of their work beyond the study, to wider populations of young people involved in youth work. Alternatively, where the size of the group being studied allows, a 'census' approach of contacting all members of the relevant population may also be possible, as in the case of North Macedonia in this Phase 2 study. However, there is still no guarantee of a high response rate unless the time and resources are available to allow for extensive follow-up contact with prospective respondents.

In conclusion, the MIYO's second pilot phase has demonstrated the transformative power of youth-led research. The experiences and findings of this phase not only contribute to the field of youth development but also highlight the capacity of youth workers to lead impactful research initiatives.