VILNIUS UNIVERSITY
BUSINESS SCHOOL

INTERNATIONAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

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THE FINAL MASTER'S THESIS (PROJECT)

Projektų valdymo praktikos ir iššūkiai į jaunimą orientuotose nevyriausybinėse organizacijose Lietuvoje	Project Management Practices and Challenges in Youth-Oriented Non-Governmental Organisations in Lithuania

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SUMMARY

VILNIUS UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOL
INTERNATIONAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME
STUDENT EMILIJA URBONAITĖ
PROJECT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES IN YOUTH-ORIENTED NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS IN LITHUANIA
Master's thesis supervisor – Dr. Birutė Miškinienė
Master's thesis prepared – 2025, Vilnius
Scope of Master's thesis – 102 pages
Number of tables used in the MT – 11
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Thesis Description. This master's thesis examines project management practices and challenges in Lithuanian youth and youth-focused non-governmental organizations. The relevance of the study stems from the fact that at the international level (especially at the European Union level), non-governmental organizations are encouraged to implement projects in the field of social welfare, which raises the question of how these organizations view project management in practice and what challenges they face when implementing projects. Since there is a lack of research that delves into project management practices and challenges in the field of Lithuanian NGOs, a qualitative research method was chosen for the study, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives from various youth and youth-focused non-governmental organizations.

Aims and Objectives. This thesis aims to examine how Lithuanian youth NGOs / NGOs working with young people approach project management and what kind of challenges they face when doing project-based work. Objectives of the master's thesis:

- To analyse the characteristics and operating context of the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector in Lithuania, with particular attention to youth-oriented organisations.
- To review project management practices and approaches in professional and academic literature, with a focus on their applicability and relevance to the NGO sector.

- To identify Project Management practices and challenges in Lithuanian youth-oriented NGOs.

Methodology and Results. The research data was collected through semi-structured interviews with representatives of youth organizations and NGOs working with young people. The collected data was analyzed using a qualitative content analysis method with MAXQDA software. The results showed that the NGOs surveyed use traditional, agile, and informal (ad hoc) project management methods, with the latter being the most prevalent. The choice of method varies depending on the organization and is strongly influenced by the type of organization, its activities, and the requirements of the funding institutions. The results reveal that organisational capacity constraints significantly influence project management practices within Lithuanian NGOs, creating specific and recurring challenges. The main capacity constraints identified in the interviews were a lack of human resources and a lack of sustainable funding sources. These challenges are interconnected and dependent on each other.

Conclusions. The master's thesis analyzed the characteristics of the NGO sector, including management, leadership, project financing, and the context of NGOs in Lithuania, with a particular focus on youth-oriented organizations—youth organizations and organizations working with young people. In addition, the theory of project management practices was reviewed, including traditional project management, Agile project management, project management competencies, and project monitoring and evaluation tools. As part of the master's thesis, a qualitative study was conducted with nine NGOs that participated in semi-structured interviews. The data collected during the interviews was carefully analyzed and are presented in the thesis. The findings indicate that most Lithuanian youth-oriented NGOs manage projects informally, reflecting their grassroots work with target groups through events, workshops, and non-formal education. Some organisations adapt their project management approaches to individual projects, combining funder-driven formal structures with more adaptive practices. Agile principles were applied selectively rather than systematically and were mainly observed in organisations developing digital tools. In contrast, traditional project management approaches, such as Waterfall, were primarily associated with donor requirements related to planning, reporting, and accountability.

SANTRAUKA

VILNIAUS UNIVERSITETO VERSLO MOKYKLA

TARPTAUTINĖS PROJEKTŲ VADYBOS STUDIJŲ PROGRAMA

STUDENTĖ EMILIJA URBONAITĖ

PROJEKTŲ VALDYMO PRAKTIKOS IR IŠŠŪKIAI Į JAUNIMĄ ORIENTUOTOSE NEVYRIAUSYBINĖSE ORGANIZACIJOSE LIETUVOJE

Magistro darbo vadovas – Dr. Birutė Miškinienė

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Literatūros šaltinių skaičius – 96

Darbo aprašas. Magistro baigiamasis darbas nagrinėja projektų valdymo praktikas ir iššūkius Lietuvos jaunimo ir su jaunimu dirbančiose nevyriausybinėse organizacijose. Tyrimo aktualumas kyla iš to, jog tarptautiniu lygiu (ypač Europos Sąjungos lygmeniu) nevyriausybinės organizacijos yra skatinamos įgyvendinti projektus socialinės gerovės srityje, tad kyla klausimas, kaip šios organizacijos praktiškai žiūri į projektų valdymą ir su kokiais iššūkiais joms tenka susidurti vykdant projektus. Kadangi yra trūksta tyrimų, kurie gilintųsi į projektų valdymo praktikas ir iššūkius Lietuvos NVO srityje, tyrimui buvo pasirinktas kokybinis tyrimo metodas ir buvo vykdomi pusiau struktūruoti interviu su atstovais iš skirtingų jaunimo ir su jaunimu dirbančių nevyriausybinių organizacijų.

Darbo struktūra. Darbas suskirstytas į penkis skyrius. Literatūros apžvalga susideda iš dviejų skyrių. Pirmame skyriuje pateikiama bendra Lietuvos NVO aplinkos apžvalga, įskaitant teisinį pagrindą, finansavimą ir NVO tipus, ypatingą dėmesį skiriant jaunimo organizacijoms ir su jaunimu dirbančioms NVO. Skyriuje apie projektų valdymą NVO aptariami projektų valdymo metodai ir metodologijos, jų taikymas NVO darbe, projektų valdymo kompetencijų sistemos, bei projektų stebėsenos ir vertinimo metodai. Tyrimo metodikos skyriuje aprašomas tyrimo modelis, dalyvių atranka ir imties sudarymas, taip pat paaiškinama, kaip buvo analizuojami surinkti duomenys. Tyrimo rezultatų analizės skyriuje atskleidžiama, kaip jaunimo NVO ir su jaunimu dirbančios NVO praktiškai valdo projektus, su kokiais iššūkiais jos susiduria šioje srityje ir kokios kompetencijos reikalingos projektiniam darbui jaunimo sektoriuje. Šiame skyriuje taip pat

aptariami tyrimo apribojimai ir ateities tyrimų kryptys. Galiausiai išvadose apibendrinami magistro baigiamojo darbo rezultatai.

Tikslas ir uždaviniai. Šio darbo tikslas – ištirti, kaip Lietuvos jaunimo ir su jaunimu dirbančios NVO praktiškai vykdo projektų valdymą ir kokie iššūkiai joms kyla dirbant su projektais. Magistro baigiamojo darbo uždaviniai:

• Išanalizuoti nevyriausybinių organizacijų (NVO) sektoriaus ypatumus ir veiklos kontekstą, ypatingą dėmesį skiriant jaunimui orientuotoms organizacijoms Lietuvoje.

• Apžvelgti projektų valdymo praktikas ir metodus profesinėje ir akademinėje literatūroje, ypatingą dėmesį skiriant jų pritaikomumui ir aktualumui NVO sektoriui.

• Identifikuoti projektų valdymo praktikas ir iššūkius Lietuvos jaunimo ir su jaunimu dirbančiose nevyriausybinėse organizacijose.

Metodologija ir rezultatai. Tyrimo duomenys buvo renkami vykdant pusiau struktūrizuotus interviu su jaunimo organizacijų ir su jaunimu dirbančių NVO atstovais. Surinkti duomenys buvo analizuojami taikant kokybinį turinio analizės metodą naudojant MAXQDA programinę įrangą. Rezultatai parodė, kad apklaustos NVO naudoja tradicinius, *agile* ir neformalius (ad-hoc) projektų valdymo metodus. Neformalus projektų valdymas buvo dažniausiai įvardintas apklaustų organizacijų. Projektų valdymo metodo pasirinkimas skiriasi priklausomai nuo organizacijos ir yra stipriai veikiamas organizacijos tipo, veiklos ir finansuojančių institucijų reikalavimų. Be to, rezultatai rodo, kad organizaciniai pajėgumų apribojimai daro didelę įtaką Lietuvos NVO projektų valdymo praktikai, sukeldami ir kitus iššūkius projektų valdyme. Pagrindiniai iššūkiai, nustatyti interviu metu, buvo žmogiškųjų išteklių trūkumas ir tvarių finansavimo šaltinių stoka. Šie aspektai yra tarpusavyje susiję.

Išvados. Magistro baigiamajame darbe buvo buvo išanalizuoti NVO sektoriaus ypatumai, įskaitant valdymą, lyderystę, projektų finansavimą bei NVO kontekstą Lietuvoje, skiriant ypatingą dėmesį į jaunimą orientuotoms organizacijoms – jaunimo organizacijoms bei su jaunimu dirbančioms organizacijoms. Be to, buvo apžvelgta Projektų valdymo praktikų teorija, įskaitant tradicinį projektų valdymą, Agile projektų valdymą, projektų valdymo kompetencijas ir projektų stebėsenos ir įvertinimo priemones. Magistro baigiamojo darbo rėmuose buvo įgyvendintas kokybinis tyrimas su 9 NVO, kurios dalyvavo pusiau struktūruotame interviu. Interviu metu surinkti duomenys buvo įdėmiai išanalizuoti ir yra pristatyti darbe. Rezultatai rodo, kad dauguma Lietuvos jaunimo ir su

jaunimu dirbančių NVO projektus valdo neformaliai, atspindėdamos neformalaus švietimo darbą su tikslinėmis grupėmis renginių, dirbtuvių metu. *Agile* principai buvo taikomi selektyviai, o ne sistemingai, ir daugiausia buvo pastebimi organizacijose, kuriančiose skaitmenines priemones. Tuo tarpu tradiciniai projektų valdymo metodai, tokie kaip „Waterfall", buvo daugiausia siejami su donorų reikalavimais, susijusiais su planavimu, ataskaitų teikimu ir atskaitomybe.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NGO – Non-governmental organization

EU – European Union

PMI – Project Management Institute

PM – Project Management

IPMA – International Project Management Association

LIST OF DEFINITIONS

Young person – in Lithuania, it is a person who is between 14 and 29 years old (LR Seimas, 2021).

Youth-oriented organization – an umbrella term for youth NGOs and NGOs working with young people.

Youth policy - a set of measures that address issues relevant to young people, with the aim of creating favourable conditions for their personal development and integration into society (LR Seimas, 2021).

Youth work - *Youth work* is defined as activities aimed at providing young people with opportunities to engage in personal, professional, and social activities, and to develop and nurture their skills (LR Seimas, 2021).

INTRODUCTION

Non-governmental organisations (hereinafter NGOs) have features that distinguish them from the private and public sectors (Stasiukynas, 2014). Non-governmental organizations include all civic organizations established by the free will of citizens, bringing together individuals or groups of individuals with similar interests (Šilinskytė, 2013). This sector is also characterized by civic activities, is based on volunteering and the strengthening of social ties (Stasiukynas, 2014). Lithuanian NGO sector consists of three types of organisations: associations, charity foundations and public institutions (Keleckaite, M. & Meiliene, E., 2015). As the organisations in the NGO sector are diverse, they face a lot of different challenges (Keleckaite, M. & Meiliene, E., 2015).

The European Union has come to rely heavily on projects as a means of promoting regional and social welfare development both domestically and internationally (Löfström, 2025). As a result, between years 2021 and 2023 the European Union's structural fonds awarded €7.4 billion to NGOs to support their work towards EU's key internal policies such as cohesion, research, migration and the environment (The Brussels Times, 2025). According to Salgado (2010), the fact that most NGOs obtain funds from the EU has a significant impact on the development of the NGO landscape in some Member States. In the EU, project funds have been shown to be an important driver of the projectification phenomenon (Jakobsen, 2022).

Considering that NGOs have been encouraged at the international level to implement projects in the social welfare sector, the question arises of how these organisations approach project management. According to Barazi, Salmeron & Zardet (2022), research indicates that NGO teams are fully involved in the project lifecycle: from designing the project, preparing technical and financial proposals, to implementing them and conducting evaluations. However, despite the repetitive nature of these tasks, it is visible that standardized project management techniques and best practices often are not considered (Barazi, Salmeron & Zardet 2022). Lack of standardized project management can cause inadequate project planning, limited accountability and stakeholder involvement, superficial risk management strategies, unmotivated project team and finally – low quality project results, financial and time losses (Keleckaite, M. & Meiliene, E., 2015).

The problem.

The adoption of PM methodologies in NGOs is not widely documented. In fact, there is a lack of evidence that the adoption of specific PM methodologies or tools in the non-governmental

sector happens at all (Golini, R., Corti, B. & Landoni, P., 2017). Stasiukynas (2014) supports this, stating that in general there is a lack of comprehensive research on the development of Lithuanian NGOs from a management perspective. So, the central problem is *the lack of systematic knowledge regarding project management approaches within Lithuanian youth-oriented NGOs, as well as the structural and capacity-related challenges that these organisations face when carrying out project-based activities.*

The aim of the thesis.

This thesis aims to examine how Lithuanian youth-oriented NGOs (youth NGOs & NGOs working with young people) approach project management and what kind of challenges they face when doing project-based work.

Objectives:

- To analyse the characteristics and operating context of the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector in Lithuania, with particular attention to youth-oriented organisations.
- To review project management practices and approaches in professional and academic literature, with a focus on their applicability and relevance to the NGO sector.
- To identify Project Management practices and challenges in Lithuanian youth-oriented NGOs.

Research methodology.

The research for this thesis was carried by using both primary and secondary sources. The theoretical part consists of an analysis of project management methodologies and tools tailored to non-governmental organizations, along with an overview of available project funding opportunities for NGOs in Lithuania, with the aim of identifying the key opportunities currently accessible to the sector. The empirical part of the research adopts a qualitative content analysis method, based on collected data from semi-structured interviews with NGO representatives / project managers, working in Lithuanian youth organisations / organizations working with young people (in the text – youth-oriented NGOs). This selection considers their experience as non-governmental organisations and being one of the main actors of the implementation of Lithuanian youth policy, according to the Law on the Fundamentals of Youth Policy of the Republic of

Lithuania (Document no. IX-1871). The interviews aim to gather insights into the participants' experiences with project management practices in Lithuanian NGOs, with particular attention to project managemet approaches and challenges, the influence of institutional support mechanisms and the importance of project management competences.

The structure of the thesis.

The thesis is divided into five key sections. The literature review consists of two chapters. One provides a general overview of the NGO environment in Lithuania, including the legal basis, funding and types of NGOs, with a particular focus on youth-oriented organisations. The *Project Management for NGOs* chapter covers project management approaches and methodologies, their application in NGO project-based work, project management competence frameworks, and monitoring and evaluation methods. The *Research Methodology* chapter describes the research design, participant selection and sampling, and explains how the collected data was analysed. The *Analysis of the Research Results* chapter shows how youth-oriented NGOs approach project management in Lithuania, the challenges they experience in this area, and the competences needed for project-based work in this sector. It also includes the limitations of the study and future research directions. Finally, the Conclusions chapter summarises the study findings.

Keywords.

Non-governmental organization, NGO, youth organization, organization working with young people, project management approaches, project management competences, project monitoring and evaluation.

1 THE CONTEXT AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NGO SECTOR

1.1 Conceptualization of non-governmental organisations

The origins of non-governmental organizations can be traced to medieval charitable foundations, which were primarily established to assist the poor and homeless (Šilinskytė, 2013). The term *non-governmental organization* (or NGO) emerged around the founding of the United Nations in 1945 to distinguish private organizations from intergovernmental ones like the UN (Britannica Academic, 2025). According to Šilinskytė (2013), "NGOs function as intermediaries between the public and private sectors, encompassing civil organisations formed through the free will of citizens and uniting individuals or groups with shared interests" (p. 326). A vast majority of NGOs operate as non-profit entities, most of them are described as small-scale, grassroots organisations (Britannica Academic, 2025). These organisations are expanding fast, both in scope and in range of implemented activities, which, in many cases, are project-based (Latif and Williams, 2017).

NGOs work to promote public goods that benefit both their members and the public (Kaloudis, 2017). NGOs act as accelerators between the public and private sectors, as well as fostering public-private partnerships: their activities are focused on improving the public welfare and / or targeting particular social groups, they also provide an opportunity for citizens to directly solve problems in society by themselves by organizing activities that are usually done by the state (Suciu et al., 2023, Šilinskytė, 2013). And, as stated by Jelovac (2025), nowadays NGOs play a very important role in promoting moral responsibility, social values and sustainability in today's global business environment. NGOs are important drivers of sustainable, progressive, resilient, and inclusive development at the local community level. Hence, through their programs, functions, and roles, NGOs can help local communities become self-reliant and ultimately achieve sustainable, inclusive, competitive, and resilient development (Suciu et al., 2023).

Depending on the socioeconomic and political conditions in which they operate, there are differences among NGOs concerning their institutionalization level, approaches to corporate governance, human resources and financial capacity (Ayhan, et al, 2025). NGOs can be differentiated into various types: membership-based associations and trade unions, service-providing NGOs, charitable foundations, and development-oriented NGOs, faith-based organizations and advocacy NGOs (Ayhan, et al, 2025).

1.2 NGOs in Lithuania

In Lithuania, NGOs emerged only after the restoration of independence, as they did not exist during the Soviet period. Only the negative influence of the Soviet legacy on NGOs has been emphasized, however, the authors D. Petreikienė and I. Bučiūnienė (2024) in their article "Unearthing the Legacy: Contrasting Soviet Imprints on Early NGOs in Lithuania" argue that the Soviet past created a specific force for the development of NGOs, which became a motivation and an opportunity to engage in creative processes and interesting activities that Lithuania has not seen for a long time.

Nowadays, the Lithuanian *Law on the Development of Non-Governmental Organisations* (LR Seimas, 2025b) defines non-governmental organisations as "a public legal entity established on a voluntary basis, independent of state or municipal institutions and agencies, acting for the benefit of society or a group thereof, and whose purpose is not to seek political power or pursue solely religious goals." According to the Lithuania's National NGO Coalition, as of July 1, 2025, there were 16 053 active NGOs in Lithuania with the NGO mark on the Register Centre (Nacionalinė NVO koalicija, 2025). In Lithuania, there are three types of non-governmental organisatons: associations, charitable foundations and public entitities (Vasiliauskaitė, 2013). However, it is important to point out that public entities can also be not-for-profit organisations but were established by the government (e.g. municipality), which is the opposite of a non-governmental organisation. Table no. 1 compiles the definitions of the three different types of non-governmental organisations that exist in Lithuania.

Table 1. *Three types of non-governmental organisations in Lithuania*

Association	Charitable foundation	Public entity
A voluntary union or alliance of companies, organizations, corporations, or individuals for the purpose of developing joint economic, political, cultural, scientific, or other activities (Žilinskas, n.d.).	A public legal entity whose main objectives are to provide charity and/or support, and other assistance to natural and legal persons in the fields of science, education, culture, art, religion, sports, health care, social care and welfare, environmental protection, and other areas that are beneficial to society and not associated with the pursuit of profit (LR Seimas, 2024).	A non-profit public legal entity, whose purpose is to serve the public interest by carrying out activities that are beneficial to society (LR Seimas, 2025a).

Source: compiled by the author.

According to Lithuania's Ministry fo Social Security and Labour, the non-governmental sector in Lithuania is not yet developed enough to be able to adequately fulfill its role in ensuring democracy development and the strengthening of civil society (LR Socialinės apsaugos ir darbo

ministerija, 2025). The main barriers to the development of the NGO sector are low public participation, poor administrative and financial resources of non-governmental organizations, and insufficient cooperation between non-governmental organizations and government institutions (LR Socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministerija, 2025).

Youth-oriented non-governmental organisations in Lithuania. Figure no. 1 (p. 18) shows Lithuania's National youth policy framework. Blue-marked entities are state and municipal institutions, green entities are structures for cooperation between state and municipal institutions and the youth non-governmental sector, and purple is the youth non-governmental sector (Jaunimo reikalų agentūra, 2025a). The *Parliamentary Committee on Youth and Sports* is responsible for the formation and implementation of state youth policy at the national level, while the *Ministry of Social Security and Labour* is responsible for forming youth policy, as well as for organising, coordinating and monitoring its implementation (LR Seimas, 2021). The *Agency of Youth Affairs* is responsible for implementing youth policy. The Agency's mission is to create and maintain the most favourable conditions for implementing youth policy, focusing on the needs of young people. This is achieved by initiating and supporting cooperation between different institutions (Jaunimo reikalų agentūra, 2025a).

Youth-oriented organisations in Lithuania are youth policy actors as they seek to create a supportive environment that fosters the growth of young people and their seamless integration into the community (LR Seimas, 2021). As shown in the Picture no. 1, the Lithuanian youth NGO sector is represented by Youth organisations, NGOs working with young people and Municipal youth organization councils, which are represented by the Lithuanian Youth Council (or LiJOT) (Jaunimo reikalų agentūra, 2025a). Lithuanian Youth Council also represents the interests of young people, contributes to the development and implementation of youth policy, fosters international relations, provides information to young people and trains youth leaders (Jaunimo reikalų agentūra, 2025a).

Figure no. 1. *Lithuania's National youth policy framework.*
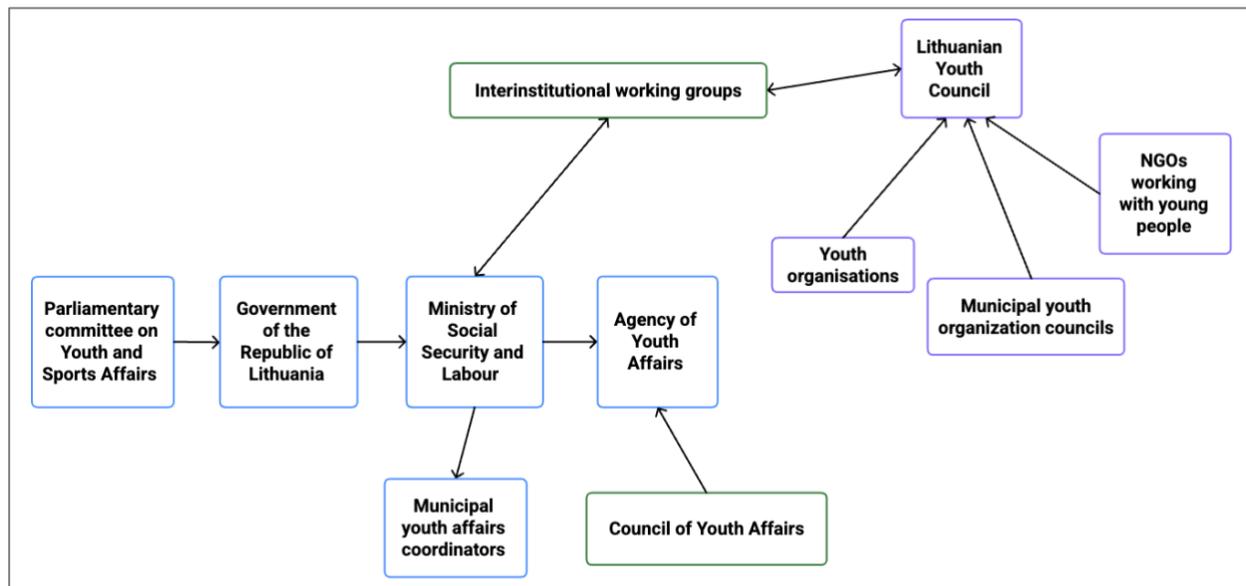
In the Lithuanian Law (LR Seimas, 2021), a *young person* is defined as someone between 14 and 29 years old. A *youth organization* is an association established to represent young people and / or their interests, in which at least two-thirds of the members are young people. The activities of youth organisations include fostering civic awareness, providing non-formal education for young people, organising youth activities, cultural, sport and other events, and promoting international cooperation among young people as well as other activities (Jaunimo reikalų agentūra, 2025c). A *Municipal youth organization council* (or a Round table, as they are called in Lithuania) is a non-governmental youth organisation whose main goal is to unite and represent youth organisations operating in Lithuanian municipalities (Jaunimo reikalų agentūra, 2025b). Representatives of youth organisations are delegated to the municipal youth affairs council by the round tables. The interests of young people in the municipality are represented and defended by these representatives, who also contribute to the formation and implementation of municipal youth policy (Jaunimo reikalų agentūra, 2025b).

An *organisation working with young people* is described as a legal entity whose one of the main objectives is to carry out youth work (LR Seimas, 2021). *Youth work* is defined as activities aimed at providing young people with opportunities to engage in personal, professional, and social activities, and to develop and nurture their skills (LR Seimas, 2021). Youth work can take various forms, such as open youth work, street youth work, mobile youth work, developing practical skills among young people, and providing information and counselling (LR Seimas, 2021).

1.3   The funding of NGO projects

The extent to which NGOs achieve their social mission is a key indicator of their success (Potluka, Spacek & von Schnurbein, 2017). To do so, they require sufficient short- and long-term capabilities in areas such as financial capacity, operational knowledge, human resources, expertise, and political networks (Potluka, Spacek & von Schnurbein, 2017). One of the main obstacles for NGOs is financial difficulties and a shortage of resources, which restrict the organizations' ability to implement impactful projects. Due to the lack of necessary funds, NGOs are forced to rely on external sources of funding, which are not always consistent or predictable (Lușcan, 2025). Therefore, to secure funding for their activities, nonprofit organizations rely on multiple sources of funding, including membership dues, grant proposals, donations, service fees and other sources, to maintain a continuous focus on securing adequate funding to keep activities operating (Ebaugh, et al., 2005, Kearns, K. P. et al. 2012). Financial resources and organizational capital have a direct impact on project long-term viability, and NGOs with diverse funding sources are more likely to overcome operational barriers (Lușcan, 2025).

That explains why NGOs often tend to use project funding to meet public needs, as private financial resources and government support are insufficient (Keleckaite, M. & Meiliene, E., 2015). However, the competition between NGOs for limited financial resources is increasing, while funding institutions more often require the NGOs to secure co-financiers, covering only part of project costs (Jelovac, 2025). This project-only funding model leaves NGOs with persistent budget gaps (Jelovac, 2025). It is also worth noting that non-profit organizations seeking financial support from foundations often must put in considerable effort to monitor changing foundation priorities and align their funding proposals with the strategic objectives of those initiatives. (Ebaugh, et al., 2005). Since securing future funding is essential to the survival of non-profit organizations, funders have great power to keep non-profit organizations accountable (Bruni-Bossio & Kaczur, 2022). Dependence on donor funding can undermine the legitimacy of NGOs, as it raises questions about whether they represent socially excluded communities or primarily pursue donor priorities, and can lead to power tensions when funders impose activities or outcomes that are not in line with the organization's mission (Kaloudis, 2017; Bruni-Bossio and Kaczur, 2022). Therefore, achieving financial independence and maintaining a stable income are crucial for staying on track and withstanding potential risks posed by donors whose attitudes may change (Potluka, Spacek & von Schnurbein, 2017).

To conclude, NGOs should secure funding for their activities by relying on multiple funding sources. Those organisations with diverse funding sources are more likely to overcome

operational barriers, as financial resources and organizational capital directly impact project viability in the long term (Lușcan, 2025). This is evident given the increasing competition among NGOs for limited financial resources, as funding institutions are increasingly requiring NGOs to secure co-funding to cover the rest of project costs (Jelovac, 2025).

National NGO Funding in Lithuania. In Lithuania, NGOs can receive funding from international, national or municipal budgets. This funding can be used to strengthen organisational capacity, implement targeted projects, build competencies needed for public service delivery, support community development, and carry out strategic partnership agreements with the government (LR Seimas, 2025b). The distribution of this funding is overseen by designated public authorities.

One of the national funds targeting NGOs is the Lithuanian NGO Fund. It was created to support NGOs and implement state policy on NGO development, functioning as a national financial mechanism (LR Seimas, 2025b). Part of the funding is allocated competitively, with the goal of strengthening NGO institutional capacity and supporting activities defined in the Fund's regulations (LR Seimas, 2025b).

1.4 Leadership and governance in NGOs

Leadership in NGOs. Projects require effective leadership (PMI, 2021). Numerous studies have shown that leadership competence has a significant impact on project performance (Haq, et al., 2018). However, different leadership styles are effective in different cultural and organisational contexts, so there is no single style that guarantees success. Therefore, project managers must adapt their leadership approach to suit the specific team, environment and culture of each project (Haq, et al., 2018). That is why it is important to delve deeper into the concept of leadership in NGOs. The ability to communicate effectively, motivate others, and take action when necessary is crucial for enhancing the project team's performance and overcoming challenges to ensure the project success (PMI, 2021).

Although both leadership and management are essential to the success of an organization, they perform fundamentally different functions. Management focuses on creating organizational structures and systems, while leadership is about providing inspiration and empowering others to take action (McMullin & Raggo, 2020). Leadership style also has a significant impact on employee psychological empowerment, which in turn affects NGO employees' job satisfaction (Mufti et al., 2020). Since NGOs often operate with small teams, sometimes resembling the activities of a single person, the success or failure of NGO projects greatly depends on the effectiveness of leadership (Salameh-Ayanian, 2025). According to Mufti

et al. (2020), transformational skills and competencies are essential for NGO leaders to cope with future challenges. Therefore, NGOs need to make more efforts to enhance leadership capacity and initiate appropriate systems and processes that support leadership development and succession strategies; otherwise, they may face staff turnover and dissatisfaction, which may affect the achievement of their goals (Mufti et al., 2020).

Management vs governance. Leaders of non-profit organizations are increasingly forced to adjust their strategies and strengthen their organizational values by integrating principles of efficiency into the provision of their service. In doing so, they are adopting management practices traditionally associated with the for-profit sector, such as quality management, benchmarking, and other related methodologies (Miškolci and Rajchlova, 2024). According to L. Marcinkevičiūtė and J. Žukovskis (2015), NGO management is remarkably similar to the management of small or medium-sized enterprises. NGOs follow the same organization, planning and management principles as the business sector. Service-providing NGOs compete with service providers in the business and budgetary sectors (Marcinkevičiūtė & Žukovskis, 2015).

It is important to point out the differences between governance and management of an organisation. According to J. Carver (2002), governance can be interpreted as management upside down. A board is a group of more than one person (if there is a CEO), while each management unit typically has one individual who leads a group of people. So, a board leader and management leader are two very different roles. The chairperson of the board has only as much authority as the group gives him, so he is more of a servant leader than an authoritative leader. On the contrary, the CEO has real authority over the staff, which cannot be granted or revoked at the will of the employees. Since the CEO reports to the board, the chairman of the board has no authority over the CEO. Therefore, unlike a personnel manager, the head of the board has no direct authority (Carver, 2002).

Good organizational governance is seen as a framework of regulations and procedures designed to ensure that the organization operates properly, transparently, and responsibly, regardless of who is performing management and representation functions at any given time, as this is a key issue in building credibility and legitimacy (Ortega-Rodríguez et al. 2024). The role of the non-profit sector implies that its governance should be organized in such a way as to maximize its contribution to society (Ortega-Rodríguez et al. 2024). P. Bradshaw et. Al. (2007) identified four basic models of NGO governance: Policy Governance Model, Constituent/Representative Board Model, Entrepreneurial Board Model, Emergent Cellular Model and Hybrid Configurations.

The *policy governance* configuration is formal, bureaucratic, and traditional: it is associated with a clarity of roles and responsibilities between board and staff, more formal committees, also with a larger, more bureaucratic and hierarchical organizational structure (Bradshaw, 2009, McMullin & Raggo, 2020). The *constituency/representative governance* is more decentralized and is set up to respond to several potentially conflicting stakeholders, also has a relatively stable and/or predictable environment (Bradshaw, 2009, McMullin & Raggo, 2020). The organization structure is more formalized, as in has clear agendas and well-established policies. It has more formal committees (for example, fixed structures with clear mandates) and established roles and responsibilities between board and staff (Bradshaw, 2009).

The *entrepreneurial/corporate configuration* is more focused on efficiency and emerging strategic planning (McMullin & Raggo, 2020). The organizational structure is less formalized (e.g., fewer policies and rules), less bureaucratic, and more action- and business-oriented, with fewer committees and more working groups or project teams. However, there is less clarity of roles and responsibilities (for example, there might be an overlap of board and staff roles, working boards) (Bradshaw, 2009). And finally, the *emergent cellular approach* is flexible, organic, decentralized, as well as least formalized: it works the best for multi-stakeholder environments or organizational networks that are characterized by high instability and uncertainty (Bradshaw, 2009, McMullin & Raggo, 2020).

Contingency approach suggests that there is no single governance structure that works for everyone; organizations should adjust their governance to both the external environment (e.g., funding, stakeholders) and internal organisational characteristics (including organisation's size, and complexity) (McMullin & Raggo, 2020). Success is not guaranteed by a single strategy; instead, success depends on how well the context is aligned with a management approach. On top of that, there is no single best way to manage an organization. Rather, success depends on how well a strategy aligns with the tasks involved in project management within the particular organizational environment (Uddin & Farooq, 2025).

In conclusion, management involves creating organizational structures and systems, whereas leadership involves inspiring and empowering others to take action (McMullin & Raggo, 2020). Additionally, leadership style significantly impacts employee psychological empowerment, which, in turn, affects NGO employees' job satisfaction (Mufti et al., 2020). There are four basic models of NGO governance: The Policy Governance Model, the Constituent/Representative Board Model, the Entrepreneurial Board Model, the Emergent Cellular Model, and Hybrid Configurations. However, a single governance structure that works for everyone doesn't exist. To be effective, organizations must adjust their governance to both the external environment and

internal organizational characteristics (McMullin & Raggo, 2020). Thus, understanding leadership styles and governance structures is essential to analyze how youth-oriented NGOs manage projects, overcome challenges, and ensure accountability and impact.

2 PROJECT MANAGEMENT FOR NGOs

2.1 Contextualizing Project Management

The 7th edition PMBOK Guide by Project Management Institute describes projects as "a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result" (PMI, 2021, p. 4). A project can be standalone or be a part of a program or portfolio (PMI, 2021). Projects aim to introduce new products/services or improve the existing ones. Projects can also be seen as transformational processes, turning ideas into reality and achieving desired outcomes that offer measurable benefits (European Commission, Directorate-General for Digital Services, 2023). The temporary nature of projects implies it's clear beginning and end (Project Management Institute, 2021).

Project management assists in establishing functional responsibilities to ensure that all activities are covered, regardless of personnel changes. This helps to reduce the need for ongoing reporting; set deadlines for planning; evaluate achievements against targets; and so on (Kerzner, 2017). However, a project is not merely the result of project management capabilities to manage and control its implementation; it is also the product of the influence of other stakeholders on the project (Löfström, 2025). Successful project management can be defined as a consistent achievement of project objectives within a specified time frame, without exceeding the planned budget, achieving the desired level of performance / technology, using the allocated resources efficiently and effectively, and ensuring that the results are satisfactory to the client and/or stakeholders (Kerzner, 2017). On the other hand, weak project management can lead to failure to meet deadlines, overspending, low quality, rework, uncontrolled project growth, loss of organizational reputation, stakeholder dissatisfaction and failure to achieve the objectives for which the project was initiated (Project Management Institute, 2017).

Although projects are common among non-profits / NGOs, their knowledge of project management is not exactly sufficient (Löfström, 2025). Most often projects carried out by NGOs involve the funding agency, the coordinator, and the target recipients who are directly benefitting from the project outcomes – e.g. the community or society in general (Latif and Williams, 2017). Projects can offer organizations funding opportunities, foster innovation, and increase legitimacy, but their temporary and specific nature can limit long-term planning and autonomy (Löfström, 2025). This focus on short-term results can create friction with broader organizational goals, as dependence on projects for funding and new service development can lead NGOs to prioritize project activities over strategic initiatives (Löfström, 2025). NGOs usually implement "soft" projects, which have some ambiguities in their objectives, and they might not have a tangible

output as a result (Golini & Landoni, 2014). Unlike in projects that can be considered 'hard', such as construction projects (Golini & Landoni, 2014), it can be challenging to evaluate the success of these "soft" projects, implemented by the NGOs (Latif & Williams, 2017). Even though "soft" projects in some ways can be quantitatively measured (e.g. by number of people reached), their success isn't limited to fulfilling such quantitative objectives (Golini & Landoni, 2014). Measuring the extent and impact of achieved results can be particularly difficult when the output is intangible (Golini & Landoni, 2014).

Stasiukynas and others (2022) carried out qualitative research regarding factors, influencing NGO activities in Lithuania. As noted in the research paper, the experts mentioned that although funding is formally allocated based on project management principles (to support project implementation), the actual focus often shifts away from project management outcomes (Stasiukynas et al. 2022). Instead, greater emphasis is placed on process control mechanisms rooted in traditional public administration, then as a result, administrative procedures tend to dominate, shaping how the project management method is applied in practice (Stasiukynas et al. 2022).

2.2 Project management approaches and frameworks.

According to Reif and Schlegel (2022), the defining feature of a project management *approach* (or *process model*) is the distinction between traditional and agile project management, which fundamentally differ in their approaches and processes. And "a project management *approach* is "the highest level of abstraction used when describing how a project will be designed"", such as whether the project will be managed traditionally, using an agile approach, or in a hybrid manner (Reif & Schlegel, 2022, p. 46). The decision to choose the suitable process model for a project is done by the project owner together with the project manager and the chosen approach should not be changed ad-hoc (Kuster, et al., 2023).

In contrast, a project management *methodology / guide / framework* offer more detailed instructions for managing a project in a specific way, such as PRINCE2 or PMBOK (Reif & Schlegel, 2022). Harake (2024) explains *Project management methodology* as a set of principles or processes which best help to manage a project. The methodology is usually defined and formalized, and once established, project managers must strictly adhere to it (Harake, 2024).

Moreover, *Project Management Framework* is the outline of the project, so project managers have more freedom to change (or abandon) the rules depending on how the project is progressing. Additionally, a framework covers many more details and even includes stages that are not included in the methodology (e.g., evaluation and feedback after project implementation)

(Harake, 2024). Nevertheless, these terms are not consistently used or clearly defined in the literature (Reif & Schlegel, 2022). However, in this chapter Project Management approach is used as explained by Reif & Schlegel (2022).

2.2.1 Traditional Project Management

According to Ciric Lalic et al. (2022), the traditional project management approach is characterized by its emphasis on planning and control methods that are highly organized and thoughtful (Ciric Lalic et al., 2022). This approach also puts a significant emphasis on the importance of planning. However, projects rarely follow the sequential flow, which limits the effectiveness of this approach (Ciric Lalic et al., 2022).

Waterfall model. One of the traditional project management methods is the Waterfall methodology. It is a classic linear project management method and its origins date back to the beginnings of systems engineering and software development (Harake, 2025). The Waterfall methodology is most suitable for projects for which the requirements are clearly specified, the objectives are clear, and the technology is stable (Ghena and Ghiculescu, 2023). For example, in construction and other engineering fields, the Waterfall process has long been the standard because design changes late in the construction phase can be unreasonably expensive (Harake, 2025).

In conclusion, the Waterfall methodology is a plan-based, documentation-heavy approach that is best suited for projects with little uncertainty. It provides both clarity and control but limits the ability to adapt (Harake, 2025). Due to unforeseen circumstances or changing requirements, necessary changes may require a return to the initial stages, which can lead to additional delays and costs. For industries where change is common and adaptability is key to staying competitive, like the power tool industry, the rigid structure of the Waterfall method can constrain the ability to meet changing customer needs and market demands (Ghena and Ghiculescu, 2023). However, the traditional approach is tried and tested, and for a long time, it has proven itself in the management of various types of projects (Ciric Lalic et al., 2022).

There are several standards in the field of traditional project management, including: PMBOK, PRINCE2 and the Logical Framework Approach (LFA), the latter of which is used as the main tool of Project Cycle Management (PCM). All these standards use broadly similar tools and techniques to implement project management processes (Bessi Aboganina, 2025).

Traditional Project Management standards and frameworks:

PMBOK and PRINCE2 standards. The PMBOK (Project Management Body of Knowledge) was created by the Project Management Institute (PMI) to establish a set of principles of project management knowledge (Matos and Lopes, 2013). The Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) Guide is presented as a flexible framework rather than a strict methodology, allowing organizations to adapt it by incorporating different methodologies, tools, and practices (Fiampolis and Acaster, 2015; Project Management Institute, 2017). It provides a foundation on which organizations can build methodologies, policies, procedures, rules, and techniques, as well as establish the life cycle phases required for effective project management (Project Management Institute, 2017).

Project Management Institute's seventh edition of the PMBOK Guide released in 2021, represents a paradigm shift with its introduction of 12 principles and 8 performance domains designed to provide a more flexible, value-driven framework (Catana and Florescu, 2025). The 7th edition of the PMBOK states that projects should not only produce deliverables but also enable the creation of results that add value and benefit the organisation and its stakeholders (Amaro and Domingues, 2023).

PRINCE2 is the prevailing standard for project management in the United Kingdom. PRINCE2 stands for "PRojects IN Controlled Environments." It was originally created by the British government (Kuster et al., 2023). This project management standard has been shaped by the insights from thousands of different projects and the contributions of various project managers and teams, sponsors, consultants and others (Matos and Lopes, 2013). PRINCE2 is more detailed than PMBOK in defining processes and roles, which makes it a popular choice for government and public sector projects (Catana and Florescu, 2025). It defines exactly what needs to be done in a project from start to finish, making it well-suited for large, bureaucratic work environments where transparency and consistency are critical. (Kuster et al., 2023, Catana and Florescu, 2025). However, PRINCE2 has also been criticized for being too inflexible and challenging to combine with agile practices (Catana and Florescu, 2025).

According to Catana and Florescu (2025), researchers have observed that organizations frequently combine PRINCE2 with PMBOK or agile frameworks, forming a hybrid system which balances flexibility and structure.

Social Good DPro guide by PM4NGOS. The Social Good DPRO guide, created by PM4NGOS (2025) is tailored towards anyone involved in managing or contributing to projects that

aim to address social issues or create positive social impact. This includes not-for-profit organisations, community initiatives, social enterprises, etc. According to the guide (PM4NGOS, 2025), the main goal is to ensure that project management is both accessible to a diverse audience of professional project managers, project teams, coordinators, volunteers, and anyone involved in planning and delivering initiatives for social change, as, for example, many small or growing organizations might not even have a dedicated project manager at all. The guide uses language that is easy to understand, examples that are easy to relate to, and scenarios that are driven by the community to engage users who may not consider themselves to be "project managers" (PM4NGOS, 2025).

As this is a very recent model, there seems to be little to none research papers dedicated to analyzing how this guide can be applied in real life project management cases in NGOs.

PM² Methodology. PM² is a project management methodology that was developed by the European Commission. It enables project managers to provide solutions and benefits to their organizations by effectively managing the entire project lifecycle. While PM² was created with the needs of European Union institutions and projects in mind, the best practices described can be applied to projects in any type of organization (European Commission, Directorate-General for Digital Services, 2023). The first open access version was launched only in 2016, although the creation of this methodology started back in 2007 inside the European Commission (Ribeiro-Lopes et al., 2022). As PM² is not a very well-known methodology, the research on it is very limited (Ribeiro-Lopes et al., 2022).

PM² integrates globally recognized project management best practices established in standards and methodologies (European Commission, Directorate-General for Digital Services, 2023). The methodology can be tailored to meet any team's needs. The PM² guide is considerably simpler and smaller than other frameworks, methodologies, and methods, so it can be a suitable tool for both newbie and experienced project managers and their teams because of its simplicity (Ribeiro-Lopes et al., 2022).

Although it maintains a traditional project management perspective, it also incorporates modern agile approaches and emphasizes the importance of tailoring to achieve project success (Schmidtner, Schidek and Timinger, 2023). Tailoring in this case means making changes to governance and adding or removing PM2 processes or artifacts (Schmidtner, Schidek and Timinger, 2023). According to Wagner, Vukomanović, & Kummer (2023), the PM² framework has

been embraced by a few national public administration bodies (e.g., Germany), yet further efforts are required for its more widespread adoption.

Logical Framework Approach (LFA) and Project Cycle Management (PCM). The European Commission (EC) developed Project Cycle Management (PCM) methodology as a common approach for designing, implementing and evaluating the tens of thousands of projects it finances each year (Fuster, 2006). The Logical Framework Approach is the basis for PCM, a tool used for project design and management. LFA is a widely used tool by international donors and NGOs for project structuring, analysis guidance, decision-making support and measurable results through a matrix that outlines the project's results chain, indicators and assumptions (Bessi Aboganina, 2025).

The project which follows the PCM standard has to a) have clearly defined stakeholders , with emphasis on the target group and the final beneficiaries; b) have a well-designed coordination, management and financial system; c) have a planned project monitoring and evaluation system and d) the project's benefits must exceed its costs, as demonstrated by an adequate level of economic and financial analysis (Esposito, 2020). LFA and PCM assist organisations in planning, implementing and evaluating development initiatives that target specific issues within a defined timeframe and budget (Bessi Aboganina, 2025). These approaches are based on the assumption that the project will evolve in a stable environment. However, project teams must have a certain level of adaptability when dealing with the potential risks that might arise from the volatility and uncertainty of socio-economic conditions, including political factors, which can occur at least once during the life cycle of a project (Bessi Aboganina, 2025).

In conclusion, predictive project management models such as PMBOK, PRINCE2 and LFA recognise the importance of soft skills, these methods are based on a mechanistic perspective, where future outcomes are seen as predictable and project phases are viewed as fixed (Bessi Aboganina, 2025). This means that changes are limited and the outcome is only visible to the customer / beneficiary at the end of the project, creating a "tunnel effect" (Bessi Aboganina, 2025). According to Ciric Lalic et al. (2022), the traditional project management process approach, which solely focuses on cost, time, quality, technical requirements, and the project plan, is no longer considered effective.

2.2.2 Project lifecycle

Understanding the principles and limitations of traditional project management approach is important for understanding the next aspect: the project lifecycle. It outlines how such projects progress from initiation to closure. The number of project phases, along with how they are approached, heavily depends on the project's type, scope, risks, importance, and the influence the project owner wants to exert over it (Kuster et al., 2023). The project life cycle is the sequence of stages that a project goes through from its beginning to its end. A project phase is a set of logically related project activities that culminate in the achievement of one or more results. Phases may be sequential, iterative, or overlapping (Project Management Institute, 2017). The phases include (Kerzner, 2017; Project Management Institute, 2021):

- The *conceptual (feasibility)* phase involves a preliminary evaluation of an idea. The goal of this phase is to determine the validity of the business case and the organization's capacity to deliver the intended outcome (Project Management Institute, 2021).
- *Planning (Design)* phase. This phase mainly involves refining the elements from the conceptual phase. It requires firmly identifying the necessary resources and establishing realistic time, cost, and performance parameters (Kerzner, 2017). Planning and analysis lead to designing the project deliverable that will be developed (Project Management Institute, 2021).
- *Building* phase - conducting construction of the project deliverable with integrated quality assurance processes (Project Management Institute, 2021).
- The *testing* phase is mostly testing and final standardization efforts so that operations can begin. Almost all documentation must be finished during this phase. (Kerzner, 2017).
- *Implementation (Deploy)* phase integrates the project's finished product or services into the existing organization. If the project was developed to produce a marketable product, then this phase may include the product life cycle stages of market introduction, growth, maturity, and the initial stages of deterioration (Kerzner, 2017). The project deliverables are being used, and the transitional activities necessary for sustainment, benefits realization, and organizational change management have been completed (Project Management Institute, 2021).
- During the *closure* phase, the efforts are evaluated and applied to the conceptual phases of new projects and systems (Kerzner, 2017). The project and contracts are closed, project knowledge and artifacts are archived, project team members are discharged (Project Management Institute, 2021)

It is also important to point out that for example, Agile and other adaptive project management approaches rely on flow-based scheduling, replacing fixed project phases with continuous delivery (Project Management Institute, 2021). The primary goal is to enhance efficiency and optimize resource usage by reducing waste and increasing throughput. These approaches are mostly derived from the Kanban system, which is used in lean and just-in-time production (Project Management Institute, 2021).

2.2.3 Agile Project Management

The term "Agile," which became established in the software industry in the early 2000s, is based on the Agile Manifesto, which is a set of principles dedicated to improving the software development process (Crăciun et al., 2024). This methodology was created in response to the inflexibility and limitations of traditional development processes such as Waterfall, which prompted practitioners to seek more flexible ways of managing projects (Harake, 2025, Crăciun et al., 2024). In the context of project management, the term Agile refers to a group of methodologies based on iterative development, adaptation to change and continuous feedback, enabling teams to react promptly to changes (Harake, 2025, Crăciun et al., 2024). Agile enables ongoing and responsive software delivery that is oriented towards customer needs (Crăciun et al., 2024).

Essentially, Agile methodologies reject the notion that detailed plans made at the beginning of a project can remain relevant in the face of uncertainty and changing perceptions. Instead of one large phase, Agile teams break the work down into small phases and iterations. Each iteration goes through a mini planning, execution, and review cycle, during which a tangible part of the product is created and can be presented to stakeholders for evaluation (Harake, 2025). The ability to improve project performance is one of the key benefits of adaptive project management. Regular assessment and adjustment of project strategies is an effective way for NGOs to increase their chances of achieving the desired outcomes (Dusengimana and Kimemia, 2025). Agility enables NGOs to identify and address challenges at an early stage, thereby reducing the likelihood of project failure or underperformance and ensures flexibility (Dusengimana and Kimemia, 2025)..

Agile relies on direct communication and functioning software, products, or services rather than detailed documentation. However, this can pose a risk if documentation is lacking or if the documentation is insufficient for future use (Ghena and Ghiculescu, 2023). Also, when it comes

to social projects, the way in which adaptive project management is applied is influenced not only by the project teams involved, but also by the funding sources that impose specific operational and financial requirements (Bessi Aboganina, 2025). These requirements have a significant influence over how projects are managed (Bessi Aboganina, 2025), and in the case of projects managed by youth-oriented organizations, they are usually funded the government institutions and international donors, such as the European Union.

Agile methodology has had a significant impact on project management practices. According to M. F. Harake (2025), nowadays, many organizations use a hybrid approach, combining Agile methodology with traditional methods: for example, maintaining high-level Waterfall milestones to meet regulatory requirements, while internally performing development sprints).

2.2.4   Hybrid Project Management

Currently, it's becoming uncommon for projects to be so clearly suited to either the traditional or agile approach (Kuster, et al., 2023). Typically, projects lie on a spectrum between the two approaches, making a combination of both models an obvious choice (Kuster, et al., 2023). Both traditional and agile project management approaches have their own pros and cons, and the hybrid approach combines the best parts of both. It is intended to provide flexibility without disrupting project planning and avoid the disadvantages of one approach by incorporating positive elements from the other. A variety of these methodologies exist, including the Water-Scrum-Fall model, the Hybrid V-model, the Waterfall-Agile model, and the Agile-Stage-Gate model (Reif & Schlegel, 2022).

Hybrid project management approach is more feasible in large organizations. Such enterprises might benefit the most from this approach (Reif & Schlegel, 2022). Projects that are uncertain or risky can be managed effectively using hybrid project management methodologies (Reif & Schlegel, 2022).

Studies have shown that hybrid processes offer several advantages, such as enhanced team productivity, strengthened communication and coordination, boosted morale and motivation of the team, better alignment between work processes and methods, as well as increased flexibility in the overall design process (Ciric Lalic et al., 2022). As NGOs usually are pretty small organisations, it can be assumed that adapting hybrid project management practices for these organisations would be a challenge.

2.3   Project management competences.

Economic growth, innovation, and societal development across different sectors are driven by projects, and project managers play an important role in achieving these goals (Jacob and Mosquera, 2024). Uddin & Farooq (2025) argue that relying solely on advanced PM techniques doesn't ensure project success. Instead, they contend that a project's outcome is contingent on the skills and abilities of the project manager. While managerial competencies are important, they are not the only factor in project success (Uddin & Farooq, 2025). As the demand for competent project managers continues to grow – according to Project Management Institute (2025), by 2035, there could be a demand for almost 30 million more project professionals to be able to keep pace with growth and change. It brings importance to the fact that a qualified project manager must have the right skills for the project's life cycle and complexity level (Uddin & Farooq, 2025).

Project managers should possess a variety of technical and interpersonal skills: in a survey completed by PMI (2023), project professionals identified these important power skills: communication, problem-solving, collaborative leadership and strategic thinking as the crucial ones that help them fulfil organizational objectives. According to Darrell, Baccarini & Love (2010), successful project management also requires generic managerial skills, including leadership, role delegation, the capability to manage change, performance management and evaluations, staffing, developing procedures and policies, planning, organising and controlling, strategy and organisational know-how and others.

Project Managers also need to understand the project management approach(-es) used in their organization and possess the technical competencies required to efficiently manage the project phases (European Commission, Directorate-General for Digital Services, 2023). This brings the focus to the IPMA ICB 4.0, also known as the Individual Competence Baseline, which is IPMA's core competence standard. It defines three areas of expertise: perspective (5 elemements), people (10 elements), and practice (13 elements) for project, programme or portfolio managers in their everyday activities (IPMA, 2023). The IPMA competence baseline (ICB) is the common competency framework all certification bodies and IPMA member associations adhere to (Faisal et al., 2023). Most of the framework's content focuses on explaining the competence elements: it breaks every competence down into categories to help individuals develop and assess them on their own (Faisal et al., 2023).

The Project DPro Project Management Competency Model, as outlined in the Social Good DPro guide by PM4NGOS (2025), is particularly relevant for the NGO/not-for-profit context. It establishes these four areas of project management competencies (PM4NGOs, 2025):

- **Project Management Technical** – the 'science' behind project management. For instance, can the Project Manager select the right processes and tools for the job, and employ them effectively to achieve project management success?
- **Leadership / Interpersonal** – the 'art' of project management. How, for example, the Project Manager approaches communication with team members and other stakeholders and resolve conflict?
- **Personal / Self-Management** – the Project Manager's ability to manage time and people to achieve project's goals. E.g. can the Project Manager effectively prioritize tasks, organize work and stay motivated?
- **Social Good Specific** – the capacity to put into practice the previous competencies in the wider context of projects that aim to work for the social good. This competency area is about being able to understand what are the values of organizations that promote social good and how to navigate this complex environment.

The Project DPro Project Management Competency Model and the ICB 4.0 by IPMA are similar in some ways. The *leadership / interpersonal* and *personal / self-management* competency areas can be compared the People expertise area in the ICB 4.0, which includes *personal integrity and reliability, self-reflection and self-management, personal communication*, *leadership, teamwork, conflict and crisis* as competence elements. The Project Management Technical competences area can be directly aligned with ICB 4.0's Practice expertise area, which pays attention to *Project design*; *Requirements and objectives*; *Scope, time, quality, cost, resources; Plan and control, Stakeholder management* and others. The Social Good specific is a NGO specific competency area is closest related to ICB's Perspective expertise area, which includes *Culture and values, Governance, structures, and processes* and *Power and interest*.

Accidental Project Managers. In industries outside of project-based ones, such as in the public sector, many people become project managers unintentionally. This is mainly because there has been a sudden demand for project management that their organisations are not prepared for, which means that the project management process happens through a combination of luck, perseverance and determination (Darrell, Baccarini & Love, 2010). This type of Project Managers are called *Accidental Project Managers* (APMs), who unlike their career PM

counterparts, who pursue the role on purpose, often find themselves in PM roles unintentionally (Chadwick, 2025). As stated by Chadwick (2025), project management in many project-oriented organisations is still underdeveloped due to low organisational maturity. Project management roles are often given to staff without any formal training, and limited resources restrict access to structured training. This often results in project implementation relying on ad hoc, experience-based practices rather than formalised project management methodologies (Chadwick, 2025).

Training and development involves planned efforts to help employees gain the Project Management skills and competencies that will improve their performance at the work place (Darrell, Baccarini & Love, 2010). The three main phases of training efforts are as follows (Darrell, Baccarini & Love, 2010): first, there is the assessment phase, which includes identifying the needs, defining objectives and setting up evaluation criteria. The second phase is the training design and implementation phase, which involves selecting training methods, materials and providing the training. The final phase is the evaluation phase, which involves assessing training results against predefined criteria (Darrell, Baccarini & Love, 2010).

It is evident that strong project management competencies are becoming increasingly important not only in the private and public sectors, but also within non-governmental organisations that are increasingly dependent on project-based funding. As projectification advances in modern society, all sectors, including civil society organisations, have to prepare to implement increasingly complex and strategically important projects (Wagner, Vukomanović & Kummer, 2023). Consequently, public institutions and NGOs must continuously cultivate and strengthen their project management competencies to effectively respond to emerging challenges (Wagner, Vukomanović & Kummer, 2023).

2.4 Project Evaluation and Monitoring processes

Project planning and control are key project management processes (Pellerin & Perrier, 2019). They involve monitoring project implementation against the baseline plan, analyzing discrepances and taking appropriate corrective measures (Pellerin & Perrier, 2019; O'Regan, 2025). Project activities are monitored and ensured to be completed on schedule and to meet the required quality standards (O'Regan, 2025). The project manager is responsible for the day-to-day management of the project, ensuring work is properly allocated, executed, and monitored, while updating schedules and managing issues, risks, and change requests. They also regularly report project progress to the project board and act on its guidance and recommendations (O'Regan, 2025).

Earned Value Management (EVM), Earned Schedule Management (ESM) and Earned Duration Management (EDM) are traditional methods widely used to monitor project performance. Nevertheless, they often rely on intuitive thresholds based on subjective judgement and limited evidence, which may not provide a reliable distinction between acceptable and unacceptable deviation (Carneiro & Lee Ho, 2024). EVM methodology combines scope, cost and time into a single framework, enabling managers to detect cost overruns and time delays (Carneiro & Lee Ho, 2024). This approach is the most well-known for monitoring project execution, and has been extensively explored in literature across a range of contexts (Carneiro & Lee Ho, 2024).

Regarding project evaluation in projects funded by donors, the need to improve performance by demonstrating results and showing accountability for donor funds resulted in the introduction of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) (Eremugo & Okoche, 2021). M&E is an integral part of the project life cycle. The process of continuous collection and analysis of data on an ongoing project, programme or policy is known as monitoring. The purpose of monitoring is to provide management and other stakeholders with updates on progress towards achieving predetermined objectives and goals (Eremugo & Okoche, 2021). Evaluation, on the other hand, is defined as the periodic and comprehensive assessment of an ongoing or completed project, programme or policy in relation to its design, implementation and results, based on specifically defined criteria (Eremugo & Okoche, 2021).

A wide range of project management software has been developed to support project managers, with Excel being employed for task planning and tools such as Microsoft Project and Primavera frequently referenced in studies (Pellerin & Perrier, 2019). However, these tools function as planning and control systems rather than project management information systems, with most focusing on schedule control rather than cost management. This software typically includes WBS charts, Gantt charts, network diagrams, PERT charts and earned-value tools, as well as communication and tracking systems. Some tools also incorporate risk management methods, such as rating indices that assess project scope risks early in the development process (Pellerin & Perrier, 2019).

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology adopted in the study. Firstly, it explains the research design, including the aims and objectives of the study, the rationale for selecting a qualitative research approach, and the choice of semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection tool. Secondly, the chapter describes the participant selection process, sample size and sampling process, interview procedures, and provides general background information on the participating youth-oriented non-governmental organisations. Finally, the data analysis section describes the process of qualitative content analysis, including transcription and coding procedures, as well as the use of analytical software. It also presents the thematic structure of the semi-structured interviews and outlines each sub-theme of the interviews. The chapter as a whole focuses on the collection, processing and analysis of empirical data relating to project management practices and challenges, as well as the competencies required for project management roles in youth-oriented NGOs.

3.1 Research design

The study *aims to understand how Lithuanian youth-oriented NGOs (NGOs working with young people and youth NGOs) approach project management and what kind of challenges they face when doing project-based work.* To explore the research question four research objectives were identified:

- Identify how Lithuanian youth-oriented organizations approach project management. Do this by examining the selection of PM approaches/frameworks, identifying project funding sources and analyzing project monitoring and evaluation processes.
- Describe common challenges these organizations face when managing projects.
- Define the most important project management (PM) competencies for staff working in youth-oriented NGOs.
- Outline the aspects that could help to improve the quality and effectiveness of Project Management in youth-oriented NGOs in Lithuania.

The study employs a qualitative research approach to answer the research objectives. Qualitative research approach was chosen because, as stated by Mwita (2022), it helps to gain insight into the personal experiences of its participants and to uncover the emotional aspects of the issue, which is particularly useful for this study. *Semi-structured interviews* were chosen as the primary data collection method to meet the research objectives. The semi-structured interview is a good choice for this study because it combines the focused nature of a structured interview with the flexibility to explore relevant ideas that might arise during the interview (Adeoye-Olatunde

and Olenik, 2021). A semi-structured interview is characterized by an in advance prepared interview guide consisting of a few main, open-ended questions and topics related to the study's topic (Belina, 2023, Ruslin, et al., 2022). The interview guide also offers the freedom to ask additional questions for more in-depth responses, providing the flexibility to delve deeper into the topic (Belina, 2023), which is especially valuable for a topic about project management practices in youth-oriented NGOs. Interviews can be carried out in person or via telephone or video conferencing (Mwita, 2022). The interview guide, which can be found in ANNEX 1, was prepared prior to conducting the interviews in order to reflect the research objectives.

The semi-structured interview was chosen as the primary method of data collection, so *qualitative content analysis* was selected as the ideal method for analysing the data. As stated by Kleinheksel et al. (2020), content analysis is a method that is used to identify and interpret meaning in recorded forms of communication. They explain it as "isolating small pieces of data that represent salient concepts and then applying or creating a framework to organize these pieces in a way that can be used to describe or explain a phenomenon" (Kleinheksel et al., 2020, p. 127). In coding, the importance of a theme is not defined by how often it occurs; instead, it is determined by the presence of specific patterns it displays (Biggs, et al., 2021). The process of reading and interpreting primary data to develop concepts, themes or a process model through interpretations based on data is known as *inductive coding*. This type of coding requires to mark passages and sentences of a text with a code (Chandra, Shang, 2019).The identification of themes can be broken down into three fundamental stages (Biggs, et al., 2021):

- First, the researcher begins with a comprehensive reading of the text (for example, an interview).
- Second, the researcher analyses the text by identifying significant subsections and coding or categorising these subsections.
- Finally, as more texts are analysed, the researcher refines and expands the emerging code system.

3.2 Sample size and the participants of the research

In a study by Hennink and Kaiser (2022), it was noted that saturation in all 16 tests of data from in-depth interviews was reached in between 9 and 17 interviews, excluding outliers. Overall, an average of 12–13 interviews were needed to reach saturation (Hennink and Kaiser, 2022). In qualitative research, sample sizes are guided by data sufficiency, so an optimal sample size is less about the number of participants and more about the data's capacity to offer a comprehensive

and detailed account of the studied phenomenon (Hennink and Kaiser, 2022). Taking this research into account, it was sought to reach sample size of at least 8-9 respondents.

The organisations were selected according to the following criteria:

1. It is a public institution, association, or charity foundation that holds the NGO designation on the Centre of the Registers of Lithuania website.
2. It does not have a registered legal status indicating liquidation or bankruptcy.
3. It is either:

   - A *youth organization*, as defined in the Law on the Fundamentals of Youth Policy of the Republic of Lithuania as an association representing young people and/or their interests, in which at least two-thirds of the members are young people; or
   - An *organisation working with young people*, as defined in Law on the Fundamentals of Youth Policy of the Republic of Lithuania as a legal entity whose objectives include youth work.

Twelve youth-oriented non-governmental organisations were initially identified as suitable for the study. They were selected because they demonstrated experience in project management and represented diversity in geographical location, organisational size, and areas of activity within the youth sector. This approach reflects purposive sampling, which, as described by Ahmad and Wilkins (2025), involves deliberately choosing participants or organisations that possess specific, relevant characteristics needed to answer the research question.

Potential participants were contacted via email or social media messages and invited to take part in the study. The invitations to participate in the research presented the research question, model, structure and the approximate time that the interview would take. Also enclosed were a confidentiality and anonymity disclaimer, and information about the purpose of data use. Twenty two youth-oriented organisations were contacted, however, only ten project managers or NGO representatives from nine organisations agreed to participate. During the recruitment process, several respondents recommended additional organisations, resulting in elements of snowball sampling.

8 interviews were done in Lithuanian language as the respondents are Lithuanian, and 1 interview was done in English, as the respondent was not fluent in speaking Lithuanian language. Table no. 2 presents the participating organisations and their activity descriptions. To keep the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, the NGO names are coded. Only general information is disclosed about the organization's activities and objectives.

Table no. 2. *Study participants.*

Code name	Legal form	Respondent	Organisation's description
NGO-1	Public institution	Project manager	Organization, working with young people at a local level.
NGO-2	Association	Director	Volunteer-based organization working with young people at a local level.
NGO-3	Association	Chairperson	Youth organization, working in the field of social inclusion and human rights.
NGO-4	Public institution	Director	Organization working with young people. Specializes in developing young people's competences.
NGO-5	Public institution	Director	Organization working with young people working in the fields of culture and social inclusion.
NGO-6	Association	Two project coordinators	Youth organisation operating at the national level, representing the interests of young people.
NGO-7	Public institution	Chairperson	Youth organisation engaged in civic and political participation at the national level.
NGO-8	Association	Chairperson	An umbrella youth organisation representing local youth organisations.
NGO-9	Public institution	Director	Organisation working with young people and youth workers, with a focus on non-formal education.

Source: made by the author.

3.3 Research method

Interviews were organised online with the organisation representatives who agreed to participate in the study, as this was the most preferred option. The interviews were conducted using the *Google Meet* video communication app. No advance preparation for the interview was requested from the respondents. Before starting the interview, each interviewee was given a brief overview of the research by presenting the research model, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and answering any questions that had arisen. The interviews were recorded using the 'Voice Memos' app on an iPhone. This app does not offer an automatic transcription feature for the Lithuanian language. The audio was recorded only with the respondent's consent and after the interviewer explained that the recording would be used only for study purposed and the answers would be fully anonymized. To transcribe the interviews, Fireflies.AI Pro Version AI

notetaker tool was used. The translations from English to Lithuanian were done also using the Fireflies.AI tool by instructing it to translate the interview like this:

"Translate the interview from Lithuanian to English. The translation needs to be precise, translated word to word. Do not add any additional information. Make sure speakers and time stamps are in place – do not remove them."

The interview guide developed to align with the study's research objectives. The interview guide (which can be found in ANNEX 1) was divided into five themes: (1) the organization's background and context, (2) project management practices, (3) project management challenges, (4) project management competencies and skills, and (5) what is needed to improve Project Management in youth-oriented NGOs? The interview questions were used as a guide; additional questions were asked as well to get as much in-depth information from the respondents as possible. Table no. 3 presents the interview blocks which are analyzed in the *Analysis of Reasearch Results* section.

Table no. 3. *Descriptions of each interview block.*

Block name	Description
Project Management practices	The aim of this interview block is to understand how youth NGOs plan, manage and organise their projects, including whether they use formal project management methodologies or more informal practices. The questions also seek to identify how organisations monitor project progress and evaluate completed projects, and which tools support these processes. Overall, it helps to reveal the level of project management structure, consistency and capacity within youth-oriented NGOs. It also touches on the project funding aspect and aims to understand how youth-oriented NGOs assess the synergy and collaboration between them and the donor institutions.
Project Management challenges	The questions are designed to identify the main challenges that youth NGOs face when managing projects, including issues related to operations, organisation and resources. They also explore the influence of donor requirements and administrative rules on project management practices, and their potential impact on organisational autonomy. The overall aim is to understand how external funding conditions and strategic alignment pressures shape the challenges faced by NGOs in their project work.

Continuation of Table no. 3:

Project Management competences and skills	The aim of this block is to explore which project management competences that are considered essential by youth-oriented NGOs, and how these skills are developed within organisations. The questions also seek to assess the availability of training or professional development opportunities, and to understand staff attitudes towards formal certification. The overall goal is to understand how NGOs develop and perceive project management competencies, and their importance at individual and organisational levels.
What is needed to improve Project Management in youth-oriented NGOs?	The aim of this question was to understand the needs of youth-oriented NGOs so that the quality and effectiveness of their project management could improve.

Source: made by the author.

3.4 Research analysis

Following the data collection process, the interview responses were analysed using a qualitative content analysis approach. The analysis followed a methodical, step-by-step process designed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and categories within the interviews. First, the transcripts were read several times to get a general understanding of the material. The next step was to highlight and code data relevant to the research questions. *Inductive coding* method was used, as the interviews were read and interpreted in order to develop the repeating themes and concepts (Chandra & Shang, 2019). The *Project Management competencies* category was based on the Individual Competence Baseline (ICB) 4.0 by IPMA, which can be considered a *deductive coding* method.

The MAXQDA Analytics Pro software was the primary analysis tool used for the analysis. The software made coding of the transcripts more convenient. The individual codes were grouped into broader themes and analysed in terms of their frequency and how often they occurred together. During this process, the initial categories were gradually improved, merged, or separated as needed, resulting in a structured coding system that captures the main themes related to project management practices and challenges in Lithuanian youth-oriented NGOs. Finally, the coded data were synthesized into broader thematic findings that reflect how these NGOs approach project management, what kind of challenges they encounter, and how organisational capacities shape their practices.

4 ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the data collected, which was completed once the process was finished. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten respondents from nine organisations to gather enough knowledge to fulfil the research objectives outlined in the previous sections. Six of the respondents were women and four were men. The data was analysed based on the participants' responses without any biases to to their gender, age or any other attributes. Interviews were conducted through the "Google Meet" online platform, with each interview lasting between 30 to 90 minutes. The interviews took place in November and December 2025.

The organisations were selected on the basis that they are either a youth NGO or an NGO working with young people (as these organization types are described in the Law on the Fundamentals of Youth Policy of the Republic of Lithuania), and that they have practical, hands-on experience managing and/or contributing to projects. The respondents represent a wide range of youth-oriented NGOs in Lithuania that differ in terms of organisational size, scope of operation and target groups. This diversity enabled a variety of perspectives on project management practices and challenges to be obtained.

The analysis of the interview responses was conducted in alignment with the research objectives. The following thematic blocks correspond to the research questions outlined earlier, and the interview data were analysed and structured accordingly.

4.1 Project Management in youth-oriented NGOs

This chapter intends to analyze how youth-oriented NGOs approach Project Management. To understand how this, during the interviews the respondents were asked a question *"What's your organization's approach to planning and managing projects?"*

The data from the interviews shows that project management as a process begins with the generation of ideas, and occasionally involves a needs analysis. For example, involving the target group, as all the interviewed NGOs manage projects are funded by a variety of donor institutions, implementing different programmes, such as Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps or Interreg. These institutions are a key stakeholder in the project management process. As a representative from NGO-8 said, *"<…> everything in a project always arises from some problem we see. It's very important—we've made it a point every year, especially since I became director, to encourage our board to help conduct needs analysis or qualitative research, so we see where we need to go next with projects."*

However, submitting a written grant proposal does not guarantee project funding – the proposal may be rejected due to quality issues, administrative rules set by the donor or even by donor's lack of funds to grant a project. Therefore, a project can only proceed if the proposal is approved by the funding institution and the grant agreement has been signed. This is why it is important to bear these factors in mind when analysing project management in youth-oriented NGOs.

4.1.1 Grant writing as part of Project Management approaches in youth-oriented NGOs

In the interviewed youth NGOs, grant writing is not treated as a separate preliminary activity, but rather as an integral part of the overall project management process. The project proposal can be viewed as the business case for youth-oriented NGOs. In the PM² Methodology Guide (European Commission, Directorate-General for Digital Services, 2023), the business case is described as a document that *"<…> provides decision-makers with the information they need to determine whether the project is worth doing"* (p. 34). The business case, and in NGO case, the project proposal, should be revisited during important project milestones to ensure that the expected benefits are still achievable, and that the costs and schedule remain within budget and on schedule (European Commission, Directorate-General for Digital Services, 2023).

Organisations have to define their project objectives, activities, indicators, timelines, monitoring and evaluation methods in the funding application. Consequently, project management practices tend to be done according to the rules by the donor institution, with grant writing playing a central role in establishing everything that has to be achieved with the project. As an interviewee from NGO-9 explained it: *"For other projects like partnership or innovation projects, the structure is usually determined by the funder. <…> So the structure is mostly imposed by the funders, as they structure the application and thus the reporting."* Project proposal is an integral part of project management in interviewed organisations. A respondent from NGO-1 framed it as her professional identity: *"Honestly, I prefer the writing. The management part is very mechanic - a lot of paperwork and not so creative. <…> I see myself more as a grant writer than as a project manager."* NGO-8 also highlighted grant writing as a major project management task: *"<…> I write the project, but the team is involved. I create a separate Excel file in our shared organizational drive, and my colleagues can see it and follow my work. Initially, there's a draft, and I often get feedback or suggestions."*

Grant writing is a time-consuming activity, and the uncertainty whether the project is going to get funded or not can affect motivation to prepare proposals, as a respondent from NGO-2 claimed: *"Motivation to write grants can be low, knowing the work required and the slim chances due to such competition. <…> When you spend weeks writing, only to be turned down because*

you 'lack track record,' it's frustrating." However, in some organisations the responsibilities between team members are still divided even before knowing if the project is going to be funded in NGO-8: *"Even <u>before we know if we will win the project, we plan who will be responsible for implementing which activities</u>, and what each responsibility will be. <u>So we distribute who could do it, what the responsibilities would be, and so on.</u>"* The importance of the success of the project proposal is highlighted in the words of a respondent from NGO-5: *"We identify a need, <u>write the project, try to get funding; if we get it, we implement it, if not, we don't</u>."*

In other cases, internal support structures of larger youth organisations can partially mitigate the burden associated with grant writing. In NGO-6, a youth organisation with branches across different Lithuanian cities, an internal structure resembling a Project Management Office was identified, providing centralised support to local branches during the application process: *"We get the application from the branch, <u>review it, comment, suggest improvements or corrections</u>. After these updates, <u>we review it again. If it's all good, <…> and then it's sent to the municipality</u>."*

4.1.2 Project Management approaches used by youth-oriented NGOs.

Although some elements of PM frameworks such as PMBOK, PRINCE2, or Agile / Watterfal principles might appear informally, most respondents don't formally use them. Many interviewees associate project management with improvisation, experience and informal learning. Of all the respondents, two organisations apply Agile elements in specific contexts, such as the development of digital tools.

The most frequent PM approach that came up during the interviews was the **informal, experience-based approach** or in other words, *learning by doing* approach. NGO-5 described it like this: *"And now, looking at practical work, <u>it's more about relying on experience than strictly following theory from the start</u>. <…> a lot still <u>relies on a trial-and-error method</u>."* NGO-7, when asked whether they follow any PM approach such as Waterfall or Agile, told that: *"Not really. <u>We do things our own way.</u>"* NGO-1 also described their organisation's PM processes as coming from **the practical experience:** *"Maybe there are practices we naturally use that are in there, but I never called it that. <u>For me, it's always been just practical experience</u>, not theoretical frameworks."* NGO-8 explained it that *learning by doing* is one youth work's main principles: *"<u>Learning by doing is a core principle in youth work</u>, so I naturally connect things this way.<…> <u>it's just our culture.</u>"* A respondent from NGO-6 described that "fancier" PM approaches would be useful in a bigger team: *"I think they would be helpful if our team were larger, but as it stands, with our small team, there just isn't the need for those kinds of processes yet."*

NGO-4 pointed out that not many people in the youth work sector have some management knowledge: *"<…> it's a question of how many people in NGOs have actually studied management. Not many. We're really good social workers, really good educators, but when management questions arise, that's where the trouble starts and it's debatable how much we want to deal with that."* This quote explains the knowledge gap in formal Project Management processes by the interviewed NGOs.

Traditional Project management approaches (Waterfall and Project Cycle Management) in youth-oriented NGOs were named by some of the respondents. For example, NGO-9 explained that in the project proposal for partnership and innovation projects (such as Erasmus+ KA2 projects), they plan work packages, which can resemble a Waterfall method: *"Sometimes those work packages resemble a bit of Waterfall - certain sequences. And we have these horizontal work packages: project management, dissemination, etc."* A respondent from NGO-4 also explained that the traditional PM principles are followed when the project is traditional or less creative: *"<…> or those required by funders to strictly follow a fixed plan, we stick to the waterfall or classic project management principles."* An interviewee from NGO-5 pointed out that from the trainings she was most familiar with the Project Cycle Management framework: *"I think, as far as the project management methods I've come across in various trainings, it's mostly the project cycle management approach. <…> So, I guess this is the most familiar theory."*

Iterative / adaptive approaches (Agile, Design Thinking). NGO-4 explained that they use Agile principles in their work when developing digital educational tools: *"<…> the process includes initial design, getting feedback, iterating on the product with designers and pilot users, building a "minimum viable product" (MVP), and then testing it. We adopt elements from the agile approach in these cases, especially by regularly checking what works and what doesn't, and making quick corrections if necessary."* NGO-9 also work with the development of digital tools and use them in the development process: *"Maybe Agile fits the tech side - if a specific improvement needs to be made to our platform, then we agree on a time frame, there are these shorter sprints, we check progress, test it, and release to production. That's more for the technical part, working with programmers, because it's very clear what's needed."* NGO-9 also named the Design Thinking approach as a method to come up with new ideas: *"If it's a bigger innovation, something that wasn't there before, and you have to start from scratch, then we go through design thinking - understanding the problem, defining a prototype, testing it, and then looking at the experience and working on improvements. So quite often, our approach for project structure is like that."*

To summarize, the project management approaches vary by organization. Organisations that claimed to use informal project management approach tend to have hands-on experience of

working in youth work. They work directly with their target groups, organising events and workshops for them. They also practise non-formal education, which continues into their project management processes. The organisations using adaptive approaches work with the development of digital tools, so Agile, for example, is used selectively. The use of traditional PM methods are recognized as a part donor requirements. Table no. 4 summarizes the main project management approaches identified across the interviewed NGOs. However, these categories are flexible. Most interviewed NGOs tend to combine formal, funder-driven structures with adaptive or experience-based practices depending on the project and external requirements.

Table No. 4. *Project management approaches by youth-oriented NGOs.*

PM approach category	Description	Typical context of use	Interviewed NGOs
Traditonal PM approach (Waterfall, Project Cycle Management)	This is a structured, linear approach with predefined phases, deliverables, and reporting requirements. It is largely determined by the funding institutions.	EU-funded or national programmes with strict rules (e.g. Erasmus+, Interreg).	NGO-4, NGO-5, NGO-9
Adaptive / iterative PM approach (Agile, Design Thinking)	This is a flexible and iterative approach, with experimentation, feedback, and adjustments during implementation. Respondents apply it selectively for certain type of projects.	Development of educational tools, digital products, or innovative initiatives.	NGO-4, NGO-9
Informal, experience-based PM approach ("Learning by doing")	This approach is based on practical, hands-on experience, rather than formal knowledge, understanding is acquired through "learning by doing".	Small teams, youth work contexts, limited formal PM training, however still comes up in organisations working with bigger programmes, such as Erasmus+ or Interreg.	NGO-1, NGO-2, NGO-3, NGO-5, NGO-6, NGO-7, NGO-8

Source: made by the author according to the data collected from the interviews.

4.1.3 Project management role distribution in youth-oriented NGOs

Regarding role distribution and organisational structure, most interviewed NGOs operate with very small teams, resulting in overlapping roles and unclear responsibilities. Due to limited

human resources, directors / chairpersons frequently assume operational and project management tasks. This centralisation of responsibility was pointed out by manyrespondents. A representative from NGO-2 stated that as a director she is the one responsible regarding everything happening in the organization: "*I'm the director, but actually, I do everything.*" Similarly, a respondent from NGO-4 noted that "*If gaps appear, the director steps in and takes responsibility.*" This pattern was also reflected in the experience of NGO-7, where the chairperson described a highly centralised role: "*I coordinate everything: structuring programs and events. The hard part is everything is tied to specific budget lines.*" The chairperson of NGO-8 noted that she is the person preparing the project proposals: "*<…> I write the project, but the team is involved.*" In NGO-9, the director is not only involved as a trainer but also directly responsible for project management procedures: "*I handle document preparation and all the accounting.*" These examples demonstrate how a shortage of human resources can result in a single individual taking on multiple roles, which in turn, can affect project quality.

Project management role division. This role division can be seen in a few interviewed NGOs. In NGO-1, roles are divided and the organization has employed a dedicated project manager: *"My role in the organization is to manage the international projects and write them. So, I write and administer (or manage) projects."* In NGO-7, responsibilities are further distributed, with a designated financial coordinator overseeing reporting requirements: *"Our financial coordinator oversees most of this, especially our main national project. I'd say 70–80% of their work is managing quarterly reports - invoicing, <..> system entries, and so on."* At the same time, project-related tasks extend beyond a single role, as *"The financial coordinator handles most of it, but our office manager and I also plan activities, check resources, and coordinate when funding comes in. It's a team effort, because there's a lot to handle."* Similarly, NGO-6 noted that responsibilities expand with project size: *"For larger projects, other people get involved."* The project manager from NGO-1 also emphasized the necessity of shared responsibility is closely linked to capacity limitations: "*Alone it's hard, if not impossible.*"

Involvement of the organisational board in project management. Beyond staff and directors, organisational boards or committees also play a role in project management, primarily in oversight and coordination functions. In NGO-7, this involvement includes monitoring and coordination: *"Our board also monitors and coordinates."* Similarly, NGO-6 described a more structured division of responsibilities: *"We have a designated committee focused on organizing the events."* These arrangements suggest that boards contribute to project governance and accountability, helping to compensate for limited organisational capacity.

Centralised, director-led arrangements were more common in smaller NGOs, while larger organisations tended to exhibit greater role specialisation and governance involvement.

PMO-like activities of NGO-6. During the interview with NGO-6's project coordinators, they explained that as their organization has branches in different Lithuanian cities, they as the members of organisation's board help their branches with project applications and other formal grant application preparation tasks as it was mentioned in the *Grant writing* chapter. The project coordinators do not implement the projects and the support leads to more formal monitoring processes by the organisation's board.

The coordinators in NGO-6 also train the branches: *"we help our branches write projects if needed, and before that we conduct trainings."* They review their proposals: *"We help our branches write projects <…> we review all documents, suggest improvements, and check the budget before submission."* Check planned budgets in the proposals: *"Before an application is submitted, we always check out the budget: how the funds are planned to be used, to make sure it's a sensible allocation."* And monitoring processes of the activities: *"Our job is to check in later and make sure everything is still being carried out and nothing has been abandoned. So while it's not our job specifically, we do monitor the process"* and *"The actual organization of activities is left to the branches. Later on, we ask them periodically for an initial report to see how many activities took place, what indicators were planned or achieved, and so on."*

Another aspect which is very specific to the youth sector is **youth involvement.** NGO-2 mentioned the aspiration of involving young people in the co-creation of project ideas and management itself. As the interviewee stated: *"I'd love for it to be co-created by youth <…> but it's rare for youth to proactively suggest projects."*

4.2   Project Management tools

When it comes to project management tools, the NGOs that were interviewed emphasised simplicity, accessibility, and the use of digital solutions that are widely available and free to use, instead of using specialised project management software. Organisations mostly use general-purpose tools like Excel, Google Workspace, and shared calendars, such as Google Calendar. Tool choice depends on organisation's size, financial capacity, accessibility needs, and the involvement of external (usually international) partners.

When it comes to **planning and scheduling**, most organisations rely on basic, familiar tools. For example, shared calendars are often used to coordinate tasks and timelines. One interviewee from NGO-5 described using *"<…> a shared calendar to keep everyone in sync"*, while respondent from NGO-3 stated that *"Google Calendar is our main tool for keeping track of*

timelines". In some cases, tasks are directly divided on the shared calendar, which makes the task sharing more easy, as stated by interviewee from NGO-1: *"we divide tasks on a calendar, <…> and then we already plan activities for the next year <…>."*.

When it comes to **task management**, some organisations complement calendars with task management tools such as *Trello* or *Monday.com*. Trello is used mainly for task lists and coordination, as illustrated by respondents from NGO-5 and NGO-2 who both mentioned *"Trello for task management"* or "*Trello for task lists sometimes"*. A representative from NGO-4 named *Monday.com* as the selected main project management tool due to the growing number of projects: *"what we are trying to implement is Monday.com as it is a CRM, as well as a project management tool."*

Regarding **data entry and reporting tools**, "Excel" spreadsheet editor stands out as the main tool used by interviewed organisations for all project management related tasks such as budgeting, reporting, planning and monitoring progress. Its versatility was emphasised by interviewee from NGO-5: *"Excel is our MVP! We use it for everything: not only budgeting but planning, building calendars, schedules, tracking progress"* (NGO-5). Similarly, another interviewee from NGO-1 stated that they use Excel for finance management: *"I double-check costs in Excel and coordinate with the accountant so we never run short"* and for time management: *" I set up an Excel with deadlines"* (author's note – for open calls by funding institutions)*.

Cloud-based solutions are widely used for **documentation and collaboration**. Most interviewees mentioned Google Drive and Google Workspace as the primary platforms for storing, sharing and co-editing documents. Interviewees such as NGO-5 use *"Google Drive for sharing files"*, NGO-2: *"Google Drive for all our files and notes"* and NGO-4: *"Google Workspace for collaboration and sharing"* (NGO-4), as well as NGO-9: *"So most monitoring is through Google products; our organisation uses the whole Google suite"*. Such wide use could be explained by Google's wide popularity all over the world and by the fact that Google Drive, for example, can be used for free.

However, it was pointed out that organizational growth sometimes requires more advanced systems. Representative from NGO-4 noted*: "When the team was small and we only had one project, Google Drive worked fine, but now with 5 or 6 ongoing projects and several different contributors, centralization is essential to avoid losing track of various documents, deadlines, and tasks."* In a larger organization such as NGO-6, an internal document management system has been introduced: *"With the new document management system, signed documents*

go straight there. This makes it much easier; we can organize things by branch and see who owns which documents."

Monitoring and evaluation practices rely mainly on qualitative feedback and simple survey tools. Many organisations use evaluation forms, online surveys, and reflection sessions to assess project outcomes. NGO-5 described using two different tools such as Google Forms and the interactive tool Mentimeter: *"surveys - usually Google Forms, sometimes real-time feedback using tools like Mentimeter"*, while NGO-4 mentioned conducting *"surveys right before and after project activities with participating youth and their parents."*

Overall, tool selection is largely influenced by financial constraints and accessibility limitations. Several interviewees explicitly stated that they had tested more advanced tools, but ultimately opted for simpler ones. NGO-9 explained this decision as a choice to keep things simple for everyone involved: "*Since most of our projects are international with partners, we keep the tools accessible and easy to use*." Another respondent from NGO-3 explained: *"We tried some other accounting software, but they were just too expensive for us to justify"*.

Accessibility concerns were raised, particularly by NGO-2, which works with young people with diverse needs: *"Miro is a nightmare for people with visual impairments - they just can't use it."* As the organisation summarised, "*We tried more advanced tools such as Miro, Discord, Slack, but they weren't accessible, user-friendly, or free. Many programs just aren't adapted for people with disabilities. So it's much easier to keep things simple for everyone involved.*"

Table no. 5. *Project management tools used by Lithuanian youth-oriented NGOs.*

PM element	Tool	NGOs mentioning the tool
Planning and scheduling	Google Calendar	NGO-1, NGO-3, NGO-5, NGO-9
	Trello	NGO-2, NGO-3, NGO-5
	Monday.com	NGO-1, NGO-4
	Gantt charts (Excel-based)	NGO-3
Task management	Trello	NGO-2, NGO-3, NGO-5
	Monday.com	NGO-1, NGO-4
Data entry and reporting	Excel	NGO-1, NGO-3, NGO-4, NGO-5, NGO-8
	Google Sheets & Docs	NGO-7, NGO-9
Documentation and collaboration	Google Drive	NGO-2, NGO-3, NGO-5, NGO-7, NGO-8
	Google Workspace	NGO-4, NGO-9

	Internal document management system	NGO-6

Continuation of Table no. 5:

Communication and coordination	Facebook / Messenger	NGO-2, NGO-3
	WhatsApp	NGO-2
	Slack	NGO-3
Monitoring and evaluation	Evaluation forms (Google Forms, questionnaires)	NGO-4, NGO-5, NGO-8, NGO-9
	Mentimeter	NGO-5, NGO-9
	Reflection meetings / debriefings	NGO-4, NGO-5
	Participant follow-ups	NGO-4, NGO-5

Source: compiled by the author according to the data collected from the interviews.

4.3 Project funding in youth-oriented NGOs

To understand how youth-oriented NGOs fund their projects, the study participants were asked: *"How long has your organization been carrying out projects, and what types of funding sources do you usually depend on (EU, national, or private)?"* The answers show that project funding is primarily dependent on external grants and public funding, with organisations adopting different strategies to be as financially sustainabile as possible. Most interviewed NGOs rely on a mix of **municipal, national, and international funding sources**, supplemented by private donations and income-generating activities.

Funding sources and their diversification. NGO-3 emphasized the importance of having multiple project funding sources to mitigate risk: *"We always try to diversify our funding sources because we had a tough experience once when we relied on a single grant application"* (NGO-3). NGO-9 also pointed out that public funding is not reliable: *"<…> we always try to look at opportunities for more funding <…> because public funding is less predictable - you can expect a lot and get nothing or just half of what you hoped."*

European Union and other international funds are being used, as stated by NGO-1: *"We started with national grants and municipal stuff, then later Erasmus, and then gradually bigger agencies like Interreg, EEA grants, Nordic Council, and more EU funds. There's still national funding"* (NGO-1). Private funding was also mentioned, for instance by NGO-4: *"We've also worked with the Kazickas Family Foundation, a private donor, for specific projects."*

Some NGOs rely on project funding as their main operational income. Interviewee from NGO-3 stated: *"Our main sources are project initiatives. That is, we write and submit project applications and hope to win grants from those."* NGO-2 as well: *"We get by mostly on project*

funding." However, NGO-8, for example, noted that financial sustainability doesn't come from project funding: *"We <…> we have two stable sources aside from project activities. We have external funding that doesn't come from projects."*

Aligning with donor priorities. Participants during the interview were asked a question: "What are some of the challenges you face when striving to align your organization's project goals with donor's strategies or priorities?" Most NGOs mostly agreed that the priorities do not exactly cause challenges and that they try to apply to those calls that are relevant for their organisation's aims. For example, NGO-4 emphasized mission alignment: *"We try to focus only on projects and funding streams that align with our mission and strategic plan, rather than chasing every opportunity"*, while NGO-5 put a greater emphasis on the selection rather than adaptation: *"We really only apply where there's a real match. If the call for projects or funding matches our mission or strengths, we go for it. If not, we don't waste our energy."* On the other hand, respondent from NGO-3 argued that donor's priorities add a certain value to the NGO: *"You write a project that suits the donor's priorities but with added value for your organization. There's always a bit of give and take."* NGO-7 also highlighted the role of experience and understanding of donor imposed rules:*"You really learn from practice and every donor or grant has different rules."*

Synergy and collaboration with donor institutions. The nature of interaction with donor institutions varies by the type of institution. Some interviewees described **formal, administrative processes** with the donors. A respondent from NGO-7 stated that bureaucratic and IT challenges are common: *"They're usually helpful, but contact often means a problem needs fixing, which can be stressful. System outages and bureaucracy are ongoing frustrations."* Then, there were different views regarding synergy with municipalities. NGO-3 stressed that the synergy with their city's municipality is very bureaucratic: *"With the municipality, it's strictly administrative - you get news when to submit, sign a contract, submit your report, and that's it; only if you need help filling out a form will you have more interaction"*. In contrast, interviewee from NGO-8 had a much more positive experience with her city's municipality: *"With the local municipality, everyone gets involved, sees the implementation, observes and helps. It's much more positive and friendly"*. It is likely that in smaller cities the municipalities are more involved with helping their beneficiaries. It might also depend on the individual employee working at the domor institutiom. NGO-5 stated that administrative problems a lot of times can be resolved by communicating with the donors: *"For the most part, it's positive - there's usually goodwill and supportive communication.<…> Sometimes there are differences in how things are interpreted or how rigid people are about the rules. Overall, though, I find that problems can usually be resolved with direct communication and understanding both the rules and the people."*

Administrative requirements and unpredictability. Funding comes with **strict administrative rules**, reporting requirements, and financial regulations. Interviewee from NGO-7 described the challenges of managing funding flows: *"For example, with our Agency of Youth Affairs project, funds always come at the end of the month. Sometimes you even need to cover urgent expenses from other project accounts while you wait for transfers."* Furthermore, a respondent from NGO-9 highlighted auditing risks: "*A project that has received public funding is subject to an audit within five years of completion, and all partners need to be prepared for possible audit in that period, which is risky.*"

Access and competition. NGO-2 in particular, put emphasis on the uneven access to funding and smaller organisations often face disadvantages in this area: *"Many municipality or national fundings go the same way: those with experience, long track records, or more staff always have an advantage"* and *"Established organizations know all the tricks. Small ones like us are left hoping for a breakthrough."* It was also noted that **information on opportunities can be scarce**, making grant writing a matter of luck and persistence, as stated by a representative from NGO-2: *"With municipalities, it comes down to luck and your own time to chase opportunities. The process is rarely publicized, and the same 'in crowd' of organizations seem to win the funding every time.*"

4.4 Project monitoring and evaluation in youth-oriented NGOs

Participants of the study were asked how they monitor their ongoing projects and how they evaluate them when they are finished: *"How do you monitor your ongoing projects, and what tools do you use to do so? And how do you evaluate finished projects?"* From the answers it can be observed that qualitative indicators are used if the project involves young people and seeks to develop / cultivate their skills and competences. Quantitative indicators, on the other hand, are used if the objectives are clear and defined by measurable indicators, such as number of workshops organized. A recurring challenge across interviews is the difficulty of objectively evaluating youth-oriented projects.

Project monitoring. If the project's activities involve young people, their engagement and feedback is observed. A representative from NGO-1 stated: "*For monitoring, participants themselves are our best "tool" - seeing their engagement, collecting feedback, and evaluating outcomes.*" NGO-4 added: *"<…> feedback is not just a box to tick, but an active tool. If after running the first week of an initiative we see some part isn't effective, or participants aren't engaging as hoped, we have immediate discussions and make adjustments for the next session."* However, monitoring depends on a project type. Respondent from NGO-4 commented on monitoring processes for Interreg project: "*<…> or projects involving partners (like Interreg), we*

hold periodic meetings and use shared spreadsheets to keep track of everyone's responsibilities, ongoing work, and deliverables."

Quantitative indicators. Projects with clearly defined outcomes primarily use objective and quantitative indicators. For example, NGO-5 explained that in Lithuanian language courses they rely on measurable indicators such as attendance and exam results: *"With something like Lithuanian language classes, we use objective measures: class attendance, evaluations from the teacher, language exam passes."* Similarly, respondent from NGO-7 reported measuring progress against predefined goals and milestones: "*We report what we've done and measure it against goals and milestones.*" From an evaluation perspective, projects with strict funder frameworks, like Interreg, were said to be particularly easier to evaluate. Interviewee from NGO-1 said: *"Some projects, like Interreg, have really clear deliverables, which you just tick off what was achieved or not."* These examples suggest that projects which have clear deliverables, or can be quantified, with an evaluation system provided by the donors, are easier to evaluate.

Qualitative evaluation and soft-skill assessment in youth work. Qualitative evaluation plays a central role in youth-oriented projects as they quite often are oriented towards young people's skill and competence development. So, outcomes such as personal development and empowerment are difficult to quantify. Intervieweed NGOs emphasized that these impacts are often assessed through observations, reflections, and participant feedback rather than numerical indicators. As stated by NGO-1's project manager: *"but with youth projects, it's much more subjective. We check soft-skill development through training sessions, observations, and comparing where participants start and where they end. In some cases you see the impact immediately; in others, participants write to us weeks later saying they want to come back. That's a sign something worked."* Interviewee from NGO-2 added to this topic arguing that the development of skills cannot be measured by quantitative metrics: *"It's not always possible or meaningful to quantify outcomes like 'personal empowerment' or 'new skills.'"*

Methods such as pre- and post-activity surveys and reflection questionnaires are commonly used. They can be used to evaluate the development of the skills, as stated by NGO-4: *"We conduct surveys right before and after project activities with participating youth and their parents. This includes reflection questionnaires, checking in daily or at each session, and then again at the end of the project."* NGO-9 also applies the follow-up method: *"After the project, or a bit later, we might also follow up with participants, especially with youth, to see what stuck and what they've done with what they learned. That feedback loop is really valuable".* However, a respondent from NGO-5 pointed out that it might be difficult to follow-up with the participants after

the project has ended: *"Sometimes, though, <u>we do try to look at longer-term effects, but people</u> <u>move on, so it's tough to follow up</u>."*

Evaluation challenges. A representative from NGO-7 emphasised that for them avoiding financial penalties when closing a project for them is often considered a key success criterion. *"as long as we don't have to give money back and the project is closed, <u>that counts as a success</u>."* Although the respondent from NGO-7 acknowledged that more professional evaluation approaches could improve learning and accountability, capacity constraints, such as reliance on volunteers and a lack of sustainable funding, limit what is achievable: *"more professional evaluation would be helpful, but <u>we just don't have the resources</u>."* Overall, the findings suggest that the monitoring and evaluation practices of Lithuanian NGOs tend to be shaped by funder requirements, youth work principles and at times, organizational capacity constraints, rather than formal evaluation models.

4.5 Project management challenges and capacity constraits in Lithuanian youth-oriented NGOs

4.5.1 Organisational capacity constraints

The findings show that organisational capacity constraints have a strong impact on project management practices in Lithuanian youth-oriented NGOs, generating specific and recurring challenges. The main capacity constraints identified across the interviews are **human resource constraints** and **lack of sustainable funding sources.** These constraints are interconnected and dependent on each other. For example, if an organisation is unable to hire more people due to a lack of funds, it will have a small team and will have to heavily on volunteers. That leads to informal and highly adaptive project management approaches. Table no. 6 in p. 61 summarizes the organizational capacity constraints and provides explanations what they mean in youth-oriented NGOs context.

Lack of sustainable funding sources emerges as a foundational constraint that affects almost all other aspects of project management. As it was noted in the project funding section, for many of the respondents project funding is one of the main sources of their organisation's income. Interviewees repeatedly pointed out that available funding rarely covers real staffing needs or competitive salaries, making it difficult to attract and retain qualified personnel. Participant from NGO-2 noted: *"<…> <u>as the only core member, everything is on my shoulders</u> <u>from application to the activity and reporting</u>. The time needed is huge, and most of the time<u>, local</u> <u>grants don't even cover your basic expenses</u>."* NGO-3 pointed out that they need to have at least two projects running to ensure financial stability: *"Of course, the biggest difficulty for us is that we don't have continuous funding - it's project-based. <u>We basically need at least two larger projects</u>*

a year to keep the office running and then we can also do smaller, more strategic projects which align even more closely with our internal goals." Respondent from NGO-9 pointed out this NGO dependence on European funds*: "Sometimes another funding source can cover the rest, but still most organisations rely only on European funding, which means it's difficult to pay and retain or attract new staff or experts."* And it is important to note that project funding from funding institutions is often **unpredictable**, requiring diversification of funding sources. NGO-9 stated that: *"Public funding is less predictable - you can expect a lot and get nothing or just half of what you hoped."* And NGO-5 described this unpredictability as one of the challenges they encounter: *"Definitely the unpredictability of funding, especially for things like rent or maintaining a community space."*

As a result, NGOs struggle to compete with the private or even public sector, leading to high staff turnover and instability. Respondent from NGO-4 stressed: *"You invest time training someone and as soon as they're really polished, they often get an offer elsewhere with higher pay."* Respondent from NGO-9 had the same concern regarding the inability to provide a competitive salary: *"I can train them myself or send them for training, or they can learn by experience, but in the long run you have to pay them competitive salaries for good performance."*

These funding constraints directly translate into human resource limitations, including a small team size, reliance on part-time workers and a lack of dedicated project managers. A participant from NGO-5 stated that, due to the dependence on project funding, it is difficult to maintain a consistent team: *"Most projects are quite short-term. If someone only joins for one project, they're probably not involved in drafting and planning, and when the project ends, there's no funding to keep them. That's hard for continuity and stability, especially for the core team."*

Nevertheless, some of the respondents provide additional services and participate in public procurement, which helps them achieve at least a minimum level of financial stability. For example, NGO-9 has a digital product and provides facilitation and consulting services: "<…> *we always try to look at opportunities for more funding from our digital product and try to grow that share, because public funding is less predictable <…>. We also sometimes provide training, consulting processes, like online training facilitation <…>."* NGO-8 also organizes trainings and other events: *"The municipality purchases our training services twice a quarter, so that's an income source."*

The small team size is the result of **human resource constraints**, which have led to overlapping roles and concentrated responsibilities. Several respondents highlighted that formal role separation between strategic leadership and operational project management is often not feasible. As interviewee from NGO-2 explained, *"Without funding to hire staff, one person inevitably does all the administrative stuff, project management, and practical running around."*

Similarly, another respondent from NGO-4 noted that *"if they* (the team – author's remark) *can't deliver or there are gaps, <u>then the director steps in and takes responsibility</u>."* A representative from NGO-9 claimed that because of the workload it is difficult to do everything on time: *"<…> frankly, for what we do, our team is very small. Except for our admin person, who spends a lot of time on admin, and it's not even their only job, <u>the rest</u> (and my colleague) <u>do several jobs</u> - <u>we're both trainers and sometimes manage projects</u>. <u>One challenge is doing several jobs at once, so sometimes you can't do everything on time</u>."* Having so many responsibilities concentrated in the hands of a few individuals puts significant pressure on them and limits the organisation's ability to establish professional project management functions.

The human resource constraints lead to **reliance on voluntary work,** which is often framed as both a necessity and a limitation. In NGO-2, the team is very small (up to 3 people) and consists of only volunteers: *"<…> we have no paid staff. <u>We get by mostly on project funding</u>, and <u>everything else is volunteer work</u>. "* It is difficult to ensure accountability and reliability of the volunteers and other team members and that work that NGOs do is as important as any other sector's. As participant from NGO-3 stated: *"There's also the issue of expectations - some people think that volunteering in a civic sector <u>means you can just dip in and out</u>. But when it comes to project work<u>, legal liability is real - our organization is just as legally responsible as any company</u>, with the same obligations and risks of penalties if we mess something up. Sometimes it takes a while for new people to realize the accountability involved."* Respondent from NGO-9 argued that reliance on volunteers is not sustainable: *"<u>You can't rely only on volunteers</u>. If people are volunteering, the quality won't be as high, because <u>they're learning as they go, and before they've learned, the project is over</u>".* Another aspect of youth organisations is that the volunteers are very young and have other responsibilities. As an interviewee from NGO-7 stated: *"<…> the ones really doing the work are around eleven because board members mostly focus on strategic or administrative duties. The others manage communication, education, events, administrative tasks, etc. <u>Most are students or high schoolers, often juggling responsibilities in several organizations at once</u>."* NGO-2 criticized the expectation that youth-oriented NGOs should be carrying out their work on a voluntary basis: *"People expect youth NGO work to be voluntary, and I actually support volunteering, I think it's beautiful, but <u>there are limits to how much you can expect from young people "for free</u>.""*

Table no. 6. *Organisational Capacity Constraints in youth-oriented NGOs.*

Constraint	Explanation

Lack of sustainable funding sources	For many respondents, project funding is one of their organisation's main sources of income. Interviewees repeatedly pointed out that available funding rarely covers real staffing needs or competitive salaries, which makes it difficult to attract and retain qualified personnel. Project funding from funding institutions is also unpredictable, meaning that a project application may be rejected and not proceed to the funding stage. In order to maintain a sustainable financial state, NGOs need to have fundraising and entrepreneurship skills, as well as offering services and training opportunities besides project funding.
Human resource constraints	This constraint is directly linked to the lack of sustainable funding sources. It leads to small teams, overlapping roles and concentrated responsibilities. Formal separation of roles between strategic leadership and operational project management is often not feasible. NGOs are unable to hire staff and therefore have to rely on volunteers, which has its limitations. Volunteers often have other responsibilities, such as school, university or work, and there is also a question of accountability and reliability. Volunteers must be constantly motivated by the NGO and must understand that work in an NGO is as important as work in any other sector.

Source: made by the author according to the data collected from the interviews.

4.5.2 Project Management challenges

Challenges with partner organisations and other stakeholders. Organisations implementing international youth-oriented projects with partner organisations from abroad, such as those funded by the Erasmus+ programme, often encounter issues. NGOs rely on their partners for participant recruitment, project implementation and expertise, yet have limited control over their performance. As one interviewee from NGO-9 claimed: *"We depend on other people – on partners' efficiency. Even if you plan, partners may still be late, not just a day or week, but maybe three months."* A participant from NGO-5 also noted that working with partner

organisations can go either positive or negative way: *"Partnerships can be both a help and a challenge, depending on how engaged partners are and whether people complete their contracts or get interrupted by other offers."*

When partner organisations lack capacity themselves or disengage from the project, the burden shifts back to the coordinating NGO, further straining limited internal resources. As a respondent from NGO-1 claimed, partner quality directly affects project outcomes, particularly in projects for young people where participant selection is important: *"Sometimes partners send participants who don't fit the topic at all, and then it's impossible to reach the planned learning outcomes."*

One interviewee from NGO-4 also pointed out challenges with supplier relations: "*Some vendors see "grant-funded project" and think, "It's project money, we can charge them more." I have a pretty good sense when a price is inflated."* NGOs have to build trust with the suppliers, otherwise they run into risk of being overcharged: "*Relationships with suppliers are based on trust built over time—though even then, we have to keep checking prices so we're not overcharged just because it's "project money."* Such challenges not only undermine project outcomes, but also increase the coordination burden on already limited NGO teams.

Ensuring project continuity. NGO-4 claimed that ensuring project continuity is a big challenge which requires specific skills and resources to manage: "*<…> continuity is a big challenge - ensuring that a good project or tool is sustained after funding ends, rather than just disappearing because the grant cycle is over. This requires strategic thinking and, in some cases, entrepreneurial skills to find new sources of sustainability or income."*

Constraints in project management skills. The research shows that a lack of project management skills is a difficulty for youth-oriented NGOs. Restricted access to formal project management training aggravates these difficulties, leaving staff to rely largely on experiential learning. When asked about familiarity with established project management approaches or methodologies, a respondent from NGO-8 openly acknowledged this limitation: *"No, I'm not familiar, I am not that qualified in this area."* This skills gap is partly explained by the non-managerial professional backgrounds common in the NGO sector. As an interviewee from NGO-2 noted, many practitioners enter youth NGOs with expertise rooted in other disciplines rather than management: *"It's a different mindset – most people here have a background in social work or psychology, like me, not management."*

In addition to general project management competencies, deficits in financial and administrative skills, which are particularly critical given the compliance requirements attached to external funding were mentioned. A participant from NGO-7 emphasised the challenges related

to documentation and accounting: *"The main challenges are lack of experience and competence, especially around documentation and accounting. People can attend trainings, but you really learn from practice and every donor or grant has different rules."*

Complex administrative requirements and donor systems. Beyond skills-related constraints, NGOs face difficulties stemming from complex administrative requirements and donor-imposed systems. These challenges increase the administrative workload and place further pressure on already limited organisational capacity. An interviewee from NGO-5 described how strict reporting and contractual conditions affect project implementation: *"<…> when you know you have quarterly reports and so on, you prepare for quarters. Then you realize you have to pay salaries by the end of the quarter. So you also tell the finance person to prepare all the documents earlier, because the salary can't be paid late - if it is, then there will be extra documentation and similar issues. So, it's just a lot of bureaucracy."*

Regarding bureaucracy, there are some donor institutions that require full printed documentation, as stated by NGO-3: *"Some foreign funders, like the German Bundesstiftung, still want original signed documents, paper copies sent in. That's a holdover from old-school bureaucracy, and it can be a hassle."*

Respondents also reported that **donor systems are often not user-friendly and can be unreliable**, increasing the risk of costly mistakes. A participant from NGO-7 explained: *"Systems sometimes don't work, and mistakes can be costly. One error, like missing a button in the system or mislabelling an expense, can lead to an issue like a 300-euro penalty. Sometimes mistakes from previous events cause issues months later."* Likewise, the NGO-8 interviewee emphasised the considerable learning involved in using donor platforms: *"At first, it was really hard for me to get used to all the systems, how they work in the beginning. The systems are not beginner-friendly, but with time and experience, things become clearer."*

The most frequently mentioned Project Management challenges by the respondents were partnership issues, bureaucracy, and donor-related requirements, highlighting the administrative and collaborative difficulties faced in project implementation, according to the frequency table no. 7 (p. 62). Overall, the analysis shows that capacity constraints and project management challenges are related. Funding and human resource constraints affect how these NGOs plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate their projects. Consequently, project management in Lithuanian NGOs is characterised by flexible role distribution and simplified processes that enable project delivery despite constraints. However, these factors can also hinder long-term strategic development.

Table no. 7: *Project Management challenges in youth-oriented NGOs and how often they were mentioned during the interviews.*

PM Challenge Category	Interviewed NGOs
Challenges with partner organisations and other stakeholders.	NGO-1, NGO-5, NGO-9
Issues with donor IT systems	NGO-7, NGO-8
Bureaucracy / Administrative requirements	NGO-2, NGO-3, NGO-4,NGO-7
Ensuring continuity of created tools / services after project ends	NGO-4
Constraints in project management skills	NGO-2, NGO-4, NGO-7, NGO-8

Source: created by the author according to the data collected from the interviews.

4.6 Project management competencies and their development within and outside the organisation.

When studying a phenomenon that has already been described using an existing framework, codes can be created based on theoretical frameworks or concepts identified in the literature (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). This is called deductive coding (Chandra, Shang, 2019). The study participants were asked: *'What project management skills or competences do you think are most important for a youth-riented NGO staff?'* The answers were categorized using the ICB 4.0 competence framework by IPMA (2023): Practice, People, and Perspective, by creating the codes before the analysis of the transcribed interviews.

The interview data show that the competences of project managers in youth-oriented NGOs are shaped by organisational capacity constraints, value-driven work and complex donor environments. Across the interviews, respondents consistently emphasized certain competences corresponding to all three ICB 4.0 domains **Perspective, Practice, and People,** particularly focusing on time management, financial competence, communication, and leadership.

4.6.1 Practice competences

Time management emerged as one of the most frequently mentioned *Practice* competencies by the respondents. Respondents repeatedly framed as a necessary skill when working in the NGO sector. As one respondent from NGO-8 explained, *"<…> you really have to know how to manage your time so nothing gets lost."* Similarly, interviewees from NGO-6 and NGO-1 stressed that *"<…> time management is vital"* and that *"It's all about time management"* when juggling multiple responsibilities and deadlines. The same notion was also stated by a respondent from NGO-3: "*Being able to manage your time is critical, given how many things are*

going at once in these organizations." Given that many NGOs experience a shortage of human resources, effective time management is critical for fulfilling all responsibilities.

Other competence within the *Practice* domain, that came up quite often during the interviews was **Plan and control**. Several respondents highlighted the importance of anticipating future resource requirements and potential risks. One interviewee from NGO-7 said that thinking ahead about resources helped avoid crises by allowing them to plan proactively: *"<…> a lot of our work is planning, and I think we've avoided quite a few crisis situations because I tend to think ahead."* Few different participants emphasized maintaining structure and order. NGO-1 noted that even minor organizational lapses can become a problem: *"being organized - if even one invoice is in the wrong folder, it becomes a problem."* Interviewee from NGO-5 also supported the idea of being structured: *"Maintaining structure and discipline."* A respondent from NGO-6 also emphasised the importance of being organised: "*Another important skill is making sure nothing gets lost (documents, information, etc.), even with the new system, you still need to be organized and tidy."* These answers show that project management in NGOs has to be thoroughly planned and monitored.

Financial competence was another important element within the *Practice* domain. Respondents stressed that in small NGOs, project managers cannot rely solely on accountants and must themselves understand budgets, reporting, and compliance. An interviewee from NGO-2 stated that: *"you really need at least basic administrative and financial skills, especially because in small NGOs there's often nobody else to handle those things"*. Others emphasized the need to actively track budgets and. A participant from NGO-3 claimed: "*the project manager needs to track budgets, not just the accountant. People have to be able to adapt, keep records, submit reports, sometimes even preemptively fix budget allocations."* While a representative from NGO-7 stated: "*You also need to set aside a kind of financial safety net."* These findings indicate that financial competence in youth NGOs is not optional but integral to effective project management.

Digital skills are not included as a competence in the ICB 4.0, but this element has been included in the results analysis, as two study participants identified the need for these skills among their staff. NGO-3 pointed out the growing reliance on digital tools: "*Some tech competence is necessary as more and more is done through digital tools, social networks, and the like."* And NGO-9 also emphasized the need to be acquainted with AI tools: *"With so much international and remote work, digital skills are critical. Now AI skills are increasingly important for grammar checks, style, breaking down tasks, brainstorming, so people need to use those tools."* NGOs, together with businesses and enterprises, need to be up-to-date with technological developments, so that they can improve and and reduce their workload.

Finally, **decision-making under uncertainty**, which also is not part of the ICB 4.0, was mentioned as particularly important in the international context by NGO-9. A respondent from said NGO noted that project managers must be able to *"make decisions even if you don't have all information, and <…> act fast under uncertainty."* The same respondent also emphasized the importance of transparent and democratic decision-making: "*In international projects and youth work, it's important to make decisions transparently and democratically, as in being able to negotiate, agree, bring up problems and solutions, and make decisions as partners."* This response shows that democratic decision making is particularly important for the NGO environment.

Table no. 8 compiles the ICB 4.0 *Practice* competences which were mentioned during the intervews and which respondents mentioned as important for their work in a youth-oriented NGO.

Table no. 8. *PM competences identified by interviewed NGOs in the Practice domain.*

ICB 4.0 dimension	Key competence	Interviewed NGOs
Practice	Time management	NGO-1, NGO-3, NGO-6, NGO-8, NGO-9
Practice	Financial competence	NGO-2, NGO-3, NGO-7
Practice	Plan and control	NGO-1, NGO-2, NGO-3, NGO-5, NGO-6, NGO-7
Practice	Decision-making	NGO-9

Source: made by the author according to the data collected from the interviews.

4.6.2   Perspective competences

Within this domain, **strategic thinking** was a recurring theme. Some interviewees argued that project activities should be aligned with the organisation's long-term mission and strategic plan even before engaging with donors. Both a respondent from NGO-1 and NGO-4 emphasised the importance of understanding organization's long-term strategy: *"Strategic thinking also, we must understand the organization's long-term strategy and fit our activities into it"* and *"<…> having a clear long-term strategy and sticking to it, rather than being distracted by every new potential project or funding stream is important for consistency and effectiveness."*

A respondent from NGO-3 explained that they first check whether a project fits their long-term strategy: *"it all starts with our strategic plan. We first check our overall goals even before approaching donors, we need to see if the project fits our longer-term path."* The organisation's representative also made a point that strategic competence also involves negotiation with funders:

"*if a funder wants to see a certain number of youth participants or sets a certain number of required activities, we have to consider whether that fits our strategic aims. Sometimes we build in a few extra donor-oriented activities even if they aren't our core focus just to secure the funding.*" This response demonstrates the importance of compromise when project funding is at risk.

A particularly distinctive feature of youth-oriented NGOs is the strong emphasis on **culture and values**. Many respondents noted that NGO work goes far beyond formal job descriptions. An interviewee from NGO-2 pointed out the dedication to their job: *"We do way more than is listed in any project report - devoting evenings, weekends, and even our own money."* The same respondent also stated that *"So in reality, in our sector, maybe 70% of the people are in it for the values: they really care about the cause, about young people, about change."* A respondent from NGO-5 noted that excessive administrative burdens can cause staff to lose touch with the meaning of their work: "*It's easy, especially when overloaded with administrative work, to lose touch with the meaning of what you're doing, and that's disheartening.*" Therefore, maintaining a strong value orientation is both a Project Management competence and a challenge in the practice of project management within youth-oriented NGOs.

Table no. 9 represents the mentioned *Practice* domain competences during the interviews and their frequency between the interviewed organisations.

Table no. 9: *PM competences identified by interviewed NGOs in the Perspective domain.*

ICB 4.0 domain	Key competence	Interviewed NGOs
Practice	Strategic thinking	NGO-1, NGO-3, NGO-4
Practice	Culture and values	NGO-2, NGO-5

Source: made by the author according to the data collected from the interviews.

4.6.3   People Competences

Across all interviews, **personal communication** emerged as the single most important people-related competence – all the respondents mentioned it. They repeatedly described communication as a foundation to successful project implementation, volunteer coordination, and conflict prevention. As an interviewee from NGO-9 put it, *"Communication is probably the most important skill, whether for technical or admin roles. If communication is weak, everything falls apart."* A respondent from NGO-3 emphasised that communication is also an important skill in the

motivational aspect: "*Communication is huge - our work relies on not only the work of experts, but also on keeping volunteers motivated and involved.*" NGO-2 also highlighted conflict solving and creation of positive team environment as important components of this skill: "*<…> a project manager needs good communication skills: being able to talk with different people, resolve conflicts, motivate, and create a positive team environment.*" Respondents from NGO-6 pointed out the importance of communication in larger NGOs: "*<…> communication is crucial. In a large organization you often can't talk directly with everyone and things can get lost in translation.*" As the responses show, youth-oriented NGOs regard communication as one the most important Project Managemement competences in their work.

Other competences / skills that were mentioned during the interviews, but could go under the personal communication competence and are not included in the ICB 4.0, were **intercultural competence, creativity, and motivation**. Respondents from NGO-5 and NGO-9 highlighted the need for intercultural competences: "*in our context, intercultural competence and empathy are huge: you need to be able to work with diverse communities and different viewpoints*" and "*Most of our work is international. So, cross-cultural, communication, creativity, and decision-making skills are important.*" Motivation was described as both a personal competence and a managerial responsibility, as NGO-3 put: "*So you need to be able to persuade, motivate, sometimes with small things.*" These competences were repeatedly linked to the international and youth-focused nature of NGO work.

Teamwork and delegation of responsibilities were also highlighted as necessary in *People* domain, particularly in organizations relying heavily on volunteers. Interviewee from NGO-4 stressed the importance of coordinating collective efforts: "*<…> teamwork and the ability to delegate and trust others <…>. Especially as the organization grows, it's important to share responsibilities, step back from micromanaging, and rely on colleagues' strengths.*" An interviewee from NGO-3 also pointed out the importance of trust and sharing the responsibilities between team members: "*<…> being able to delegate, to trust others, and to keep an eye on the overall process are all vital*", as well as the importance of responsibility and owner-ship: "*It really varies by person, but first, responsibility is key. If you start something, you finish it.*"

Leadership as a competence was mentioned by a respondent from NGO-2. The respondent claimed that "*a true project manager should be more of a leader. <…> real leadership means you're willing to take responsibility yourself, not just tell others what to do while standing off to the side.*" This response shows the importance of youth-oriented NGO leaders of being involved in the work done by the NGO, instead of just delegating tasks to the team members.

Table no. 10 represents the mentioned *People* domain competences during the interviews and their frequency between the interviewed organisations.

Table no. 10: *PM competences identified by the interviewed NGOs in the People domain.*

ICB 4.0 dimension	Key competence	Interviewed NGOs
People	Personal communication	NGO-1, NGO-2, NGO-3, NGO-5, NGO-6, NGO-9
People	Teamwork	NGO-4, NGO-5
People	Responsibility	NGO-3, NGO-8
People	Motivation	NGO-3
People	Leadership	NGO-2
People	Negotiation	NGO-3, NGO-9

Source: made by the author according to the data collected from the interviews.

4.6.4. Development of Project Management Competences

The participating organisations were asked: *"Does your organization provide any training or professional development related to project management?"* The participants' answers show that there is a strong need to improve project management competencies in youth-oriented NGOs, and this necessicity is recognised. However, it is limited by available time, financial resources and organisational capacity.

Several organisations emphasised **internal trainings and learning from experience** as their primary approach. For example, a respondent from NGO-7 stated: *"Yes, we do internal trainings, which are sometimes led by guest speakers or experts in the field. We're always learning from experience and from umbrella organizations, too."* Similarly, NGO-1 reported that *"Most of our training is internal: strategic sessions with our director or other experienced team members."* NGO-6 highlighted the importance of *"<…> regular experience-sharing sessions"*, which they organize, where long-standing members pass on their knowledge and information about external learning opportunities.

In addition to internal learning, some NGOs actively seek **external training opportunities**, particularly when they are free or low-cost. A respondent from NGO-4 explained that they *"<...> take advantage of free opportunities, like Erasmus+ training programs and municipality organized courses,"* while NGO-5 noted: *"We sign up for training whenever possible, local and international, whatever fits the schedule and budget."* Some organisations take the

training aspect and combine it with team-building purposes, as a respondent from NGO-8 described: *"Strengthening the organization from the inside is very important to us. <u>Trainings are not only for learning, but for team-building as well.</u>"* NGO-3 similarly reported annual board trainings focused on specific needs of the members: *"Each year, <u>we pick a specific topic</u>. Topics have included archiving and document management, updates in social media practices, volunteer motivation <…>. Of course, it's not like at a big company, as <u>we don't have a regular, systematized training plan</u>. If we come across useful seminars from outside, we take advantage of that, <u>but it's all ad hoc.</u>"* This type of training in youth-oriented NGOs is organized more informally and taking into account the available opportunities and the staff needs. NGO-9 competence building opportunities also depend on the team's needs and available resources: NGO-9 *"Maybe not necessarily for project management, <u>but if someone wants training, there are possibilities</u>, because we understand the importance of ongoing development. <u><…> If we have resources and people show interest, we facilitate participation in those</u>."*

Finally, one respondent also pointed out **financial and time constraints** that limit their access to training opportunities. A participant from NGO-2 expressed a strong interest in further training but highlighted barriers: *"<u>Most trainings cost money we don't have</u>. Free, short, practical courses would be brilliant. But <u>part of the problem is also time, as I, like most others, am juggling the organization, outside work, and everything else in life</u>."*

The way youth-oriented NGOs approach competence development differs between organisations: in bigger organisations, those that have branches or umbrella organisations, might choose internal training opportunities as well as learning from each other, while on the other hand, smaller organisations, if they have the opportunity, might choose to go to external trainings, prioritizing free and low-cost opportunities. All in all, the competence development in interviewed NGOs is more informal and dependent on needs and available resources.

4.7.   Improving the Quality and Effectiveness of Project Management in Lithuanian Youth NGOs

To understand what kind of measures and solutions are needed for the Lithuanian youth-oriented NGOs, the respondents were asked: "*In your opinion, what could help Lithuanian yout-oriented NGOs improve the quality and effectiveness of their project management?*" The responses suggest that improving the quality and effectiveness of project management in Lithuanian youth-oriented NGOs requires addressing structural and systemic issues which cause operational capcity constrains, rather than relying on individual motivation or commitment. Respondents consistently pointed out the need for funding stability, human resources, ensured

organisational memory, and supportive institutional environments. Table no. 11 in p. 71-72 compiles the improvement factors and explains their importance to PM quality.

Human resources and stable funding. Across interviews, human resources and stable funding emerged as the most critical factors influencing project quality, as both of these factors are inter-related. Stable staffing is seen as a prerequisite for building competence, ensuring continuity, and reducing burnout. As a respondent NGO-9 put it, *"<…> having adequate resources to hire and train competent people to do quality work. I need to have competent staff to do quality projects. <…> but in the long run you have to pay them competitive salaries for a good performance."* Similarly, NGO-1 stated that *"Mainly more people and less burnout. NGO staff often work far beyond what one person should manage. If we had more funding, we could hire more staff, divide responsibilities, and improve quality"*, highlighting issue of burnout and how hiring more people could help solve it. NGO-7 also pointed out the need to be able to pay salaries to the team members: *"More funding so we could pay for real staff."* The issue of stable and predictable funding is closely linked to human resources, and respondents described it as a prerequisite for effective project management. Many NGOs depend on short-term funding for projects, which restricts their ability to make long-term plans and develop their organisations. NGO-2 expressed the need for *"<…> stable, long-term funding, the chance to run longer projects rather than scrambling for short-term."*

To counter the issue of not having stable funding stream, an interviewee from NGO-4 recommended that other youth-oriented NGOs develop the ability to sustain funding in alternative ways: *"Developing entrepreneurial skills among youth NGOs is very importantl, as many are overly reliant on grants and project-based funding, which only provides short-term impact. Building skills in fundraising, sustainability planning, and business development would help ensure continuity."* What could ensure a more stable, sustainable funding for the NGOs is ensuring the subsidiary principle, as stated by NGO-9: *"Also, the public sector should have to do less of what doesn't belong to them, and more can be delegated to NGOs, as per the subsidiarity principle."*

Organisational learning and memory. Two respondents emphasised the importance of organisational memory and experience transfer in improving project management effectiveness. NGO-6 emphasized the importance of ensuring organizational memory sharing experience with teammates: *"Many who leave this organisation or student organizations move on to professional careers in finance, projects, etc. There is real value in experience transfer. More training would always help, but most lessons are learned through practice."* A respondent from NGO-4 also pointed out the importance of planning leadership transitions: *"It's also important for organizations*

to plan leadership and responsibility transitions well, so that when directors or key staff move on, their successors are ready and organizational memory isn't lost." This aspect is especially important for youth NGOs, which mostly consist of young people who are high school and university students and can quickly move on to other activities and organisations.

Training, learning-by-doing, and supportive structures. Respondents widely agreed that more training opportunities are needed, as an interviewee from NGO-1 stated: *"<…> external, formal training specifically about project management is rare. I think it would be helpful to have more opportunities for that."* NGO-2 stressed the importance of tailoring training to the realities of youth work: *"More opportunities for learning: practical, accessible trainings tailored for youth sector realities."* However, NGO-8 also noted that even though trainings are important, *"<…> most lessons are learned through practice."* while NGO-9 argued that allowing organisations to implement *"<…> bigger, more innovative projects"* is very important, as *"<…> we learn by doing."* At the same time, some respondents expressed a desire for more accessible and practical training opportunities by funding institutions, particularly those tailored to the realities of youth-oriented NGOs. The role of **supportive funding and governance structures** was highlighted by NGO-5, which pointed out that *"<…> consultations before application submission, clear explanations, honest guidance"* would significantly improve project quality, especially for smaller or newer organisations.

Collaboration between NGOs. Beyond individual organisations, respondents emphasised **sector-level solutions**, such as collaboration between stronger and weaker NGOs. An interviewee from NGO-8 suggested for more jointly implemented projects between stronger and weaker NGOs: *"With project activities, I think an underused possibility is implementing projects jointly among several organizations, where stronger ones support those that are institutionally weaker. This could help with administrative resources, activity implementation, generate ideas, and organizations could learn from each other."* Additionally, NGO-3 brought up the idea of "NGO hubs": *"I'd say systematic support, like municipalities creating shared "NVO hubs"* (author's remark - shared NGO workspaces*) would make a huge difference."* Because, as stated by the respondent, *"<…> most organizations either don't have office space or lose it after a couple of years. It's hard to be stable or grow when you have nowhere to store materials - books, publications, even the things you need for events or awards you've received."* By the organization representative's words, having this shared space could help creating synergy between organisations and streghten the sense of community, which according to NGO-3, has weakened.

Finally, one respondent highlighted the importance of **broader societal recognition of youth work**, arguing that undervaluation of the sector contributes to underfunding and unrealistic expectations. NGO-2 observed that society and policymakers often fail to understand *"<…> how much of it happens for free, out of pure motivation."*

Table no. 11. *Factors improving PM quality and effectiveness.*

Improvement factor	Evidence from interviews	Contribution to PM quality and effectiveness
Stable funding & Human resources	*"People burn out, and then quality follows. <…> If we had more funding, we could hire more staff, divide responsibilities, and improve quality"* (NGO-1) *"<…> stable, long-term funding, the chance to run longer projects rather than scrambling for short-term."* (NGO-2) *"Building skills in fundraising, sustainability planning, and business development would help ensure continuity."* (NGO-4) *"More funding so we could pay for real staff."* (NGO-7) *"I need to have competent staff to do quality projects. <…> the public sector should have to do less of what doesn't belong to them, and <u>more can be delegated to NGOs, as per the subsidiarity principle.</u>"* (NGO-9)	Stable funding improves the ability to recruit experienced staff and ensures the organisation's financial stability. The organisation is able to perform when it has a skilled and experienced team (Dandage, Rane, Mantha, 2021).
Training opportunities	*"<…> external, formal training specifically about project management is rare. I think it would be helpful to have more opportunities for that."* (NGO-1) *"More opportunities for learning: practical, accessible trainings tailored for youth sector realities."* (NGO-2)	The team has to be skilled and experienced to execute projects well (Dandage, Rane, Mantha, 2021).
Organisational memory	*"There is real value in experience transfer"* (NGO-6) *"It's also important for organizations to plan leadership and responsibility transitions well, so that <…> their successors are ready and organizational memory isn't lost."* (NGO-4)	Organisational memory matters for organisations engaged in all kinds of activities because it gives them ability to prevent errors from being repeated, as well as increases operational effectiveness (Sen, Arun, Okun, 2023).
Collaboration between NGOs	*"<…> implementing projects jointly among several organizations, where stronger ones support those that are institutionally weaker."* (NGO-8)	It improves the quality of project activities when they are targeted towards a specific group, such as young people. It also helps to generate ideas and lets organisations learn from each other.

NGO hubs (shared NGO workspaces)	"<…> systematic support, like municipalities creating shared "NVO hubs." (NGO-3)	A shared space could facilitate synergy between NGOs, strengthen the sense of community and help the organisation to grow.

Source: made by the author according to the data collected from the interviews.

4.8.   Summary of the findings

The aim of this study was to analyse the project management practices and challenges faced by Lithuanian NGOs that work with young people. The findings suggest that these NGOs use a combination of traditional, agile and informal ('learning by doing') project management approaches. The choice of approach varies between organisations and is strongly influenced by organisational type, activities and donor requirements. In the interviewed youth NGOs, grant writing is treated as an integral part of the overall project management process. The project proposal can be seen as the business case for youth-oriented NGOs. Project funding is a direct consequence of a successful project proposal. When it comes to project funding, most interviewed NGOs rely on a mix of municipal, national, and international funding sources, supplemented by private donations and income-generating activities.

The findings show that most Lithuanian youth-oriented NGOs manage projects in an informal way. These organisations operate at the grassroots level and work directly with their target groups, organising events, workshops and non-formal educational activities, which shape their project management processes in turn. However, some organisations adjust their PM approaches according to the individual projects and can combine formal, funder-driven project management structures with adaptive practices, such as agile. Neverthless, the use of agile principles is more selective, rather than systematic and was observed in organisations involved in developing digital tools. These organisations showed a greater tendency towards adaptive approaches. Traditional project management approach such as "Waterfall" was most clearly associated with donor and funder requirements, particularly with regard to planning, reporting, and accountability. When it comes to project management tools, the NGOs that were interviewed emphasised simplicity, accessibility, and the use of digital solutions that are widely available and free to use, instead of using specialised project management software. Tool choice depends on organisation's size, financial capacity, accessibility needs, and the involvement of external (usually international) partners.

The results reveal that organisational capacity constraints significantly influence project management practices within Lithuanian NGOs, creating specific and recurring challenges. The main capacity constraints identified in the interviews were a lack of human resources and a lack of sustainable funding sources. These constraints are interconnected and dependent on each

other. For instance, if an organisation cannot hire more staff due to a lack of funds, it will have a small team and rely heavily on volunteers. This results in informal and highly adaptive project management approaches, supporting Chadwick's (2025) statement that when PM roles are given to staff without any formal training, which also can be restricted by limited resources, it can result in project implementation relying on ad hoc, experience-based practices rather than formalised project management methodologies. .

The analysis demonstrates an overarching correlation between capacity constraints and project management challenges. Limited funding, small teams and reliance on project-based financing affect how these NGOs plan, implement, monitor and evaluate their projects. Consequently, project management in Lithuanian NGOs is characterised by flexible roles and simplified processes that facilitate project delivery despite constraints. However, these factors can also hinder long-term strategic development and organisational sustainability. The respondents also mentioned other project management challenges, including *difficulties in working with partner organisations and other stakeholders*, as well as *ensuring project continuity* (for example, making sure that a tool is sustained after funding ends. *Constraints in project management skills* were also highlighted, with some study participants not being familiar with formal project management theory or not having any managerial experience. Additionally, *administrative requirements* and *donor systems* cause challenges, as bureaucracy and extensive documentation are often difficult to navigate. These findings suggest that capacity constraints and project management challenges are closely related, with limitations in funding and human resources affecting how NGOs plan, implement, monitor and evaluate their projects.

The competencies of project managers in youth-oriented NGOs are influenced by organisational capacity constraints, value-driven work, and complex donor environments. Throughout the interviews, respondents consistently emphasised certain competencies corresponding to all three ICB 4.0 domains: Perspective, Practice and People. They placed particular focus on time management, financial competence, communication and value-based leadership. The organizational values were especially important to many participants which aligns with the PM4NGOS (2025) Project DPro Project Management Competency Model, which establishes this as a separate competence area (*Social Good Specific* competence area). The approach to competence development varies between youth-oriented NGOs: larger organisations with branches or umbrella organisations may opt for internal training and peer learning, whereas smaller organisations, if they have the opportunity, may prioritise free and low-cost external training. Overall, competence development in the interviewed NGOs is more informal and dependent on team needs and available resources.

The findings suggest that improving the quality and effectiveness of project management in Lithuanian youth-oriented NGOs requires addressing structural and systemic issues that cause operational capacity constraints, rather than relying on individual motivation or commitment. Respondents consistently emphasised the need for stable funding, adequate human resources, organisational memory and supportive institutional environments. The organisations need to look for ways to secure funding through multiple funding sources, which is also mentioned in academic literature: according to Lușcan (2025), those organisations with diverse funding sources are more likely to overcome operational barriers, as financial resources and organizational capital directly impact project viability in the long term.

4.9.   Limitation of the study.

In-depth research into project management practices and challenges in youth organisations and organisations working with young people is lacking, so this study aims to address this gap by providing insight into how youth-oriented NGOs approach project management in practice. To achieve the objectives, 9 semi-structured interviews were carried out with an in advance prepared questionnaire.

First, it is important to mention that the researcher faced a challenge when trying to find participants for the study. Over twenty organisations were contacted by email or through social networks and the response rate to agree participating in the study was only around 50 percent. To address this issue, the researcher extended the data collection period and was using the snowball sampling method to reach saturation. The time constraints might have limited the depth and diversity of the responses, which could affect the overall findings.

Secondly, due to difficulties in finding participants for the study, the scope of the study was expanded. Initially, the study was to focus only on project management practices in youth NGOs, but it was decided to include non-governmental organisations working with young people as well. Although no significant differences in PM practices were observed between these two types of organisation, this decision may affect the overall findings.

Finally, the study relies on self-reported data from interview participants. Since many respondents often had more than one role in their organisations (e.g. director, project manager, administrator), their views may be based on their own experiences and personal views about project management practices and challenges. This could lead to response bias, such as overemphasising difficulties or underreporting informal or ad hoc practices.

5. CONCLUSION

This thesis examined project management practices in Lithuanian youth-oriented non-governmental organizations, with particular attention to selected PM approaches, monitoring and evaluation processes, funding environment and PM challenges. Drawing on qualitative interviews with representatives of youth NGOs, the study aimed to understand how Lithuanian youth NGOs and NGOs working with young people approach project management and what kind of challenges they face when doing project-based work.

1. *The characteristics and operating context of the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector in Lithuania, with particular attention to youth-oriented organisations, was analysed in the thesis.* The thesis analyzed the characteristics of the NGO sector, including management, leadership, project financing, and the context of NGOs in Lithuania, with a particular focus on youth-oriented organizations - youth organizations and organizations working with young people. In Lithuania, there are three types of non-governmental organisatons: associations, charitable foundations and public entitities (Vasiliauskaitė, 2013). Youth-oriented organisations in Lithuania are youth policy actors as they seek to create a supportive environment that fosters the growth of young people and their seamless integration into the community (LR Seimas, 2021). The Lithuanian youth NGO sector is represented by Youth organisations, NGOs working with young people and Municipal youth organization councils, which are represented by the Lithuanian Youth Council (or LiJOT) (Jaunimo reikalų agentūra, 2025a). The non-governmental sector in Lithuania is not yet developed enough to be able to adequately fulfill its role in ensuring democracy development and the strengthening of civil society (LR Socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministerija, 2025). The main barriers to the development of the NGO sector are low public participation, as well as poor administrative and financial resources of non-governmental organizations, which aligns with the findings of the study.

NGO management is remarkably similar to the management of small or medium-sized enterprises. NGOs follow the same organization, planning and management principles as the business sector. Service-providing NGOs compete with service providers in the business and budgetary sectors (Marcinkevičiūtė & Žukovskis, 2015 As NGOs often operate with small teams that sometimes resemble the activities of a single person, the success or failure of their projects depends greatly on effective leadership (Salameh-Ayanian, 2025). NGOs need to enhance their leadership capacity by initiating systems and processes that support leadership development and succession strategies; otherwise, they may experience staff turnover and dissatisfaction, which could affect project success (Mufti et al., 2020).

2. *Project management practices and approaches with a focus on their applicability and relevance to the NGO sector were reviewed.* Projects are common among non-profits/NGOs, but their knowledge of project management is often insufficient (Löfström, 2025). Projects carried out by NGOs most often involve the funding agency, the coordinator and the target recipients who benefit directly from the project outcomes, e.g. the community or society in general (Latif & Williams, 2017). There are two main project management approaches: traditional and agile. The literature review covered the Waterfall model and traditional project management standards and frameworks, such as the PMBOK and PRINCE2 standards, the Social Good DPro guide by PM4NGOs, the PM² methodology, the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) and the Project Cycle Management (PCM) approach. The project lifecycle was also overviewed, as it is an important aspect of traditional project management. The use of agile project management is oriented towards software creation and delivery, and does not rely on detailed documentation. This could pose a risk to NGO projects, as they are usually funded by external donors. Hybrid project management is more feasible in larger enterprises, so this approach might not be the most suitable for small NGOs.

Project management competencies were analysed. The most relevant project management competence frameworks for NGOs were identified as IPMA's ICB 4.0 and the Project Dpro Project Management Competency Model by PM4NGOs. The term 'accidental project manager' emerged in the literature and, as the study revealed, this role is often assigned to many youth-oriented NGO project managers without formal training or access to structured training due to limited resources.

The project evaluation and monitoring processes were reviewed as they are essential project management processes. Earned Value Management (EVM), Earned Schedule Management (ESM) and Earned Duration Management (EDM) are traditional methods widely used to monitor project performance. Monitoring and evaluation are also integral to projects funded by donors.

3. *The study identified Project Management practices and challenges in Lithuanian youth-oriented* NGOs. First, three different types of Project Management approaches used by youth-oriented NGOs were identified: Traditonal PM approach (Waterfall, Project Cycle Management), Adaptive / iterative PM approach (Agile, Design Thinking) and Informal, experience-based PM approach ("Learning by doing"). The findings show that project management in Lithuanian youth NGOs tends to be informal and experience-based rather than driven by PM frameworks / methodologies. While some interviewees demonstrated awareness of project management concepts and tools, their application was often adapted to a specific project or imposed by funder

regulations, rather than embedded in comprehensive organizational frameworks. Funding institutions have a decisive role in shaping project management approaches within the sector, primarily by dictating project cycles, reporting structures and monitoring practices, this is also supported by academic literature.

Secondly, organizational capacity constraints, particularly human resource constraints and unstable funding, *are the main Project Management challenges*, which have a significant impact on the quality and effectiveness of PM in youth-oriented NGOs. Many NGOs operate with small teams where directors and core staff / volunteers take on multiple roles, resulting in overlapping responsibilities. This increases workload and burnout risk, and limits opportunities for strategic planning, systematic learning, and long-term development.

Thirdly, the findings demonstrate that project managers in youth-oriented NGOs have combine *Perspective* competencies, such as time management, planning, and financial oversight, with *People* competencies, including communication, motivation, leadership, and intercultural sensitivity. Projects are often implemented with small teams and a high reliance on volunteers, that is why these competencies are particularly important. *Practice* competencies such as strategic alignment with organizational goals, digital skills, and maintaining structure and documentation are also critical for youth-oriented NGOs in their work. In general, these skills are mostly developed through experience and according to the needs, rather than through a formalized competence development system.

Finally, the findings highlight the need of stable funding for NGOs, and the lack of it is related to other organizational capacity issues such as over-reliance on volunteers and struggles with human resiurces. As per the subsidiary principle, the NGOs should have the opportunity to act and solve the social issues at a local level, but as well NGOs should develop their skills in fundraising, selling their services and expertise. Other aspects that could support PM within youth-oriented NGOs were identified, such as ensuring organizational memory, stronger support structures from donors and umbrella organisations, and more opportunities for collaboration between organisations.

5.1. Recommendations

Several recommendations emerge for future research and practical applications have been made in line with these findings and limitations. The current study only includes the perspectives from the representatives of different organisations. It would be worthwhile into study scope to include additional stakeholders, such as representatives from funding institutions. It would offer a more rounded view of the Project Management practices in youh-oriented NGOs and provide a different perspective from the regulationary view.

The second recommendation would be to select one type of NGO (either a youth organisation or an organisation working with young people) as the subject of the study. This would enable a more in-depth analysis of the different practices and help to understand the youth NGOs that have branches in different municipalities throughout Lithuania, for example.

To mitigate the influence of subjective interpretations, future research could involve multiple respondents from the same organisation, or a focus group could be used to allow internal comparisons of perspectives on project management practices and challenges.

These recommendations could pave the way for more in-depth, comprehensive studies of project management in the NGO sector.

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ANNEX 1

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QESTIONS FOR THE NGOS

Email sent to the organisations:
Hello!
My name is Emilija Urbonaitė, and I am a student in the International Project Management Master's programme at Vilnius University. I am currently preparing my Master's thesis, which focuses on the project management practice and challenges in Lithuanian youth-oriented non-governmental organisations.
Your insights and experience would be greatly valueable. The study is qualitative and will be conducted through a semi-structured interview, lasting approximately one hour. All information provided will be anonymised in the thesis, and confidentiality will be fully ensured.
I would be very grateful if you would consider participating in this research. If you agree, I would be happy to arrange the interview either in person or online at a time convenient for you.
Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.
Kind regards,
Emilija Urbonaitė

General Information about the Respondent

Gender:

Position:

Could you briefly describe your organization's main activities and your role in managing projects?

Project Management practices

1. How long has your organization been carrying out projects, and what types of funding sources do you usually depend on (EU, national, or private)?
2. What's your organization's approach to planning and managing projects?
3. What kind of project management approaches or frameworks (for example, Waterfall, Agile, PMBOK, Prince2) do you use in your work as a Project Manager?

4. How do you monitor your ongoing projects, and what tools do you use to do so? And how do you evaluate finished projects?

5. How would you describe your collaboration with donor institutions?

Project Management challenges

6. What are the main challenges your organization faces when it comes to effectively managing projects?

7. How do funding requirements or administrative rules affect how you manage projects?

8. What are some of the challenges you face when striving to align your organization's project goals with donor's strategies or priorities?

Project Management competences & skills

9. What kind of project management skills or competences do you think are most important for NGO staff?

10. Does your organization provide any training or professional development related to project management?

Future perspectives

11. In your opinion, what could help Lithuanian youth NGOs improve the quality and effectiveness of their project management?

ANNEX 2

Example of Interview Transcript with interviewee from NGO-8

00:01 Interviewer:

<…> Let's start with interview. Maybe you can tell me about your organization and about your role in it when managing projects?

00:13 Respondent:

So, our (*organization – author's remark*) is, in other words, the umbrella organization uniting youth organizations in our area. We represent and strengthen nine organizations at the moment, although that number fluctuates during the year. As for myself, to tell more about my experience, the first time I submitted a youth project to the municipality was when I was fourteen, and it was through one of the youth member groups. I faced many challenges then, but each year I kept submitting projects. When I became president, I already had some project experience from board work, since I managed administration and also volunteered myself. I handled administrative resources, which gave me a good understanding. Over the years, we've managed at least four projects annually from different funding sources, so I have experience with dozens of projects.

01:31   **Interviewer:**
So would you then call yourself a project manager?

01:36 Respondent:

Yes, in all the projects where I received financial benefit, my position was project manager. At the same time, I have a colleague listed as project executor and also as the office manager, officially employed. She focuses more on event organization, volunteers, and communication, while I do more of the document work.

02:02   **Interviewer:**
Ok, got it. So I'm interested, which youth organizations are under your umbrella in your area?

02:12 Respondent:

There are several youth groups, including ones focused on community, student interests, volunteer work, and social issues—so these are our organizations. We also often cooperate

with informal youth groups because they receive funding from the municipality as well, so we help administer and navigate bureaucracy for them.

02:50   **Interviewer:**

So that's nice, in other words, there's also that kind of consulting work. Do youths often contact you who want to carry out their own projects and ask for help?

03:06 Respondent:

Yes, every year we organize training for our organizations, as that need is always present— mainly project management, writing, and administration. We also help informal youth groups: for example, this year we assisted three groups. Last year, it was two, so they frequently reach out. Additionally, the process requires a guarantor, and we often serve as that and provide support.

03:35   **Interviewer:**

Nice, it really is supportive and helpful for individuals too.

03:43   **Interviewer:**

Maybe then you can tell generally, from what sources are your projects financed?

03:56 Respondent:

The main one is a <…> project, funded by the Agency of Youth Affairs, one about NGO strengthening funded by the Ministry — those are the kinds of projects we have implemented. And from the municipality, there is a youth and youth-focused organizations' activity programs competition. That is specifically oriented, essentially, towards unions of organizations or other uniting organizations that have 5 or more legal entities as members. So, from those we get funding and also directly from non-governmental organizations. Also, I think, every year we implement projects related to adverse factors, for example, we had the community department's project— those are the kinds we usually have. And sometimes, as needed, we really have implemented cultural and artistic activities as well, but funded from a different department. That's about it.

05:00   **Interviewer:**

So, what I hear is, mainly national funding? Have you done anything at the international level? Or would you want to?

05:14   **Respondent:**

Looking at our human resources, I don't think we could handle that, since we already have a lot planned with other alternative funding sources.

05:29   **Interviewer:**

By the way, how many people does the organization have?

05:35 Respondent:

It's hard to say now. The board currently has five members, there's an office head, and about nineteen volunteers. The level of volunteer involvement varies greatly—some are very regular, others only help during a couple of big events, but officially, contracts are signed with the organization. So, actually, we're a pretty big organization.

06:01   **Interviewer:**

From what I hear, there really is a sort of community, and there are volunteers and a board.

06:12   **Respondent:**

Yes, yes.

06:14   **Interviewer:**

So, let's move to project management practices. What is the general approach of the organization to project planning and implementation?

06:29 Respondent:

For us, everything in a project always arises from some problem we see. It's very important—we've made it a point every year, especially since I became director, to encourage our board to help conduct needs analysis or qualitative research, so we see where we need to go next with projects. We really take that into account. I don't know if I should explain how I write projects specifically or not.

07:01   **Interviewer:**

How does the delegation of work assignments happen? Does your team have a standard process, a sequence, or a way to check tasks? How do you approach this practically?

07:30 Respondent:

Practically, I write the project, but the team is involved. I create a separate Excel file in our shared organizational drive, and my colleagues can see it and follow my work. Initially, there's a draft, and I often get feedback or suggestions. When planning the activity program project, we have a call, plan together, identify current needs, and try not to miss traditional events, thinking how they could fit under the project's activities, since such events are useful and often big, requiring more than one funding source. It's a very practical aspect. Even before we know if we will win the project, we plan who will be responsible for implementing which activities, and what each responsibility will be. So we distribute who could do it, what the responsibilities would be, and so on. And then I just fill it all out and that's it. Really, all the writing is on me.

08:39   **Interviewer:**

Understood. Have you ever heard of approaches like waterfall or agile project management?

08:53   **Respondent:**

No, I'm not familiar, I am not that qualified in this area.

09:11   **Interviewer:**

I'm asking because, as I understand, your project management approach is more DIY, learning by doing.

09:13   **Respondent:**

Yes.

09:15   **Interviewer:**

I've noticed this in other organizations too, that project management is approached as learning by doing.

09:30 Respondent:

Learning by doing is a core principle in youth work, so I naturally connect things this way. It really manifests in many of our activities, so it's hard to say if it's incompetence—it's just our culture.

10:04   **Interviewer:**

What tools do you use for project monitoring, evaluation, etc.? You mentioned Excel—are there any other tools or programs you use for that?

10:26 Respondent:

For project management, only Excel, and that's really it. We use Excel in various forms, but not specifically for project management, more for general quality assessment. We do quarterly membership surveys, focusing on particular projects depending on the activities; we emphasize those questions. Our quality assessment comes from this, and we set very realistic criteria ourselves, depending on what the organization needs. We have regular board meetings and various ways for people to reach out to express important matters.

11:18 **Interviewer:**

If you do events for the target group or for youth, do you then do evaluation from their side as well?

11:30 Respondent:

Our practice is that after each public event, we always do an evaluation, literally at the end of the event—evaluations where we consider what can be improved. We do that kind of reflection and can really see, sometimes once a year we make changes, because each event format is different.

11:51 Interviewer:

How do you generally evaluate the success of an event or project—according to which indicators?

12:04 Respondent:

Usually by the indicators we set. Now, it's hard to give exact examples, but typically, both quantitative indicators (number of participants, number of organizations, number of training hours, etc.) and qualitative ones (from reflections and general organizational experience) are used. When organizing, you get a feel for what worked, what didn't, how complete or successful an activity was, how attractive it was. It's really felt, no need for excessive formality, I think.

12:46 Interviewer:

In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges the organization faces in project implementation, management, and so on?

13:04 Respondent:

At first, it was really hard for me to get used to all the systems, how they work in the beginning. The systems are not beginner-friendly, but with time and experience, things become clearer. We do quarterly self-evaluations of our activities—what worked, what didn't—and discuss actions for the next quarter. Usually, we don't encounter major problems with implementation; we plan approximate dates and start work. Sometimes, the situation changes yearly, for example, with getting the number of young participants needed for an activity—it can take a lot of effort. This year, things seem to be improving, but sometimes it's easy, sometimes hard.

14:25   **Interviewer:**

So, in general, engaging youth is a challenge? Other organizations mentioned the same. Do the financial institutions' rules or administrative requirements affect your organization's work or planning?

15:02 Respondent:

When writing a project, you plan the activities. If an activity is outside the allocated funding, we just fund from the organization's resources, so it's not a big problem. We don't stick strictly to the budget—for example, if we have only 30 euros for food instead of the 60 needed, we will supplement from the organization's funds or elsewhere. Such things work themselves out, so no big problems. Regarding rules—if you mean how strict they are—they are quite broad; you can plan many activities. The main thing is to target the right groups or work, or include someone. It's not hard to think of a few ideas to implement. You just need to be mindful when doing things.

16:18   **Interviewer:**

That answer really connects to my next question, about funders' priorities and how to align your projects with them, so I think I got my answer.

16:44 Respondent:

Priorities aren't really imposed in advance; usually, they come from the current situation, what young people need, what organizations need, what some interest groups need. So, it's not hard to come up with a few activities where you can include those people, or activate your communication, or think of something new for this year.

17:38   **Interviewer:**

In your opinion, what are the most important project management, administration, and implementation skills for people working at youth NGOs or in youth work NGOs?

17:55 Respondent:

General literacy, especially information literacy, is very important in project management. Also, responsibility and setting priorities, since you manage both finances and general implementation—you really have to know how to manage your time so nothing gets lost. Other important competencies are creativity (to create activities), innovation, and a mindset aimed at improving yourself and strengthening your project. Creativity and innovative thinking are very important too.

18:47 Interviewer:

How about developing competencies in your organization? Are there ways your organization improves—through seminars, workshops, or similar? Do you plan such things with other organizations?

19:06 Respondent:

We do joint trainings for our members each year, and in the summer for the board. For me, my colleague, and the volunteers, we do joint trainings, and now we've made it a quarterly routine— we always offer the board, the control commission, and for me and my colleague, we purchase trainings, online if needed, for those who want to raise their competencies. Strengthening the organization from the inside is very important to us. Trainings are not only for learning, but for team-building as well. Also, regarding boards, one of our umbrella organizations is doing a great project this year strengthening us as a network—we meet several times a quarter in activities, together with others, and these are all about increasing competencies, tailored to our activities and problems. It's really a great thing.

20:22   **Interviewer:**
So it's very tailored and meets all the needs for working in a youth organization.

20:16   **Respondent:**
Yes, this is a really great thing—I felt there was a need before.

20:22 Interviewer:

Others mentioned a similar need for improving the competencies. Have you ever considered, or heard of, for example, project management certificates and so on? Maybe you've thought about it for yourself?

20:56   **Respondent:**

I haven't considered doing it for myself so far.

21:01   **Interviewer:**

In general, do you see yourself working with projects in this field in the future?

21:09   **Respondent:**

It's hard to say—I'm quite a multidisciplinary person with many interests and hobbies, but this is my job now, so I see potential to grow in this field, since I went for a second term, which means I liked it. Potentially, it could be a future option, but I can't say for sure now.

21:35   **Interviewer:**

Let's move to the last section: cooperation with funders. How would you rate it—positive, neutral, or negative?

21:51 Respondent:

With state institutions, I'd say neutral. With the municipality, positive, because the relationship is different when working with a local organization compared to national institutions. With national institutions, the relationship is very formal—national projects are rare, and feedback is minimal. With the local municipality, everyone gets involved, sees the implementation, observes, helps—it's much more positive and friendly.

22:28   **Interviewer:**

Have you ever had any significant problems, or has everything gone smoothly?

22:38 Respondent:

For me personally, no significant problems, but I know that with other organizations, when they make mistakes managing projects, I help them look for solutions and figure things out, since that's part of our umbrella organization's job—to help other member organizations and communicate

more effectively with the municipality. We've seen all kinds of situations with others, but with our own projects, no major issues.

23:06   **Interviewer:**

Your main funders are the municipality, regional programs, and what else?

23:13   **Respondent:**

Other relevant public funds.

23:26   **Interviewer:**

I see. What do you think would help youth organizations, or organizations working with youth, to improve their overall project and project management quality?

23:42 Respondent:

I think it's not just one thing—not everyone has the competencies to write projects and succeed on their first try, but still, you learn. Consulting before submitting a project is useful, but perhaps not as useful as it could be. Local youth organizations' boards should focus on strengthening organizations, including strategy, project writing, and administration skills. I think there must simply be more opportunities and skill-building. In practice, projects themselves are the learning path.

24:30   **Interviewer:**

For your organization, are projects the main funding source, or do you have other activities to fund the organization?

24:44 Respondent:

We have three main activities, along with public procurement. We implement a youth volunteering service in our city. The municipality purchases our training services twice a quarter, so that's an income source. Every December, we organize (an *event – author's remark*) which aren't funded mainly by projects but by public procurement from the municipality. So, we have two stable sources aside from project activities. We have external funding that doesn't come from projects.

25:34   **Interviewer:**

That's good that you have other sources that help keep the organization stable.

25:44 Respondent:

A couple of years ago, we thought hard about how to ensure stable funding for our organization, so we wouldn't wonder what to do next year if a project failed—wondering whether we would do nothing, or work with minimal resources. We discussed the idea of a resource center because we have equipment, spaces, everything renovated and accessible. But then, with my colleague, we moved to another city for studies, so we didn't pursue it further. There is the potential to secure even more stable funding beyond public procurement by developing the resource center.

26:27   Interviewer:
Some knowledge of public procurement is needed, and some are intimidated by that.

26:39 Respondent:

For us, it happened naturally. Our municipality is very positive, as I mentioned. The administration is supportive toward youth and our organization. Usually, we have no issues, and nobody asks questions about how we'll spend the money. Administration is not hard after implementation.

27:04   Interviewer:
So really, you have a lot of activities and ways for the organization to grow.

27:14   Respondent:
Yes, potentially.

27:17   Interviewer:
Maybe you have something else in mind to share that could help with my master's thesis.

27:29 Respondent:

With project activities, I think an underused possibility is implementing projects jointly among several organizations, where stronger ones support those that are institutionally weaker. This could help with administrative resources, activity implementation, generate ideas, and organizations could learn from each other. But this would require more flexibility in arrangements. I think other organizations—perhaps at the national level—should think about this and could get ideas from it.

We did something like this this year, applying for a strengthening project with partners—other district tables—because our situations were different. We've been strong and stable for twenty years, one partner was restored recently and lacks institutional memory but has good project administration, and another partner was restored only a year ago, still forming its identity and knows almost nothing about project management. This could be a great opportunity not just for round tables, but for national organizations too, but it needs more thought and planning.

28:55												**Interviewer:**

If we talk about international funding sources, there are some large-scale cooperation projects. They also support inter-institutional cooperation and sometimes several member organizations are involved, but, of course, it requires knowledge.

29:20 Respondent:

I became interested in these international projects when I started working, but the application process seemed too complicated. Back then I was just a teenager, so maybe I should take another look now. I know other organizations that have implemented such projects. But it always seems there are challenges, and from others' negative experiences, I think we're not ready for it yet. But maybe in the future.

29:48												**Interviewer:**

Do you have anything else to share from your practical work with projects?

30:06												**Respondent:**

Probably nothing new.

30:09												**Interviewer:**

Ok, then thank you very much for your time and good luck with your work to you as well.

30:17												**Respondent:**

Good luck with your work and with your master's thesis writing.

30:22												**Interviewer:**

Thank you.

30:23												**Respondent:**

Good.

Good, thank you, goodbye.