

Roes Cooperativa and Queer Empowerment through Experiential Education *By Roes Cooperativa for Activate Youth*

In a world still marked by systemic exclusion and binary thinking, education can serve as a powerful tool for reclaiming voice, visibility, and agency. Roes Cooperativa approaches education as a process that is not only informative, but transformative—particularly for queer and intersectional youth, whose identities and lived experiences often remain underrepresented or misunderstood in mainstream learning environments. The partnership with *Activate Youth* is grounded in this belief: that learning should be participatory, embodied, and rooted in real life.

Roes Cooperativa was founded in the 2020s by a collective of professional trainers, social workers, project managers, and informal groups with a shared commitment to creating inclusive, non-formal, and experiential learning environments. The cooperative operates at the intersection of personal growth, professional development, sustainability, and social inclusion—four pillars that inform all educational activities and community engagements.

The organisation's mission is to redefine experiential learning by offering professional, innovative, and context-responsive educational programs. Its vision is of an open world where every individual has the opportunity to access diverse pathways for personal and professional growth. At the core of Roes' approach lies a deep belief in the value of learning as a living, relational process—one that invites participants to be co-creators, not passive recipients.

The pedagogical approach adopted by Roes is rooted in experiential learning, where knowledge emerges through doing, sensing, and reflecting collectively. This aligns with queer pedagogical thought, which challenges the binary logic of formal education and proposes learning spaces that are dialogic, affective, and fluid (Owen, 2022; CIVIS, 2023).

Activities within the *Activate Youth* partnership are not structured around rigid outcomes, but around relational learning processes—zine-making, body-based expression, nature-immersion, and peer-led storytelling. These methods are particularly resonant with LGBTQIA+ youth, who often navigate complex layers of identity, trauma, and cultural erasure. As research in youth development and mental health shows, identity-affirming, participatory education significantly contributes to increased resilience, lower rates of depression, and stronger community bonds among queer youth ([Craig et al., 2021](#); [Gower et al., 2018](#)).

Learning Through Community and Resistance

Rather than positioning queer youth as passive recipients of care, Roes cultivates their role as active contributors and multipliers. In this context, care is not a service, but a political act—a form of resistance to marginalization. Events such as *Moutzoura – The Queer Pen Workshop*, *Queers re-Act: Community Zine Workshop*, and the *Manifesting Queer Care* exhibition are designed not as isolated activities, but as learning interventions where creativity and identity intersect.

These moments offer space for what scholar Oliver Davis calls “collective witnessing”—the act of learning by seeing and being seen within one’s full, complex identity. Similarly, CIVIS’ 2023 Gender Studies Lecture Series has emphasized the importance of disrupting formal knowledge hierarchies and legitimizing experience as a valid source of learning.

This approach resonates deeply with the work of Roes. By creating conditions for queer youth to express, reflect, and take ownership of their narratives, education becomes a tool for both healing and action.

From Participation to Transformation

Through carefully designed experiential programs—whether in high school classrooms, rural retreats, or community exhibitions—Roes demonstrates that education can be a relational and restorative practice. The cooperative’s work echoes findings from the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, which highlight the benefits of non-formal, inclusive environments for young people’s well-being and capacity-building ([Paceley et al., 2022](#)).

Participants in Roes’ programs are encouraged not only to learn, but to return to their communities equipped with tools and confidence to catalyze further change. Whether through informal dialogue, grassroots actions, or local initiatives, many go on to act as multipliers—spreading practices of inclusion, empathy, and creative resistance.

This ripple effect reinforces Roes’ core vision: that more educational approaches create more options for people to grow. It is not only about diversifying content, but about democratizing access to learning and redefining who gets to teach, lead, and shape futures.