

YOUTH WORK ECO-SYSTEMS



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This paper is a brief overview of the working environment, key aspects and some trends of youth work in Europe. This exploratory research is not a proof of what is the current situation or what are the core challenges in youth work, instead it represents a road map with interesting findings that need additional research and focus, which should invite further and more in-depth research and analysis.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth work as a concept is getting more and more attention in Europe. Researchers, institutions and professionals are getting more interested in the roots of youth work and how it got developed. Although there are already several pieces of research that have been done in this area, we see the start of several expert seminars and one conference that were organized on the topic by the EU - Council of Europe (CoE) partnership.

Youth work started as a concept at the end of the 19th century where well-meaning people

from the bourgeoisie or the church took care of young people from the working class, who were unemployed and wandering the streets committing petty crimes. They were brought together in what was called 'patronages', 'settlements' or 'oratorio'¹.

Today youth work looks entirely different. Seen as a tool for personal growth and non-formal learning, youth work today not only addresses the needs of the youth with fewer opportunities and special needs, but also gives opportunities.

¹ History of youthwork – Council of Europe <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/history-of-youth-work>

In this way they can explore and develop their potential, meet new cultures and travel across Europe, develop different skills and competencies that will later help them in their life or job search, to learn new things and to have fun.

Today's youth workers are people who speak several languages, travel the world and use laptops and clouds in their education. They are connected with strong organizational values rather than coming from religious or governmental organizations. Many of them are young people who had a youth exchange or volunteering experience at home or abroad and decided to continue developing and working in this area.

In some countries, there are professional youth workers who are working for youth centers, who have social work or youth work degree. These youth centers are governed by the city or the regional government (for example Finland, Germany, Luxembourg). In 16 European countries, there are 100 (65 BA and 35 MA) youth work programs at university, however, most of them have charitable and/or preventive nature, rather than emancipatory one². Although the European Commission has adopted Trainers and Youth workers' competence models, those are not being used as part of the programs at the universities. Several countries are working on developing their own youth workers' competence model.

In all European countries, there are thousands of NGOs that are doing youth work. Those organizations got created from the young people and practice youth work nowadays organizing different kinds of educational activities, youth activism projects, different sort of campaigning and awareness increase of the young people. They are often called "Grassroots organizations". A large portion of them are young people who took part in a youth program while they were young and got motivated and inspired to continue the youth work as a professional or

voluntary occupation. Their education most often finds a non-formal path with a variety of trainings in the Erasmus+ and other networks, but also some of them are self-learners.

The financing that the European Union provided in the last 20 years has made significant changes. More than €30B from Erasmus+, Youth in action, Youth and other relevant programs and foundations, have made the field of youth work like a +mushroom field after a rainy season. Many NGOs that didn't exist 10 or 15 years ago, today are the pillars of environmental, social or human rights movements in their local societies, voicing out the values and beliefs of the youth across Europe. Some of them have grown out of the local society and they do their activities on a +national or international level. They work for and with young people, and they have found their place in society.

Those trends have made the voice of young people to change. The big student movements that took place in Europe in the 1950s and 1960s were working in a post-conflict society on the exchange of students and reconciliation, fostering thousands of students in each country in a handful of organizations. Although today there are hundreds of thousands of NGOs, many of them are focused on their local reality addressing the needs of the local youngsters. There are different kinds of associations and umbrella organizations that developed to represent the needs and rights of young people, such as the European network of youth centers or the DARE network. Many countries have National Youth Councils, which are having a variety of organizations as members, however, it represents only a fraction.

Sometimes the initiatives from the local youth councils to the decision-makers have become increasingly bureaucratic and slow and therefore the voice of the youth appears dispersed and appears quieter.

² Mapping youth studies curricular across Europe (Kovacic, Baketa, Grubisic-Cabo)

Due to the lack of a well-organized network of organizations that represent the youth, we have seen events of global protests that are self-organized from the youth (e.g. Fridays for future).

Policymakers and government officials are hopeful for the future regarding youth and youth work. The European Commission and the European Parliament proposed to double and triple the budget for Erasmus+ program 2013-2020 for the following cycle of 2021-2028. In all the previous surveys³ made about the effectiveness of the previous programs (Youth 2000-2006, Youth in action 2007-2013, Erasmus+ 2013-2020) have only identified the impact of the youth programs have not only for the youth but also for the organizations. Today, many respected grassroots organizations are started by the young people in the local community and they address the needs of other youth people. This has made the policy and governing bodies develop different kinds of strategies, policy papers or policies for the youth and youth organizations in Europe and on a national level. It still remains as a challenge the lack of sufficient data and research, we don't really know how many organizations are there, what is the profile of the people working in them, how are they being funded to name just a few. More data and research in this field is a clear need, in order to make more strategic and evidence-based decisions from the policymakers which would support the development of the NGOs and the

programs for the youth.

Advances in technology, mobility, lifestyle, education have also changed the way that youth work operates. As young people are increasingly dependent on mobility and technology, smart devices, exchange programs, the youth work must follow those trends and adapt according to the needs of the young people on one side, and to the requirements of the donors on another. Therefore a lot of the activities, approaches, methods and tools are adjusted to the latest technologies in order to reach as wide audience as possible. The latest developments and increase in the geographical scope of the program has made the opportunities to reach even the most rural areas of Europe.

All of these trends and situations were observed in this exploratory research that included desk research, phone interviews, surveys, comparative analysis, literature review, interviews with relevant experts or researchers, data summary. In the research we contacted each of the “players” in the youth work field: more than 50 youth workers and grassroots NGO from all over Europe, several different National Agencies that are implementing the distributing the grants from Erasmus+ program, several representatives of the European Parliament, the youth departments of the European Commission, several European and national Youth Councils.

There are several key observations that we noticed that are in need of (require) further research and focus in the field:

1. Decision-making processes - Bottom to top, rather than top to bottom
2. Roles and actors - Change of the playing field
3. Advocacy and representation
4. Supporting systems

³ https://ec.europa.eu/youth/success-stories/youth-in-action_en
<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/final-evaluation-youth-programme-2000-2006-commission>
https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about/statistics_en

1 DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

One of the aims of our exploratory research was to find out and outline the processes of decision making in terms of youth. For the needs of the research, we set up a case study that should help us identify the steps in decision making in terms of youth in Europe.

If there is a group of youngsters who want to suggest an idea, for example, to have grant funding for starting a social enterprise as part of the Erasmus+ program, who do they have to contact, what do they need to do, and is it really possible?

For several months we were emailing and calling different representatives in the whole area:

from youth organizations, local Eurodesk offices, to national youth councils. We have contacted the national agencies in several different countries in order to ask how the process goes and where should we submit the proposals. We also got in touch with the European Parliament representatives and representatives of the European Commission. We contacted the European Youth Forum as well. Although from all sides we encountered high dedication and willingness to provide us data and help in the research, we have seen that the process is not clearly outlined and there are many challenges.

We have seen three different levels of coordination, decision and policy-making:

- Local level
- National level
- EU level

Local Level

On the local level, we can see the grass-root organizations that are working for and with youth that are taking most of the active work with the youth in out of school and non-governmental setting. In some countries, there are youth NGOs who work with the youth with organizing daily, weekly, project-based or permanent activities with the young people. They cover a variety of social and political topics. In some countries, there are youth centers that provide daily leisure and free-time activities for the youth, they organize summer camps, trips and volunteering activities.

However, none of these organizations that we met and spoke to had a platform with which there will be a structural collection of information, consultations or detailed research in terms of the needs of the youth, their opinions and ideas about potential priorities or future programs and activities. Some of them used the

opportunity of the EU Commission Presidency or specific projects that received funding to do some research, yet these are more of a one-time activities. Although we have a very small sample, we have not been able to identify well designed a bottom-up process in order to provide an opportunity for direct input. We have identified a need for more transparent, bottom-up collection and analysis of data that will complement the decision-making process.

The creation of a framework of tools that would be collecting the ideas and opinions from the young people, especially the ones with fewer opportunities would be beneficial. These tools can be local and European conferences, surveys, digital tools can collect and analyze a large amount of data, that will be transparent and will give voice to the young people to be heard all the way to the top.

National level

In several countries on a national level, we have seen a decision/advisory making body that is contained of several actors in the field of youth in which take part:

- the national agency for European or/and youth programs
- representatives of the ministry for youth/sports
- representatives of the youth councils/national networks
- representatives of some NGOs
- researchers and experts in the field of youth

This national body is responsible for the+ coordination and creation of the national position for further consultation with the EU. This body meets once or twice per year and is responsible for the negotiations and suggestions with the

EU level

Negotiations are on-going between the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament on the legal base of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps successor programs. The Commission is preparing for the implementation of the future programs, which can start once the legal base is adopted.

The European Parliament and the Council review proposals by the Commission and propose amendments. If the Council and the Parliament cannot agree upon amendments, a second reading takes place. The adoption of the legislation is a step-by-step process where the European Parliament passes laws jointly with the EU Council – and list of past laws subject to this method.

The technical preparatory work is carried out in a co-creation process with the implementing bodies of the programs (mainly National Agencies). The process includes also stakeholders through working groups with National Agencies, National consulting bodies or through stakeholder events. The Commission is preparing an impact study of the effects and prepares an impact assessment report. The input will feed

executive agency of the EU. This body has a well structured way of collecting and analyzing the collected data:

- RAY Research
- Check points/National coordination or feedback meetings
- Monitoring meetings
- Conferences among different groups (Alumni, EU Dialogue, expert working groups)

Although the processes are fairly well developed and structured, the opportunity for a stronger youth presence in these bodies is there, especially for youth with fewer opportunities who don't have easy access to Erasmus+ or similar programs.

into the Annual Work Program, Call for Proposals and Program Guide of the program, which describes the changes of the horizontal and annuals priorities, modifications of the resources and tools and other program improvements.

The European Youth Forum is an umbrella organization that fosters and represents the National Youth Councils and other European and international networks of organizations. However, they don't work directly with/for young people, but they represent the interests of the members of the forum.

From the exploratory research, we can see the need for a stronger link between the young people and the organizations that are working with youth, in terms of collection of data, opinions and ideas. The decision-making process, although is going in both directions – bottom to top, and top to bottom, largely is based on perceived realities of the experts and youth workers working in the field, rather than raw data collection and its unbiased analysis. A development of a system to collect data on permanent and regular manner can be highly beneficial in the decision-making processes.

2 ROLES AND ACTORS

While we were making our research, we were looking at different perspectives in order to understand how the field of actors who practice youth work looks like and what kind of roles do they have, what is their capacity and origin. Some of our investigations were targeting to see how many organizations are there that apply for funding in the Erasmus+ program, what kind of work they are doing, what is their capacity and how are they organized, what percentage of them are receiving funding in the Erasmus+ program?

Although our sample is 50 organizations and cannot be used to confirm or deny a hypothesis, our goal is explorative, to find some indicators that will direct us to more detailed research. We received data from two national agencies, from those numbers we can see some interesting indications that will encourage further research in the area:

- In Croatia, if observing the successful applications in the KA105 (Youth), 60% of contracted projects were with NGOs in 2017, and in 2018 this percentage goes to 88%. In 2017, out of the 63 NGOs that received the funding, 54 of them were independent, local grassroots organizations(84%). In 2018, out of 52 NGOs that had contracts with the Croatian NA, 44 were local grassroots organizations(84%).

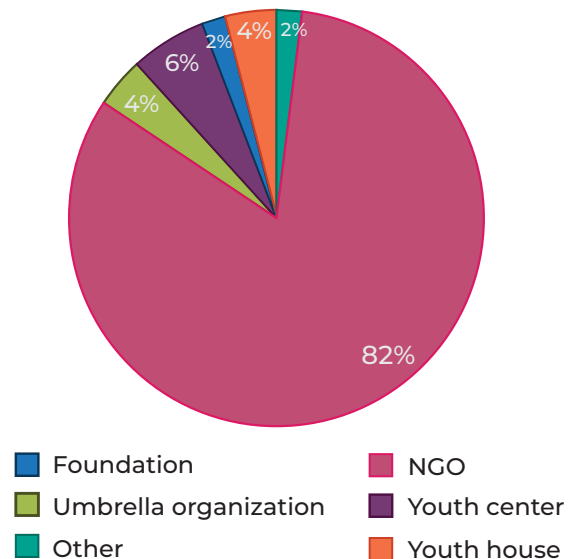
- In Germany, if observing the successful applications in the KA105 (Youth), 49% of the successful applications were NGOs in 2017, and in 2018 this percentage goes to 67%. Out of the 272 organizations that received funding, 176(64,7%) were grassroots organizations. In 2018 out of 192 organizations that received funding, 121(63%) were independent, local grassroots organizations.

Although the answer in the applications is not a definitive sample to show what kind of organizations are implementing the projects, we have made a desk and web research to see what kind of organizations they are. In this research, we have checked each individual beneficiary, their

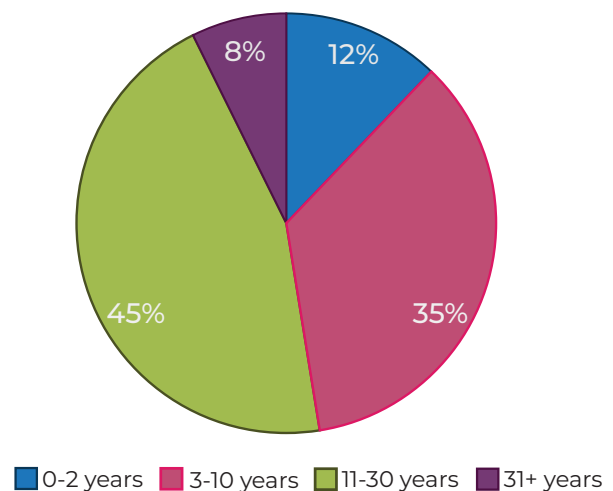
website and core work, their geographical reach. The indications are that a large percentage of them are local NGOs and different kinds of associations that are working with youth, most of them are not older than 20 years.

On a separate survey which was answered by 50 Grassroots organizations, 45% of them have answered that they exist between 11-30 years which is a significant number which shows us that the organizations have managed to secure funding and maintain their sustainability that lasts more than 10 years.

What type of an organization it is? in%



How long does your NGO exist:



All this information can only indicate that there are interesting trends that are happening in the youth work eco-systems. The need for a strategic approach and multiyear collection of data is of high importance in order to better understand the whole area, from organizations to youth workers.

Our exploratory research has identified that there is a need to have a broader and deeper research about the people who at the moment are practicing youth work in the different European countries.

Furthermore, a deeper research and analysis is needed to understand the organizations that they are working at their needs and capacity, financial sustainability and challenges.

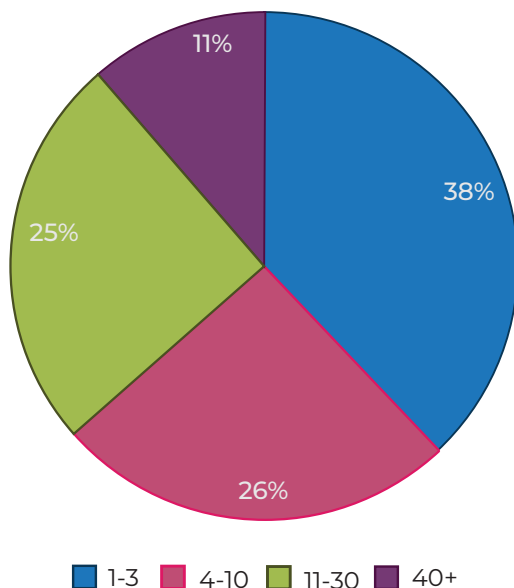
When this kind of data will be available, it can be used for development of longer terms and strategic policies that will create sustainable programs not only for the young people but also for the organizations who manage, develop and provide youth-related services in our societies which will increase the capacities of the organizations who will provide better youth services and opportunities.

3 ADVOCACY AND REPRESENTATION

In our exploratory research we were looking to see how many youth workers and trainers work in each organization, how are they organized, who is representing them, what kind of systems and structures do they have. From the previous data, we can see that a significant amount of youth projects and activities are implemented on an international level.

From the phone and in person interviews we have had with the respondents of the survey, we have found out that the challenges that they are facing are coming from the lack of capacity and sustainability on a long term basis. This prevents them from more strategic and sustainable development, as their development is closely connected to the type of funding they receive, which in most cases is not permanent.

How many people are in your organization?



Although these NGOs, who are most probably the biggest in number among organizations who implement youth programs, they have very limited resources and mostly act only on a local level. They lack representation and advocacy on national and international level, making their voice and opinions nearly irrelevant. Some of these NGOs take part in global and European strategic processes, however, there are really small to be able to make an impact or advocate for the needs of the whole community.

They have a form of representation available on the national or local level. In some countries there are local and national youth councils who are one form of organization of the NGOs. We have found out that these councils are a partner to the executive or legislative branches in terms of youth-related processes on local or national level. Having in mind that they are quite young organizations as well, they are building their capacities and adjust their core work, it is understandable that they are with very limited capacity and they are not having well set up systems and processes.

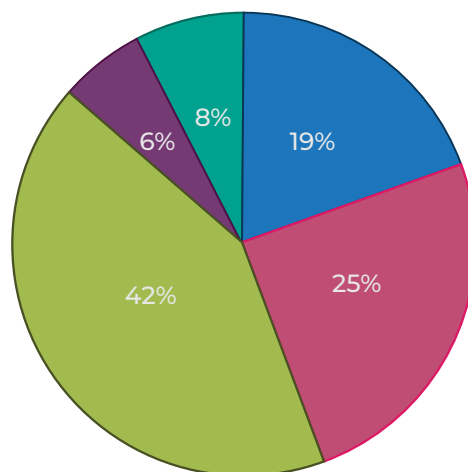
Although we have requested an interview and additional data from the European Youth Forum on several occasions so we can better understand their role and responsibilities, and how do

they represent the interests of their members, we were unable to get a positive response. From the information that can be found on the website of the EYF can be seen that they foster and represent the different members of the network, which include national youth councils, international network organizations.

A far more complex and comprehensive research is needed to identify the needs of the organizations, how to strengthen their capacity and to support the creation of a representative umbrella organization that is going to collect relevant information on regular basis and advocate for relevant changes that will provide long term and sustainable development of the whole sector on European level.

4 SUPPORTING SYSTEMS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

If your co-workers are not employed, what is their status?



■ Part time ■ Free lancers ■ Project basis ■ Temporary basis ■ Remote work

The need for recognition of youth work+ as a profession has been growing in recent years. There have been several conferences organized by different National Agencies for European programs or Salto-Youth on an international level, most notably European Youth Work Academy in May 2019 in Slovenia, Recognize It and The Quality Bonus in 2018. On these conference

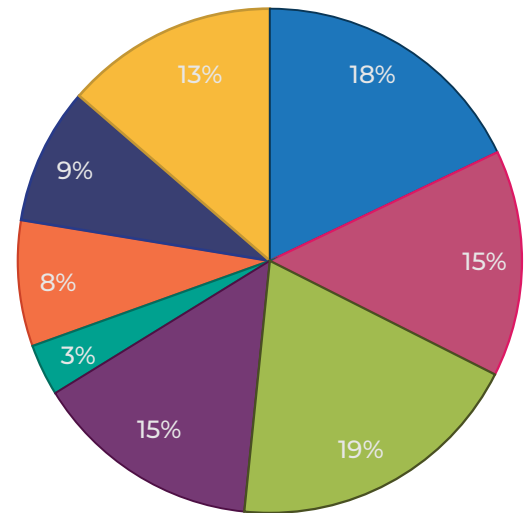
different kind of professionals met to discuss the (lack of) definition of youth work and youth workers, its job description, the profile of youth workers, roles and responsibilities, its code of conduct and ethical standards, its development of workforce and education and many other topics.

From all of these conferences and research, it can be seen that the youth workers lack in some cases even basic infrastructure and supporting systems that will enable them to do their work in quality and sustainable manner. (Several good case practices are happening) in (different innovative countries), and they are addressing the needs of the youth workers and the organizations working in it, but these are just initial signs of development.

A great first example of that kind of system is the European Training Strategy (ETS) that outlines the directions and provides a framework on top of which the development can continue. There are the Trainers and Youth workers competence models that are part of the ETS, that identify the needed competencies in Youth work, provide the framework for further development of learning material and educational curriculum. There are several assessment models (Salto, Appraiser) that can assess the competences of the trainers and youth workers competences. There are also several projects (Trainers library, Educational tools portal) that are being developed to provide resources and materials for further learning and development, there are many training courses that are organized for practical learning of the work (TicTac, Yocomo, ToT). However, a broader certification and testing processes are needed that will verify the skills and competences of these professionals.

In Europe there are more than 100 programs that offer formal education on developing skills for youth workers, however, most of them aren't using a model or in few cases they use their own models of skills and competences, which addresses only a few aspects from the competence model for youth workers to work internationally. More diverse studies need to be developed, cooperation between the NGOs/youth houses and the universities need to be developed where the learners can get practical experience. We are aware of several programs and universities that are working on developing educational programs for youth workers.


How is your organization being financed?



- Governmental funding (ministries for youth, different agencies, embassies)
- Local government funding (cities, local funding)
- Non-governmental funding
- Membership fees
- Corporate sponsorships

The question of insurance for youth workers is another important system that is missing. In some countries, there is insurance at work in a variety of forms where we have seen several examples of third party liability insurance. In some there is no insurance for the youth workers, even when requested privately to be purchased, the insurance companies could not offer a product that is tailored to the needs of the youth workers. Therefore we see an opportunity to encourage and develop such a product.

There is no career guidance or support at the moment for youth workers. Many young people, driven from the experience and desire taking part in different programs, establish or join an NGO and try to volunteer with hopes to develop a permanent employment/occupation.



However, the employment capacity of the NGOs is not really high as our and the several other research in the area show that most of the workers are not there permanently. This makes a constant brain drain from the profession. After creating capacities and gathering know-how for several years working in the NGOs, the youth workers leave their jobs seeking for more financially secure jobs that provide a regular salary.

This made us look into the type of funding that it is available for NGOs. Many of them have quite diverse funding, however since they are non-profits, it is difficult to have long term sustainability without own or capacity building funding that is going to be permanent, which will cover the basic costs of daily operations. We have found examples, that in some cities the local government provides basic funding for operations of the NGOs and covering their basic salaries, office space, insurance and other operational costs. Although this provides sustainability and opportunity for the NGOs, they are not self-sustainable which means that any deterioration in the relationship with the donor can

bring a significant crisis in the existence. Therefore, it is clear that the decision-makers need to think of systems that will enable the NGOs to develop self-sustainable and long term operations, so they can keep the know-how in the organization and develop own capacity. There are good case practices of social enterprises in Europe and USA that can be considered as a framework to be studied on how have they managed to become independent and sustainable in the long term.

Support and supervision for well being of the youth workers are one of the basic systems that are needed to be developed. In several cases, there is some exploratory research that has been done, that showed a high rate of burnout among youth workers and trainers that are working on European level. There have been more and more conferences that are having the health of the youth workers as a primary concern, which shows that the focus might be shifting. There is a clear opportunity for working groups and projects that can be developed that will address the needs of the youth workers.

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