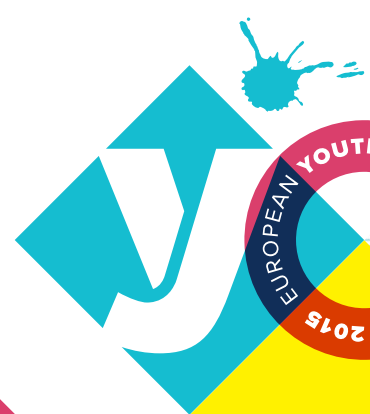


2<sup>nd</sup> EUROPEAN

YOUTH WORK CONVENTION

Similarities  
in a world  
of difference

CONVENTION



Brussels  
27-30 April  
2015



# Table of contents

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- Failure is not an option ..... 4
- The frame of the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention ..... 6
- The Convention in a nutshell..... 12
- A flavour of the Convention ..... 14
- The background documents** ..... 17
- Finding common ground ..... 18
- Reflections on 7 youth work themes..... 25
- Declaration of the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention** ..... 55
- Making a world of difference ..... 56
- Recommendations and action points ..... 62
- Who is who? ..... 66

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# Failure is not an option ...

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The European Youth Work Convention 2015 was one of the flagship initiatives of the **Belgian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe** (November 2014 - May 2015). It took place five years after the 1<sup>st</sup> Convention, organised in Ghent from 7 to 10 July 2010 in the framework of the Belgian EU Presidency. This 1<sup>st</sup> Convention resulted in the Declaration of Ghent and the Resolution of the EU Council of 18-19 November 2010 on Youth Work, a milestone for **the recognition and support of youth work in Europe**.

With the experiences of the first one in mind, we already started many years ago preparing 'the mind set' for a 2<sup>nd</sup> Convention. We were looking to bring together enough strong shoulders to carry the long preparation process and the organisation of such a big event.

The initiative of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Convention came at a very timely moment. Since 2010, important developments occurred in both youth work practice and policy. Young people have been heavily hit by rising unemployment rates, while austerity policies have endangered funding for youth work in different parts of Europe. But at the same time, the crisis also created incentives and opportunities for the rise of alternative forms of youth work and innovative approaches to youth participation. The situation of youth work is extremely diverse across Europe. This context called for an analysis of the situation in order to give a **new impetus to youth work policy** in Europe.

The first direct result of the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention is the **Brussels declaration 'Making a world of difference'**. It concludes that:

*"Youth work is not a luxury but an existential necessity if a precarious Europe is to effectively address its concerns about social inclusion, cohesion and equal opportunities, and commitment to values of democracy and human rights. Youth work is a central component of a social Europe.*

*A failure to invest in youth work has three consequences. It is an abdication of responsibility to the next generation. It is a loss of opportunity to strengthen contemporary civil society throughout Europe. And finally, it weakens the potential for dealing effectively with some of the major social challenges of our time (such as unemployment and extremism)."*

It is **thanks to contributions** of a variety of stakeholders in the preparation process and their participation in the discussions, that the declaration editing team could develop such a rich text. This is a first hurdle we took almost perfectly. We are now preparing to take the second hurdle. The Joint Council on Youth will have the possibility to prepare in the coming two years the first

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recommendation on Youth Work that hopefully will be adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. 'Failure is not an option!'

In many aspects, this 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention was exceptional. It brought together enthusiastic youth workers, researchers and policy makers from almost all countries of the Council of Europe that signed the Cultural Convention. This report brings **all relevant documentation** together to help us take the next hurdles that lie ahead. We count on you to make this endeavour a success.

Last but not least, I would like to express my sincere thanks to all the organizers, participants, helping hands, moderators, facilitators, speakers, animators, text writers, rapporteurs, colleagues, the declaration editing team, etc.

**Jan Vanhee**

*Project leader of the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention*



# The frame of the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention

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## ➔ Where are we heading?

The Convention took place from 27 to 30 April 2015 in Brussels, Belgium. It gathered stakeholders from all over Europe bringing together complementary knowledge, perspectives and experiences on youth work in order to:

- Map and review the **evolutions** in youth work practice and policy since 2010;
- Discuss **challenges** facing youth work at local, national and European level;
- Find **common ground** within the diversity of youth work in order to foster recognition.

Analyses and ideas, elements of consensus and diverging points of view formulated by participants during the Convention were collected by rapporteurs. This input formed the basis of a **final Declaration** which was drafted at the Convention by the team of editors and presented during the closing plenary session. The aim of the final Declaration is to:

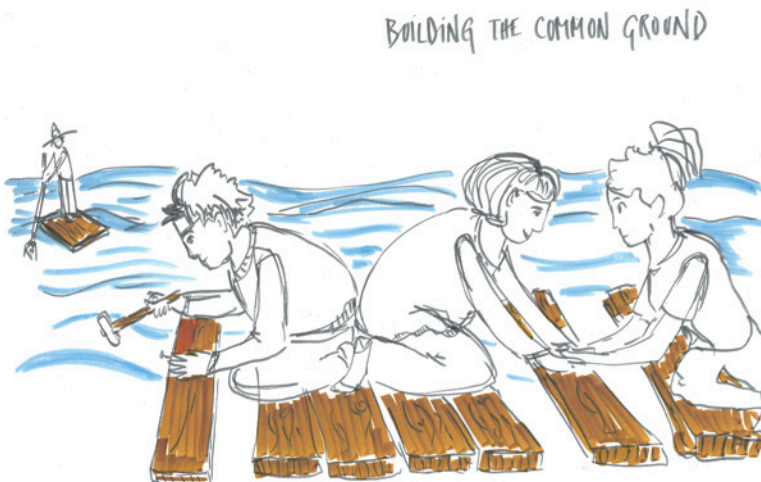
- Contribute to the elaboration of a **renewed strategy, agenda and action plan** for youth work in Europe;
- Trigger an institutional process towards an agreement (resolution or recommendation) on the **value and significance of youth work** at Council of Europe and/or EU level;
- Send a strong message of support to policymakers and practitioners to continue **developing and renewing youth work** in Europe.

## → Finding common ground

Youth work has taken on many different forms over time and in different corners of Europe. This calls for an analysis whether there are **consensual ideas throughout Europe on what youth work is and does**. The European Youth Work Convention 2015 aimed at finding common ground within the diversity of youth work practice by tackling **seven themes**:

1. The **meaning**, the 'raison d'être' of youth work (see page 25);
2. The **aims** and anticipated outcomes of youth work (see page 29);
3. The **patterns and practices** constituting youth work (see page 32);
4. The **connections** between youth work and wider work with young people e.g. formal education, training and employment, entrepreneurship and more (see page 36);
5. The **recognition** of youth work within and beyond the youth field (see page 40);
6. The need for **education and training** for quality (see page 45);
7. The **value of youth work** for young people, their communities and society at large (see page 51).

These themes were elaborated by Professor Howard Williamson, in consultation with the **Belgian and European Steering Groups**. The themes are presented in the Convention background paper *Finding common ground: Mapping and scanning the horizons for European youth work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – Towards the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention (summary on page 23) and in the individual briefing papers per theme (see page 25).*



## → Behind the scenes

The Convention was implemented by a **Project Team** specially recruited for the project, based on their previous experience with similar large-scale European youth events, including the 1<sup>st</sup> Convention of 2010. The Project Team worked under the supervision of a **Belgian Steering Group** composed of representatives from the three Communities of Belgium: Youth Ministries, Erasmus+ Youth National Agencies and Youth Councils (see page 66).

The concept and programme of the Convention were developed in close consultation with a **European Steering Group** composed of European stakeholders: The Council of Europe, the European Commission, the Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the Youth Field, Youth National Agencies of the Erasmus+ programme, the Pool of European Youth Researchers (PEYR), the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe, the European Youth Forum, the European Youth Card Association (EYCA), the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA), Eurodesk and several other actors in the field of youth work at European and national level (see page 66).

The **Permanent Representation** of Belgium and of Flanders to the Council of Europe have also pulled their weight, in particular the ambassadors Dirk Van Eeckhout and Jean M. Deboutte. Thanks to their relentless efforts, this 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention received the attention it deserved.

## → Working on a European declaration

The participants of the Convention discussed the 7 proposed themes from different angles. The programme provided them with lots of food for thought from inside as well as outside the youth work field. Young people came to testify about the effect youth work had on them, and both European practice presentations as well as local project visits showed the diversity and power of youth work. External speakers came to ask some critical questions.

All these elements were taken into the various thematic discussion groups. Reporters had the task to capture the ideas and bring them to the editing team, composed of a variety of stakeholders: youth researchers, E+ Youth National Agencies and Youth Work representatives (see page 66). They had long but fruitful debates on how to bring all these ideas and recommendations together in a well-balanced Declaration (see page 55), to be submitted to the audience for approval on the last day.



## → Who was there?

The Convention brought together national delegations from the **50 signatory countries to the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe** representing about:

- 200 youth workers;
- 60 representatives from Ministries of Youth;
- 40 representatives from the Youth National Agencies of the Erasmus+ programme;
- 50 youth researchers (including the Pool of European Youth Researchers).

Delegates were selected by their national Ministry on the basis of their representativeness, taking into account diversity, gender and geographical balance. Invited Ministries were strongly encouraged to carry out the selection in consultation with the National Youth Council and Youth National Agency of the Erasmus+ programme (in countries where they exist).

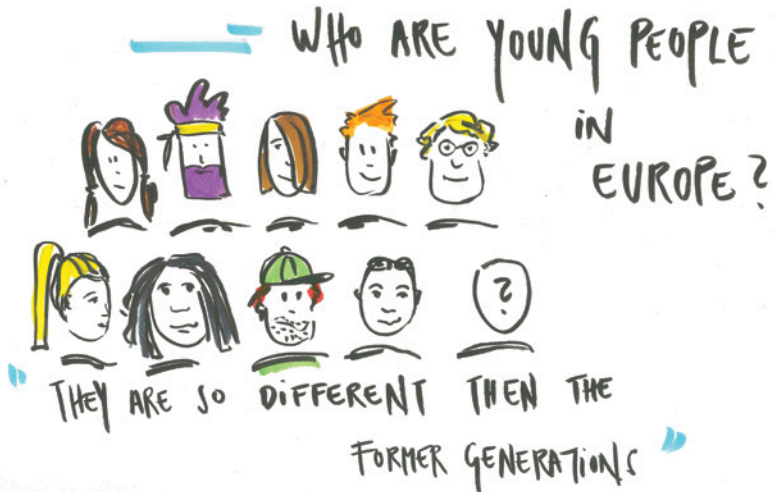
In addition to these national delegations, the Convention was also attended by:

- International delegations composed of about 30 youth workers selected by the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe and the European Youth Forum;
- About 40 policymakers from European institutions (both EU and Council of Europe), representatives from executive agencies (Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the Youth Field, National Agencies of the Erasmus+ programme, SALTO Resource Centres) and advocates for youth work from European youth NGOs;
- About 20 experts on youth work and youth policy;
- About 20 high-level speakers;
- About 60 facilitators, rapporteurs and staff members.

In total, the Convention was attended by **566 participants**. Altogether the participants of the Convention constitute the key actors responsible for **promoting and developing youth work at local, national or European level**.

## → Concrete results and tangible outcomes

The main outcome of the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention is **the Declaration**, entitled ***Making a world of difference*** (see page 55), that was presented during the closing plenary session. The Declaration was welcomed by participants as a document identifying the right challenges and presenting a set of relevant and urgent recommendations.



Immediately after the Convention, the Declaration was widely disseminated to key stakeholders and representatives of the youth field. The Declaration was presented during the **Council of the European Union (Education, Youth, Culture and Sport) on 18 May 2015** in Brussels. It is now an official document of the Council. A reference to the Declaration was also made during the stock-taking of the Belgian Chairmanship at the **125<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 19 May 2015** in Brussels.

In addition, a large quantity of **background material** was developed in the preparation phase and during the Convention itself (background notes on policy development in the field of youth work, non-formal education and recognition, background documents on the seven themes of the Convention, presentations, speeches and short video-clips explaining what is at stake). These were shared on the Convention website [www.eywc2015.be](http://www.eywc2015.be) and consulted by many. In order to ensure this material remains available to the youth workers, trainers, researchers and the wider public, the content of the Convention website will be migrated to the online database of the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy.

Finally, this **report** presents the main outcomes and messages of the Convention. It will serve as a **collective memory** and will be used in the next steps of the advocacy process towards an agreement (resolution or recommendation) on the value and significance of youth work at Council of Europe and/or EU level.

## → Reaching out beyond participants

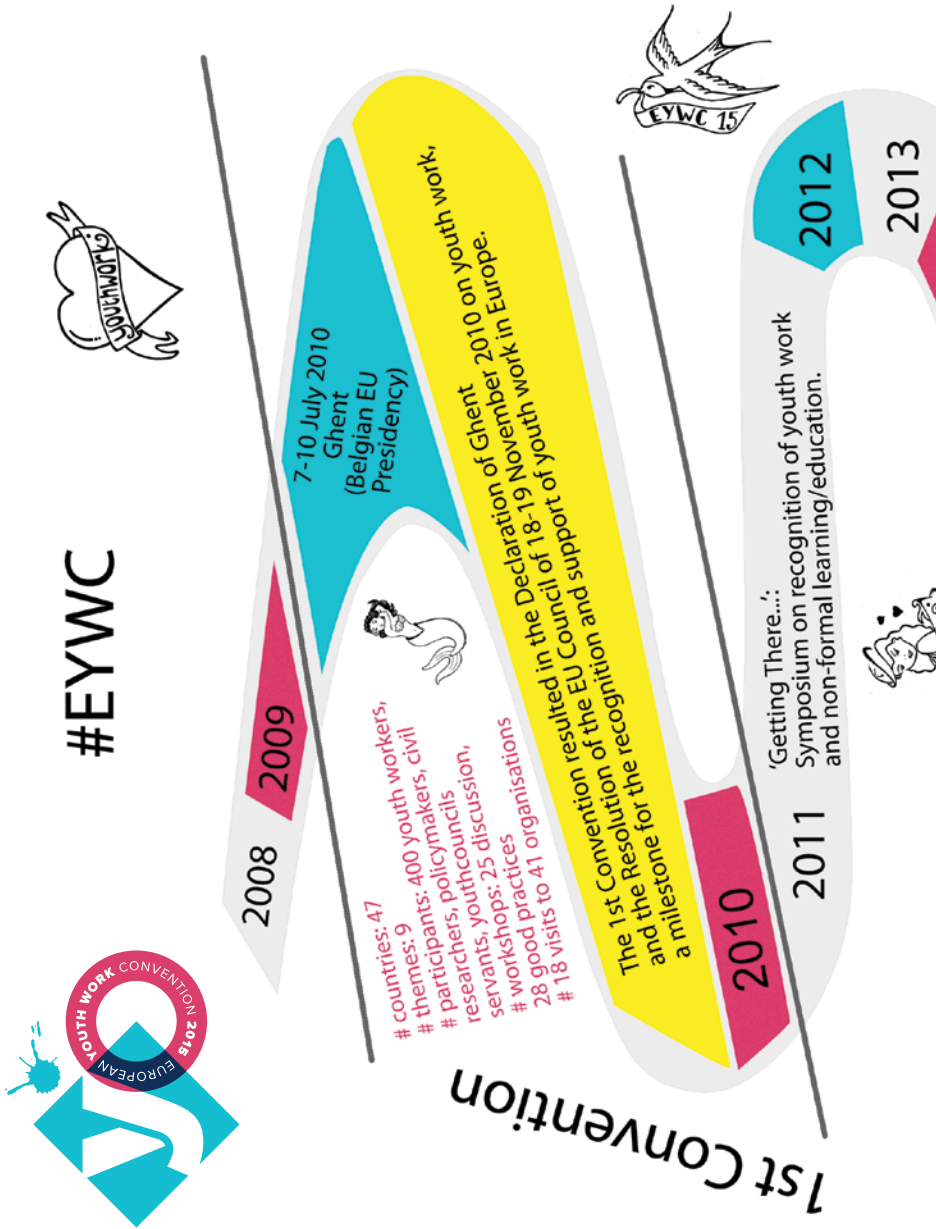
The Convention website [www.eywc2015.eu](http://www.eywc2015.eu) was launched on 8 March 2015. The online reach was very successful with over **6000 unique visitors** thus reaching out far beyond the participants of the Convention. The website included a lot of background material which seemed of interest to visitors resulting in over **45.900 page views**. The pages dedicated to the Declaration and the livestreaming of the opening and closing plenary sessions (i.e. pages related to the key messages of the Convention) received the most visitors (1315 and 1125 respectively).

Outreach on Facebook was also quite successful thanks to an active communication strategy by the Project Team. The Facebook page reached **1446 'likes'**. Followers of the Convention interacted a lot with almost 99.000 clicks, comments, 'likes' or 'shares' on content posted on the Convention Facebook page. Although statistics on Facebook are not very detailed, we can estimate that almost **11.000 people in total** were reached via Facebook during the four days of the Convention. The most popular posts on Facebook were the publication of the Declaration and the announcement of the livestreaming.

Outreach on Twitter was more modest, mostly due to a strategy to rely on partners with existing Twitter accounts. Nevertheless the Convention Twitter account reached 155 followers and the convention was mentioned over 100 times by other Twitter account holders.

Although the Convention unfortunately did not make it to the front page of newspapers, many youth organisations, both from EU and non-EU countries, promoted and mentioned it on their website, newsletters or other communication channels.

# The Convention in a nutshell



2014

# youth workers: 200  
# themes: 7

# graphic recorders: 4

# badges: 625

# countries: 47

Under the Belgian  
Chairmanship of the  
Committee of Ministers of the CoE



2015

27 - 30  
April 2015  
Brussels

# more than 200 liters coffee  
# participants: 566

#EYWC2015  
European Youth  
Work Convention 2015

"Youth work is not a marginal option"

# 40,6 m<sup>2</sup> of foam boards  
# 165 sheets of drawing paper

Exchanges, reflections and a final  
Declaration to contribute to a  
renewed strategy, agenda and action  
plan for youth work in Europe!



Declaration:  
'Making a world of difference'

# flipcharts: 20

# field visits: 20 locations, 26 organisations

# 24 thematic workshops and 24  
European practice workshops (with  
# 37 organisations / projects)

Next steps?

Towards a renewed strategy,  
agenda and action plan  
for youth work in Europe!

Towards a 3rd European Youth Work Convention.



# A flavour of the Convention

Imagine 500+ youth work stakeholders taking over a whole conference centre for three days, discussing and exchanging about what is close to their heart: youth work opportunities for young people.

The programme of the Convention channelled all this passion into a number of collective moments (plenary sessions and evening programme), to make sure all participants are 'in tune'. But of course there was plenty of time to work in smaller sub-groups too (workshops and visits).

Each programme element offered opportunities to **learn, gather food for thought, discover, get inspired, exchange, debate, get to know each other, network, play and celebrate youth work**. This made the Convention a unique participation and learning experience.

## ➔ Food for thought

The Opening plenary session introduced the background, context and objectives of the Convention (see page 4), but it were the inputs that got the participants thinking. Testimonies by young people that were positively impacted by youth work made clear once again 'why we are doing it'. But a number of speakers from within and beyond the youth work field asked some critical questions and gave the participants some food for thought.



**Paul Kloosterman** was trained as a youth worker in the seventies and is currently working as a freelance trainer. He questioned the audience about the role of youth work. Do we tell young people what to do or create space for them to experiment? Can formal education learn something from youth work? Can youth work help job centres? Why are policy makers looking to youth work? “Hello, it is me you are looking for”, as Lionel Richie sang.

**Pepe Herrera** is a community worker at the Youth Café in Solna, Sweden. He makes the point that young people need meeting places that support their ideas, and not just provide an offer for passive consumption. Does your youth work dare to follow young people’s needs? He also points out that society is rapidly changing (e.g. globalisation, internet,...) This puts pressure on the traditional role of a youth worker. How does your youth work adapt to changes?

**Frank Vandenbroucke** is professor at the University of Leuven, Belgium, and was the Belgian Minister of Social Affairs in a former life. Inequality is on the rise in Europe, more and more young people are at risk of poverty. A ‘caring Europe’ must address widening inequalities and social imbalances. This calls for social investment, inter-generational solidarity and education. Where does your youth work fit in this bigger picture? Are you part of social and civic dialogue? How do you help create better living conditions for young people in need?

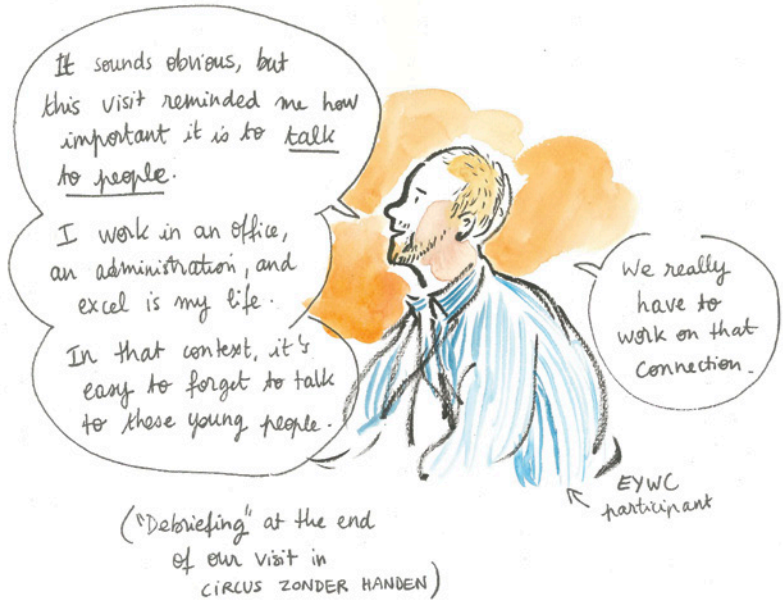
**Mayssoun Sukarieh** is a Lebanese researcher and author of ‘Youth Rising? The Politics of Youth in the Global Economy’ (2014). When looking at youth in a global context, there is a paradox. On the one hand there is a growing focus on youth (e.g. youth participation, youth voice,...), but on the other hand this does not lead to youth empowerment. Instead, young people are manipulated at the service of the elite in society. So what is your youth work doing to come to real empowerment?

These inputs gave some critical food for thought to take into the thematic workshops that explored the seven themes of the Convention (see page 16) through different formats and methodologies. These discussions fed into the **final Declaration of the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention** (see page 39).

## Rooting the discussions in practice

Discussions did not remain theoretical. Each of the participants had their own practice to contribute, which they did in European practice workshops: presenting tools, methodologies, innovative or long-established practice and sharing experiences. But they also interacted with youth organisations in Brussels.

Participants confronted these **different realities** with the seven themes of the Convention. This again enriched the discussions and rooted the input for the final Declaration in a variety of youth work realities.





# The background documents

# Finding common ground

## Mapping and scanning the horizons for European youth work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century towards the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention

### Summary Paper

This paper is a summary of a longer background paper intended to provoke some reflection on the state of youth work across Europe and consideration of the extent to which there is sufficient 'common ground' in our understanding of 'youth work' to reinforce our convictions, strengthen our commitment and embolden our capacity to advocate for it in the context of challenging political and economic circumstances. The observations, though drawn from a broad and deep range of sources, remain a personal perspective. Others, from different cultural, national, professional and experiential backgrounds would have written something quite different. Indeed, the full paper starts with a preface concerning the demise of 'my' youth centre, where I did open youth work for almost a quarter of a century. It was one of the casualties of draconian funding cuts to youth services in 2013. Part of my intention in looking to the future was to draw on the past – in order to follow in the path of one of my teachers, the late Prof Geoffrey Pearson, and shed 'old light on new problems'.



One of those problems is that youth work is, far too often, quite devoid of theoretical foundations. On the relatively rare occasions that youth work has been connected to wider social theory, it becomes immediately clear that it is nearly always riddled with contradictions and competing pressures – between the individual and society, and between association and transition. Something called ‘youth work’ has done very different things, at different times, in different contexts. Quite how it manages the tensions and dilemmas routinely faced depends inherently on the relative weight of professional inheritance and contemporary economic and political realities. The histories of youth work published by the Youth Partnership<sup>1</sup> attest starkly to this.

Does anything go? The recent EU study of the value of youth work points firmly to its *diversity* and *variety*, from which it is said it can suffer but also constitutes ‘one of its key strengths’. Yet the great eclecticism and flexibility that is routinely associated with youth work and its long histories (with continuity in some countries, but fracture and change in others) makes an attempt to define and describe ‘common ground’, at the level of both theory or practice, somewhat perilous. Myriad definitions of youth work have been advanced, across the globe, often saying more about those producing them and the context in which it operates than the practice on the ground. A significant fault line has often existed particularly between conceptions of youth work as guided (and sometimes governed) by adults and perspectives where youth work is firmly controlled by young people themselves, through youth-led youth organisation(s).

The European Youth Work Declaration in 2010 endeavoured to capture critical features of youth work, in the context of both the long-standing practices undertaken by the Council of Europe and the more recent assertions by the European Commission about the role for youth work in supporting all fields of action within the 2009 European Union Youth Strategy. But there remains a long continuum in perspectives on youth work, from projects and activities tied firmly to wider ‘youth policy’ objectives, through more abstract commitments to democracy and participation, to the recent proclamation of the UK In Defence of Youth work campaign, that youth work is ‘volatile and voluntary, creative and collective – an association and conversation without guarantee’. This is seemingly light years from some more instrumental articulations of what youth work is about.

In terms of endeavouring to define ‘youth work’, it is always tempting to produce a lengthy, calibrated definition that seeks to take account of its complexity and diversity. Yet the more we seek clarification, the more we often con-

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<sup>1</sup> *The Partnership between the European Union and the Council of Europe in the youth field*

tribute to confusion. Simplicity, strangely, may be the answer. There are two possibilities here. One is Howard Sercombe's notion of 'facilitating agency'. Through a range of diverse participatory and experiential practices, young people acquire the capacities and competencies for more autonomous, active and responsible decision-making about their lives and engagement with their society. And, though not specifically connected to conceptualising youth work, the thinking of South African youth sociologist Sharlene Swartz around 'navigational capacities' is also useful here: young people – particularly those in the most unequal and disadvantaged situations – need to build, and be equipped with, the capacity to understanding, articulate, evaluate, confront, embrace, reflect on, and resist their circumstances.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention will need to consider how perspectives on youth work might *converge*, in contrast to the celebration of diversity, space, flexibility and fluidity – in effect, the divergent features of youth work – that informed part of the Declaration from the 1<sup>st</sup> European Youth Work Declaration:

*Whatever the definitional debate, it is not contested that different forms of youth work engage with different young people, use different methodologies, address different issues and operate in different contexts. Within this frame of groups, methods, issues and contexts, youth work practice adapts, unfolds and develops over time (Declaration of the 1<sup>st</sup> European Youth Work Convention 2010, p.2)*

The two positions are not incompatible. Whilst those inside the youth (work) field understand the need for celebrating youth work's diversity, there is also an imperative, particularly in relation to those beyond the youth (work) field, for communicating youth work's consistency and common purpose.

This imperative arises because youth work requires a different narrative in times of austerity, economic 'crisis' and significant public sector budgetary restraint. Although there is a mixed story across Europe, youth work in many places is under considerable pressure – both in relation to the resources available to it and the expectations demanded of it. There has been a decline, even collapse, in open, unconditional, responsive youth work. There are growing pressures on youth work to demonstrate the value of its contribution to various wider policy agendas, not least employability and social inclusion. 'Youth work' throughout Europe has undergone significant change in the five years since the 1<sup>st</sup> European Youth Work Convention in 2010.

Not all countries in Europe have suffered the same dramatic destruction of youth work as England, but then few countries in Europe once had as robust a structure for youth work as England. Some countries are still treading an early path in their development of youth work. So the directions of travel for

different forms of youth work in different parts of Europe is very different. Relative optimism continues to prevail in some countries, from those with longstanding commitments to youth work such as Finland, those with more recent but established youth work practices like Estonia and Lithuania, to those that have only recently constructed some infrastructure for youth work practice and development such as Serbia or Slovakia. In contrast, a more depressing picture emerges elsewhere, in countries such as Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom.

According to 18 cameo reports and an interpretation of a European Youth Forum policy paper, developments in youth work in Europe over the past five years reveal both common and contrasting trends. There have been processes of both decentralisation and more centralisation. There are expectations of closer links (particularly with formal education and employment) as well as the continuation of relative autonomy for youth work. There are greater concerns about quality, the training of 'youth workers', the demonstration of impact and the recognition of youth work. There are issues about the reach of youth work and its capacity to make suitable connections with 'disengaged' youth. Sometimes this has produced a differentiation between more 'open' youth work and a practice more associated with 'youth care' and links with childhood policy and welfare systems. There is often stronger emphasis on young people's volunteering and social contribution. And, in straightened economic times, there are expectations that youth work will be supported by more diverse funding streams (including the private, business sector) as well as delivered by a more committed NGO sector.

The elasticity of the concept of youth work has permitted those responsible for youth work at national and European levels to move away from a classical position where youth work was perceived to be focused holistically on young people's needs and interests in voluntary relationship informed by some key values around rights, entitlements, participation and empowerment to a more socially attached position where youth work is depicted as capable of addressing a range of contemporary social concerns, not least youth unemployment and 'employability', health risk and even deviance and criminality. Though there may be grounds for asserting the potential for youth work having some intermediary impact on positive outcomes in these wider policy domains, caution needs to be exercised about any claims of the direct impact of youth work on concrete policy aspirations such as improved educational attainment, greater youth employment or more responsible health behaviour.

Yet this should not diminish the value of youth work. There is growing testimony to the value of many different forms of youth work. Various research studies have recently provided some evidence of the benefits that can accrue from youth work opportunities, interventions and experiences. Youth work can make a critical contribution *inter alia* to social and economic inclusion,

health lifestyles, volunteering, youth (political and other) participation, employability and entrepreneurship.

Whatever may be taking place at national levels, this understanding of youth work is reflected in a range of developments at European level seeking to evaluate, promote and strengthen the position of youth work within youth policy. Between Belgium's Presidency of the European Union in 2010 and its Chairmanship of the Council of Europe in 2015, some key documentation has been produced, starting with her 'A contribution to youth work and youth policy in Europe' and the Declaration of the 1<sup>st</sup> European Youth Work Convention, which in turn led to the Resolution of the Council of the European Union on youth work. There have been some pivotal research studies, not least the LSE Enterprise report on Youth Participation in Democratic Life and the emergent findings of the 14-country MYPLACE study of how young people's participation is shaped by the shadows of totalitarianism and populism in Europe – with significant implications for the role of youth work. A study of central importance has been on the value of youth work across the Member States of the European Union, which points to the many positive outcomes it can potentially engender. Work has continued on the recognition of youth work and non-formal learning across Europe, and how best to find the balance between self-recognition, political recognition and wider social recognition. A report is expected imminently from an Expert Group on Youth Work Quality Systems in EU Member States and the role of common indicators or frameworks.

All of this is in the context of the current EU Work Plan for Youth, in which youth work figures prominently, the Erasmus + Youth in Action component of the new EU learning and mobility programme and the continuing work in the youth work field of the Council of Europe through its training programme, campaigns and projects.

Such developments at a European level suggest a space has been created for a strong and purposeful momentum for youth work since the 1<sup>st</sup> European Youth Work Convention. Yet there remain deep anxieties that the warm rhetoric at European level is drowning out awareness about the often very tough realities for 'youth work' on the ground. A unified European agenda promoting the case for youth work needs to be consolidated. Now is the time for a 'concentrated fusillade' from all actors in the youth field who are committed to strengthening the place and purpose of youth work to build on and develop the opportunities created by that space.

## The challenges for the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention

At a time of a very mixed portrait of what 'youth work' is and does, and how it is evolving in different parts of Europe, it is important to seize the moment when the European organisations concerned with 'youth policy' (primarily the European Commission and the Council of Europe) are both proclaiming the imperative to strengthen youth policy and the place of 'youth work' within it. The current 'state of play' for youth work in Europe, coupled with its history and evolution that has taken many different forms, would suggest that the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention needs to establish whether there are overriding, reasonably consensual ideas throughout Europe. Put simply, this is the complex challenge of **finding common ground** within the diversity of youth work practice:

1. What is the **meaning**, the 'raison d'être', of 'youth work'? What are the underlying concepts and theories that inform our understanding of youth work? Is there a vision for youth work in the future?
2. What are the **aims** – and anticipated outcomes, effect and impact - of 'youth work' at national, European and other transnational levels? Are they the same? If they are different, why, and do they complement each other?
3. What are the various **patterns and practices** constituting 'youth work' that remain consistent with those objectives; in other words, what is the range of activity that may count as youth work, and where are the borders and the boundaries?
4. Where are the **connections** between 'youth work' and wider work with young people (formal education, training and employment; enterprise and entrepreneurship; health; housing; justice; and more); how can and should such connections be made, while maintaining boundaries, through principles and 'distinction'?
5. How can youth work secure **recognition** (beyond the youth field) for both its distinctive and collaborative practice and contribution to the lives of young people and the communities in which they live? How best can self-recognition, political recognition and wider social recognition be linked?
6. What kinds of **education and training** should be established for the development of professional youth work practice and ensuring quality and standards? Are there minimum requirements that need to be advocated to ensure sufficient professionalism (without the need for professionalization)?

7. How can political and public authorities be persuaded, beyond the rhetoric and exhortations from within the youth field itself, of the **value of 'youth work'** in order to support its consistent development and delivery?

**Howard Williamson**

*Professor of European Youth Policy*

*University of South Wales*

*Wales, United Kingdom*





# Reflections on 7 youth work themes

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Experts were invited to write a briefing paper for each of the 7 themes of the Convention to kick-start the discussions. They delved into research and policy papers to set the scene and dive into the discussions starting from a common springboard.

## 1 The meaning of youth work

**What is the meaning, the “raison d’être”, of youth work? What are the underlying concepts and theories that inform our understanding of youth work? Is there a vision for youth work in the future?**

By **Lasse Siurala**

Youth work is normally carried out by public or 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organizations through voluntary or paid youth workers typically in face-to-face contact with young people. Following this definition there are three key actors assessing the ‘raison d’être’ or the meaning of youth work: The *organization*, the *youth worker* and the *young people*. From the viewpoint of the organization responsible for youth work (youth ministry, local government youth service, youth organization, adult organization working with young people, a charitable or faith-based organization, a Foundation etc.) the ‘raison d’être’ of youth work depends on how well the organization and its workers meet the aims and objectives set for them. The yardstick is the objectives of the programs and strategic plans of the organization.

Another viewpoint is that of the youth workers: What is the role, task and essential practice of a youth worker? There is a myriad of definitions and claims from the point of view of the youth workers on ‘What is youth work?’ ranging from ethical reflections (Sercombe 2010), studies (Belton 2014), practitioner statements (1<sup>st</sup> Youth Work Convention) to interventions in political debates on youth work (In Defence of Youth Work). The yardstick is the ideal of the encounter between the youth worker and the young people.

The third angle to the ‘raison d’être’ of youth work is the young people themselves: How well does the offer of youth services (municipal and NGOs) meet the needs and expectations of the young people? Representative studies of

young people in Cities have shown that many respondents don't know about local youth work, many say that they are not interested about its activities and some (normally between 5 to 20 %) inform that they actively participate in them. As an example, a common critique to open youth work (like youth centres) is that they should be more cognizant of and responsive to the needs of those not visiting youth centres. The yardstick for the 'raison d'être' of youth work is the responsiveness of the youth work offer (locally, nationally, internationally) to the needs and expectations of young people in general.

Looking at the literature, there is an overwhelming focus on the second angle in defining the meaning of youth work. The ones making the definitions are youth workers looking at the key elements of the encounter and relationship between a youth worker and the young people. The angle is very important, but not the only one. Youth work is conspicuously complacent (ignorant) of the other angles and the controversies between them. As Howard Williamson noted in his background paper, organizational aims and the practice on ground may be two different things. In a similar manner, youth work does not represent or meet the interests of all young people to the effect it is sometimes claimed. The three angles do not communicate very well. We need a better awareness and an open recognition of the aims and expectations that organizations and the young people in general have on youth work.

Howard Williamson further notes that one problem in reaching common ground in understanding of youth work is that it is "far too often quite devoid of theoretical foundations". The variety and diversity of youth work practices have instead created a myriad of definitions. Those aiming at common ground have tended to be lengthy, complex and abstract. One result of this 'glorious messiness' and lack of theoretical anchoring is an increasing amount of *hidden assumptions*, *political legitimation* and even *populism* in the definitions of youth work.

Youth work is often conceptualized as "institution free" (Fusco 2014) and the task of youth workers is even to "wage guerrilla warfare against institutions" (Belton 2014). This conceptualization might be rooted in particularly oppressive administrative and youth-work hostile government policies. Under other circumstances youth work and youth workers can be differently understood emphasizing dialogue and collaboration with institutions. The roots of the different concepts of youth work (hidden assumptions) need to be uncovered and assessed – otherwise we do not know how well they are transferable to our different cultural contexts. Second, during austere times youth work tries to legitimate itself within current political rhetoric and government policies, ends up integrating young people in labour markets and reducing early school leaving and truancy etc. Youth work can find more funds and do a good job, but one must also stop to ask how are the new (politically legitimate) priorities changing youth work? Third, there is populism. Populism as a

political movement assumes that there exists something called the 'General Will' of citizens, which represents 'True Knowledge' of things and that there is a 'Gap' between people and the government. Somehow this appears similar to the 'raison d'être' of youth work which maintains that there are essential collective interests of 'young people' ('the excluded age group), young people know how things are; "there are no better experts on young people, than young people themselves" (the YNGO credo) and that the society does not listen to young people (the Gap). If there are elements of populism in the definitions of youth work, they also need reflection and deciphering.

Howard Williamson warned us that it is 'somewhat perilous' for youth work to accept its eclecticism, diversity and variance. We cannot meaningfully and consistently communicate youth work if whatever definitions and conceptualizations are acceptable. A more rigorous and plausible definition can be found through (1) a balanced integration of the interests of youth work organizations, youth workers and young people in general, (2) critically reflecting our hidden assumptions, political legitimation and populism and (3) aiming at simple but generic definition of youth work, like 'supporting youth agency' – 'through a range of diverse participatory and experiential practices, young people acquire the capacities and competencies for autonomous, active and responsible decision-making about their lives and engagement with their society' (as referred to by Williamson).

Extending our view to visions of the future, we must have an idea of larger societal changes and try to link youth work to them. The space does not allow for much, but take the social philosopher William Connolly (2011, 2013) who argues that both nature and society are characterized by complexity, plurality and uncertainty. Even if markets, politics, government, religions and even sciences promise that life and society is governable and converging to a better world, we should, according to Connolly, stop for critical reflection and find ways of breaking conventions, use critical practical wisdom, engage in role experimentation and alternative life styles which can spark off a societal reflection process – to see the multi-tiered, complex and unpredictable nature of 'the human cosmos'.

One can believe or not believe in social philosophers, but uncertain and unpredictable times challenge youth work at least in following ways. We need to find ways of preparing young people to positively and innovatively handle controversies and unexpected situations, preparing them to redraft their future trajectories. The increasingly pluralized world asks for intercultural skills, empathy and tolerance. For young people to get their ideas through versatile action must be provided and tolerated. In relation to public services and politics youth need to develop negotiation skills and strategies, at the same time as youth work (service) has to promote those same skills in their respective public administration (City Hall, City Council).

During the times of austerity youth work cannot turn inward, but link with others and build alliances through which it can make its unique competences visible and recognized. After all, most youth concerns need collective impact. Paradoxically, youth work needs to become dependent on others to create independent space (“Autonomy through dependency”).

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## 2 Aims and outcomes of youth work

What are the aims – and anticipated outcomes – of ‘youth work’ at national, European and other transnational levels? Are they the same? If they are different, why, and do they complement each other?

By **Valentina Cuzzocrea**

The label ‘youth work’ has an incredible variety and, as emphasised by Howard Williamson in the background paper of the 2<sup>nd</sup> EYWC, the 1<sup>st</sup> EYWC in 2010 was actually meant to celebrate such a diversity, which remains uncontested: ‘something called ‘youth work’ has done very different things, at different times, in different contexts’ (2015). While moving towards the overall objective of the 2<sup>nd</sup> EYWC, i.e. reflecting on common ground in these activities, we address here the more specific issue of how aims of youth work are shaped and reshaped in the interaction of different actors /parties involved in putting it into practice, at the national, European and other transnational levels.

We start by acknowledging that in a European Council resolution (2010), member states were explicitly invited to:

- ‘promote different kinds of sustainable support for youth work’;
- ‘support and develop the role of youth work in implementing the renewed framework, especially the contribution of youth work to the objectives in the different action fields<sup>2</sup>’;
- ‘involve, where appropriate, local and regional authorities and actors to play an important role in developing, supporting and implementing youth work’;
- ‘enhance synergies and complementarity between initiatives of the European Union, the Council of Europe and other actors on local, regional, national and European level’.

It is therefore incontestably recognised that actors in charge of redefining youth work are found at different levels beside informality, and that efforts are elicited to interconnect these levels. If we reflect on the diversity of youth involved in youth work, for instance, without calling for national or supranational actors, we will see that over the years the potential of youth work has been referred particularly at youth at risk of economic, social and cultural disengagement, for example NEETs who may end up trapped into conditions

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<sup>2</sup> *These are: education and training, employment and entrepreneurship, health and well-being, participation, voluntary activities, social inclusion, youth and the world, creativity and culture.*

of long term unemployment. Especially in such conditions, youth work has been considered as an instrument for empowerment of the individual, a mean able to make a difference. However, this by any means excludes that other groups of youth may benefit from the learning experience of being engaged in youth work. In this sense, reference group remain open.

Yet, thinking only at how wide and diverse can be the groups of young people engaged in youth work is a stark simplification, and the picture easily get much more complex than this when it comes to include other levels. A call for a composite, multilevel participation is recognised in the mentioned Resolution, which states that:

*'Youth work is organised and delivered in different ways (by youth led organisations, organisations for youth, informal groups or through youth services and public authorities) and is given shape at local, regional, national and European level, dependent e.g. of the following elements:*

- *the community, historical, social and policy contexts where youth work takes place,*
- *the aim of including and empowering all children and young people, especially those with fewer opportunities,*
- *the involvement of youth workers and youth leaders, the organisations, services or providers, whether they are governmental or nongovernmental, youth-led or not,*
- *the approach or method used taking into account the needs of young people.*
- *in many Member States local and regional authorities also play a key role in supporting and developing local and regional youth work'.*

This poses the crucial question of how the work of these different actors can get together –and in conjunction with *all* eight fields of action! – to fulfil the aims associated with youth work. Can original aims get lost in the process? Can competing interests ever come into play? In what conditions?

Sticking to the spirit of the second EYWC, which focuses on finding common ground among youth work practices, the working groups under theme 2 might identify what characteristics of youth work make these activities useful and purposeful not only for *all youth engaged*, but more widely for *all parties* called to be engaged too. In 2012, Filip Coussée has suggested that 'a common feature of all [youth work] practices is the use of *methods of non formal education* (educational activities outside the formal education system) and the emphasis on *voluntary participation*', and that in matters of youth work there is agreement on a '*set of values and methods*' around Europe, which are: '*voluntary participation of young people; listening to the voice of young people; bringing young people together; connecting to young people's life-words; broadening young people's life world*' (2012: 84). These help making more visible the dimensions through which the broadest aim of youth work,

that is to provide opportunities of integration and inclusion for young people, take shape.

Therefore, an underlying tasks of workshops under theme 2 could be to discuss Coussée' identified commonalities in the set of values and methods of youth work, examine whether they can be said 'verified' at the different levels (national, transnational) and in different groups and parties engaged, at different levels, in youth work. These have been identified by the 2<sup>nd</sup> EYWC organisers in: (2.1) young people and youth workers, youth workers, policy makers, community, society; (2.2) middle class young people; vulnerable groups; young migrants; gender-related groups of young people (with the caveat that this list, in particular, is far from exhaustive); (2.3) those exposed to immediate impact and outcomes of youth work at different levels; (2.4) those in charge of elaborating purposes of youth work.

More generally, and perhaps more importantly, a core reflection on theme 2 could be to see whether we can go beyond Coussée's statements and explore if:

- a) other commonalities can be envisaged and added to his original list, especially for what concerns aims;
- b) any of the point found can be reformulated and readjusted in a way that makes them more powerful, or more useful, or more apt for effective policy making in the field;
- c) what risks, if any (e.g. un-authenticity, manipulation, un-effectiveness, creation of un-helping jargons) are entailed in such broad and multilevel collaborations, and how these may affect proposed aims.

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### 3 Patterns and practices of youth work

What are the various patterns and practices constituting ‘youth work’ that remain consistent with its objectives; in other words, what is the range of activity that may count as youth work, and where are the borders and the boundaries?

By **Marko Kovačić**

Youth work is an eclectic term encompassing large scope of activities of a social, cultural, educational or political nature both by, with and for young people. Due to vagueness of its nature, there is a trouble when its conceptualization and contextualization needed. Hence, various cultural, political and social backgrounds of different countries make this story even more complicated, as well as the fact that youth work can be practiced at local, regional, national, European and other transnational levels where different objectives and activities for achieving those objectives are needed.

In the EU youth work is defined as a national responsibility. Its regulation is not in the jurisdiction of the European Union. However, the EU does influence how it is practiced throughout Europe by employing the open method of coordination, meaning by providing guidelines and good practice examples, using the ‘peer-pressure’ method for comparing and improving. Thus, the EU actually often shapes youth work practice in (any) national context. Even so, various countries emphasize different aspects of youth work (see [Table 1](#)).





**Table 1: Youth work definitions in 10 EU countries.**

COUNTRY	THE CONCEPT OF YOUTH WORK
Austria	Extracurricular youth work with emphasis on leisure time activities and prevention
Estonia	Youth work is the creation of circumstances for developmental activities of youth that enable them to act outside their family, curriculum education and job of their own free will.
Germany	Offers for young people that support their development by picking up their interests allowing codetermination, fostering self-definition and encouraging social responsibility and participation
Greece	Education and welfare services to support young people's safe and healthy transition to adult life, as well as leisure time activities
Ireland	Planned program of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation, and which is complementary to their formal academic or vocational educational training and provided primarily by voluntary youth work organizations
Italy	Initiatives that favour the access of young people to the labour market
The Netherlands	Supportive and reactive services, as well as broad leisure oriented offers
Norway	Giving young people an interesting and meaningful leisure time and opportunities of personal development through participation and social interaction
Romania	Any activity organised to improve the necessary conditions for the social and professional development of youth according to their necessities and wishes
Spain	Activities of a social, cultural, educational or political nature with and for young people

*Source: The Socio-economic Scope of Youth Work in Europe, 2008*

According to a document *Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union* there are three core features that define youth work distinct from other policy fields:

1. A focus on young people,
2. Personal development,
3. Voluntary participation

However, those features still do not give us clear guidelines what youth work is and what it is not. A distinction between *youth work* and *working with youth* might be helpful in order to understand better what this concept is all about. While former term includes all activities that where young people are mostly recipients such as teaching in schools, various trainings and lectures for young people or police work, latter puts stronger emphasize on collaboration between young people and content providers suggesting young people are more than just receivers but more of active participants of the process. In other words, youth work are all those activities that have a process dimension of empowering young people for active role in their communities where this process is opened for their initiatives. Due to that, there are several broad clusters of youth work recognized among the European countries, namely awareness raising and campaigning; information and counselling; international development and civic volunteering; leisure-based courses and activities; project activities (self-organised); street work and outreach work (Working with..., 2014). Thus, in the current practice arena, youth work takes on many forms including detached and outreach settings, youth clubs, award schemes, information and counselling services in addition to targeted work with specific interest or identity groups (Ingram and Harris 2001).

Yet, this still does not offer straightforward yardstick when to name some activity youth work. Obviously, it is impossible to cover all activities within youth work, however there are some principles in line with the idea of youth work:

- Empowers young people for active participation in society, politics and equips them with skills useful for labour market
- It is focused on the process more than the result
- Activities adequate for young people (fun for participants)
- Evidence and community based
- Young people are participating on the voluntary base
- Interdisciplinary and a multisectoral approach
- Professionalism is a requirement, but a friendly relationship between youth worker and young people is advisable
- Uses non-formal education and creates a space for informal learning
- It is flexible (adjustable to new circumstances)

In order to sum up, perhaps it is the best to quote Baizerman (1996) who argues that youth work praxis has many forms worldwide and it is therefore necessary to accept this variety and not to urge a single model. Neverthe-

less, if youth work described in line with Smith's understanding (2002) as an activity focused on young people, emphasizing voluntary participation and relationship, committing to association, being friendly and informal and acting with integrity, being concerned with the education and, more broadly, being concerned with the welfare of young people, it is unlikely we will be wrong.

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## 4 Youth work and other work with young people

Where are the connections between ‘youth work’ and wider work with young people (formal education, training and employment, enterprise and entrepreneurship, health, housing, justice and more); how can and should such connections be made, while maintaining boundaries, through principles and ‘distinction’?

By *Lihong Huang*

### THE SCOPE AND BOUNDARIES OF YOUTH WORK

Historically, youth work evolves from social work and youth movement in European countries as it operates in the middle of “tension between young people as an active social force on the one hand, and the need to preserve the social system on the other” (Morciano et al. 2015). Youth work has constantly shown “itself as a social practice mediating between private aspirations of young people and public expectations from the established society” (EKCYC Youth Policy Topics: Youth Work <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/history-of-youth-work>).

By definition and in practice, youth work as activities based on non-formal and informal learning processes organised by, with and for young people usually works between, beside and/or outside of all other youth relevant formal sectors in our society (EKCYC Youth Policy Topics: Youth Work <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/youth-work1>).

### THE CONNECTION BETWEEN YOUTH WORK AND THE EMPLOYMENT SECTOR AND BETWEEN FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING/EDUCATION

#### *At policy level:*

According to EU Strategy of Youth 2010-2018, youth work plays “a supporting role” to the collaboration between education, employment, inclusion and health policies and enhancing skills acquisition of young people “outside the classroom” or “out-of-school” (EU 2009). This appears to have set up the boundaries or limitations of youth work to be *only* between and outside the formal sectors.

In Europe on average, less than one third of youth population (ages 15-30) are members of various organizations (EKCYC 2011; EACEA/EC 2011), among

which mostly creational groups and religious organisations (Eurostat 2009). The average rate has been 9% in the years from 2004-2011 in the EU-27 of young people (ages 15-24) participating in out-of school non-formal learning activities (European Commission 2012). Meanwhile, youth political and civic engagement in recent Europe witnesses a decrease of membership in formal organisations (or conventional form of participation) and an increase in informal (or unconventional) participation in multiple platforms (EACEA/EC 2011).

Therefore, theoretically, about one third of the European youth participate in 'organised' youth work, which leaves the majority 'non-membership' youth to participate in youth work at 'random'.

Very often, carrying out youth work outside of any form of organisation entails challenge as it heavily depends personal interest, voluntary work and resource (time, information, material facilities) available for organising the activities. This has substantially limited the scope of reaching young people and the impact of youth work in isolated episodes and fragments.

### ***At practice level:***

Youth work in Europe has three core features, i.e. "a focus on young people, personal development, and voluntary participation" (Dunne et al. 2014). These features define both the practical scope of youth work (i.e. all young people and their personal development) and the boundaries (or limited reach) of youth work in practice (i.e. voluntary participation). In the implementation of EU Strategy for Youth 2010-2018, these three features are further elaborated as essential and definitive features of youth work in practice: "young people choose to participate; the work takes place where the young people are; and it recognises the young person and youth workers as partners in a learning process" (European Commission, [http://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/implementation/work\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/implementation/work_en.htm)).

The definitive feature (or operating principle) of 'voluntary participation' (or 'young people choose to participate') in youth work significantly has significantly limited the both the scope and impact of youth work in practice. For example, on average 12.8% of European youth (EU28) at age of 18-24 have left the formal education system without completion upper secondary education and this rate is highest at 20% and above in Southern European countries (European Commission 2013). Research evidence shows that early school leaving (or dropouts or incompleteness) has huge precarious implications and complications for young people transition into labour markets and adult life and youth work has been found to have positive effect on young people of (or at-risk of) school dropouts (European Commission 2013). At this level of education, early school leaving (or dropout or incompleteness) seems to be an option of 'personal choice' or 'voluntary action' and which in many cases,

signals the end of responsibility for the formal education system, the start of voluntary youth work. However, for being voluntary, fragmented and very often under-resourced, although proven positive and effective, youth work can only reach a small fragment of this youth group.

### **Conclusion on policies and practices:**

Playing a ‘supporting role’ outside the formal sectors, youth work appears to work among, within and outside of various boundaries both of its own and of other formal sectors, which has substantially limited the scope and impact of youth work. If we want to fully exploit the benefit of youth work carried out in various locations and regions in Europe, the only way forward is breaking boundaries both in policies and in practices. Instead of working outside the formal sectors to catch school dropouts or unemployed youth by isolated and separated episodes, youth work should systematically work *in collaboration* and *with* formal sectors. Policies should encourage ‘bridge making’ from both ways, i.e. formal sectors should both collaborate with each other *and* reach out (or invite in) youth work; youth work can be carried out both outside and inside a school/an employment office/a work place; and youth workers should be able to work beside and work with teachers and employers. It is completely doable. There are already successful practices in Europe of close collaboration between formal sectors and youth work both in and outside of schools on youth of (or at-risk of) early school leaving (European Commission 2013) and both in and outside of working places and formal schools on unemployed youth (SALTO 2011).

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## 5 The recognition of youth work

How can youth work secure recognition (beyond the youth field) for both its distinctive and collaborative practice and contribution to the lives of young people and the communities in which they live?

By **Dora Giannaki**

### HOW CAN YOUTH WORK SECURE RECOGNITION?

The first attempt for the articulation of a comprehensive strategy for the promotion of the recognition of youth work has been made in 2004 when the partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission published the joint working paper *Pathways towards validation and recognition of education, training & learning in the youth field* (Council of Europe and European Commission Partnership, 2004). Since then, there have been important policy developments, in both the education sector and the youth field, putting recognition of youth work on the European political agenda. During the same period a variety of instruments and other relevant tools have been developed, including the *European Portfolio for Youth Leaders and Youth Workers* (2006), an initiative of the Council of Europe for the recognition of youth leaders and youth workers' experience and skills based on European quality standards; and the *Youthpass* (2007), a tool of the European Commission for the validation and recognition of non-formal education/learning in the youth field within the framework of the Youth in Action Programme (SALTO-Youth, 2012: 37, 39).

A revised strategy (and a detailed Plan of Action) for the promotion of political and societal recognition of youth work has been proposed in 2011 by the EU-CoE partnership in their new joint publication *Pathways 2.0 towards recognition of non-formal learning/education and of youth work in Europe* (European Commission and the Council of Europe Partnership, 2011). In short, the *Pathways Paper* encourages the consolidation of existing developments and it proposes ten recommendations for action, including: reinforcement of political processes on the European level by a joint strategy called 'the Strasbourg process'; greater visibility of youth work and youth organizations; quality assurance and professional support to those working in the youth field (e.g. high quality training and educational programmes); building knowledge about the non-formal learning/education in youth work; further development and better transferability of the existing tools and instruments; involvement of stakeholders from the political and social sectors but, most importantly, from the labour market (e.g. establishment of strategic partnerships); linking youth to the lifelong learning strategy (European Commission and the Council of Europe Partnership, 2013).



Although all the proposed areas of action are necessary in order to foster the recognition of youth work, it seems that the most crucial step towards this direction is to communicate more effectively the added value of youth work activities for young people, the economy and the wider society. As the European Youth Forum has concluded, '[t]he emphasis on the impact of youth work on the individual and societal levels should be strengthened' and 'the debate should not only focus on *demanding* recognition but also *providing* worth' (European Youth Forum, 2014: 7). Similarly the *Pathways Paper* stressed that '[t]o increase trust and credibility the youth field should strongly highlight the positive outcome and impact of relevant activities both at the level of individual young people and for society itself' (European Commission and Council of Europe Partnership, 2013: 31).

But in order to inform society about the role of youth work and the contributions of non-formal learning in the youth field, we should first define (and decide between us) which are the strongest assets of youth work. Put differently, we should be able to answer, in a convincing way the following question: *why does youth work deserve recognition?*

## SO, WHY RECOGNITION?

A substantial body of international research has confirmed the various benefits of youth work for the young people themselves but also for the broader societies (Dunne et al, 2014: 137). First of all, youth work facilitates the smooth transition of young people from childhood to adulthood since youth organisations provide young people the space for building interactions, 'room for role experimentation, the opportunity to play (continuing childhood needs) and to make relationships' (Eisenstadt, 1963). Thus, the most important contribution of youth work is related to its educational dimension, that is, the learning that takes place in youth work practice, which usually has the form of 'non-formal learning' since it happens outside a formal institutional context (schools, universities, training sites) (SALTO-Youth, 2012: 14). Youth work by engaging young people in a wide range of activities in non-formal settings (associations, clubs, voluntary activities, international exchange programmes), enables them to build up 'soft skills' – such as personality characteristics (e.g. self-confidence, responsibility, discipline etc.), interpersonal skills, language abilities, leadership skills, team-work spirit, problem-solving, organisational/ planning skills, etc. – which are extremely valuable for their general personal development and their social interaction (European Youth Forum, 2003: 4; SALTO-Youth, 2012: 20).

Among the most significant contributions of youth work, which should become more visible to society in order to promote societal recognition, one could distinguish the following (the list is indicative only):

- **Youth work improves young people's employability** given that certain skills and attitudes that young people acquire in non-formal environments tend to play an increasingly important role on the labour market. Indeed, these more practical 'soft skills' – which cannot easily be learned in formal education – seem to be as important as 'hard skills' (formal qualifications) (European Youth Forum, 2003: 7). According to a recent study, youth work contributes to the employability of young people by: 'Developing skills that are demanded on the labour market; Developing specific skills as well as behaviours that are required to secure a job; Gaining an experience in practical application of one's skills and competences in a real environment; Supporting orientation as well as job searching and matching' (Dunne et al, 2014: 146).
- **Youth work can contribute to education and training, supporting and empowering disadvantaged groups.** Due to the fact that learning in the non-formal environments of youth work is more attractive to young people – because participation in youth activities *is voluntary and learning more enjoyable* – *youth organizations are able to reach out* much more young people than the institutions of formal education, and from a wide range of social-economic backgrounds. This is very important, because youth work can provide young people – especially those who did not find their luck in the formal education system, who are usually young people with fewer opportunities – an alternative learning pathway. According to the *T-Kit on Social Inclusion*, 'young people who have left school early or who are in precarious situations in society could benefit from non-formal education as a second chance that could have a strong impact in their lives' (Council of Europe and European Commission Partnership, 2003: 39). In addition, some studies have suggested that youth work by improving non-cognitive skills can help disadvantaged young people to improve their later academic outcomes, while youth work activities – due to their positive and supporting environment – can play a significant role in the prevention of early school leaving (Dunne et al, 2014: 143-144). Taking into account that in 2014, 7.5 million young Europeans between 15 and 24 were not in employment, education and training (European Commission, 2014:1), as well as the risks that this exposes the young persons to – including disaffection, youth-offending, mental and physical health problems, and poor future employment prospects (Eurofound, 2012: 2) – it becomes obvious that youth work can be an invaluable tool for dealing with this difficult situation.
- **Youth work can foster civic participation and democratic citizenship, essential to the development of society.** Young people through their participation in youth organisations, clubs and associations learn key aspects of democratic participation. As stressed by the European Youth Forum, '[y]outh organizations' engagement provides individuals and groups with a necessary set of skills and attitudes, leading to a healthier democracy and more peaceful society' (European Youth Forum, 2014: 6). Furthermore,

due to the international dimension of some youth work activities (such as, international volunteering, international youth exchange and mobility programmes, etc.), youth work can provide young persons with the opportunity to develop a range of important intercultural skills and attitudes (including intercultural awareness, cross-cultural communication, language skills, conflict resolution, etc.) which foster understanding, tolerance and respect, while combats xenophobia, racism and other similar phenomena (e.g. Anti-semitism, Islamophobia). In a period of sharp radicalization of young people, when protest politics gain ground over more traditional forms of political participation among the young, youth work can play a key role in educating young people in positive participation. In other words, by cultivating the democratic ethos in practice, youth work has the potential not only to empower young people to actively participate in social and political life but also to prevent them from involving themselves in negative forms of political participation, such as riots, violent episodes, anti-social and anomic behaviour and other extreme political activities.

Overall, youth work secures the smooth and healthy transition of young people from childhood to adulthood; the crucial point here is that in antithesis to other sectors of policy (e.g. employment) which tend to view this transition as a problematic stage of the life course (that is, as a period of ‘storm and stress’) and the young people ‘as a problem’ – or even ‘as both “dangerous” and a “threat” – the youth sector sees youth as a potential positive period and the young people ‘as in problem’ and ‘in need of protection’ (France, 2007: 23).

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## 6 Education and training for quality

What kinds of education and training should be established for the development of professional youth work practice and ensuring quality and standards? Are there minimum requirements that need to be advocated to ensure sufficient professionalism?

by *Sladjana Petkovic* and *Manfred Zentner*

Recent evidence points to the fact that there is growing recognition of the value of youth work in fostering both social and human capital, while at the same time it suffers from increasing pressure to concentrate on vulnerable and at-risk young people and to both produce successful outcomes and evidence of that success.

The EU Youth Strategy (2009), along the same lines, states that 'despite being 'non-formal', youth work needs to be professionalised further' supporting the direction shift of youth policy from being *values driven* and based on leisure activities for young people towards more *targeted approaches* which unsurprisingly results in more formal professionalisation and the professionalising of youth workers in the sector in order to meet multiple challenges.

Main challenge for the European perspective is to accept the fact that no common definition of youth work exists and that youth work is not in all countries recognised as a profession. However, the status of youth workers in Europe is increasingly becoming understood as a distinct profession even though they may not have been formally trained (in many countries volunteers are the main actors in youth work). The literature (IARD 2001 Part IV: 134) points to the different institutional settings and traditions of youth work which are reflected by diversity of education and training routes into youth work. For example, in some countries professional (in the sense of employed) youth workers are trained social pedagogues, in others social workers or educators/pedagogues. Thus, the issues here is not the way into work, but the intensity and quality young people as target group of youth work are specified topic in the education/training. For volunteers working in the youth field the situation is even more diverse.

Overall, while tendency of gaining better recognition represents one of main opportunities of youth work as a profession in the EU (EC 2014:184), the lack of clear frameworks in terms of the professional development of youth workers (including volunteers) has been recognized as one of its main weaknesses.

## YOUTH WORK REGIMES

A hypothetical comparative typology of national constellations of youth work has been created within the European framework (IARD 2001: Part IV 138)<sup>3</sup>, representing four types of, so called - 'Regimes of Youth Work'. These reflect similarities and convergence among the Member States concerned in regards to their dominant concepts of youth work and related objectives, but also methods, issues, settings, and education and training pathways.

- **Universalistic/Paternalistic**

In Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland) youth work is developed as a civic infrastructure addressing young people as citizens, and providing universal access (open youth work) encouraging participatory structures. At the same time the state has a strong interest in educational objectives (especially in health prevention) where majority of innovation happens through peer education. Youth work is mainly focused on Leisure, Counselling and Health /Prevention, and implemented through following action fields: Youth clubs, Youth associations, Cultural youth work, Sports and Recreational activities, Participation, Unemployed youth, Prevention of social exclusion, Integration of immigrant youth, Youth information. Education and training systems for youth workers is marked with dominance of higher education (mainly social pedagogy), and parallel recognition of informal pathways (training for voluntary workers by non-profit organizations, and Church) resulting in Social Workers, Social Pedagogues, Cultural Animators, and finally professional Youth Workers as main 'practitioners' (concepts).

- **Liberal/Community based**

Community-related approaches and 'open youth work' method are (hopefully) still important aspects of youth work identity in the UK and Ireland. In these countries characterised as liberal welfare states youth work has been developed in somewhat 'universalistic way' and based on (at least so far) a high commitment of local authorities to provide an infrastructure of youth clubs. The lack of national support and interest enables a strong community-orientation. Main focus of youth work is on Leisure, Community Work, and Marginalised Youth, implemented through Youth associations Youth centres, Personal social services. Education and training routes into youth work in this context lead mainly through higher education (youth and community work degrees) resulting in professional Youth Workers being involved in youth work practice. Still, there is also a strong focus on broadening access to education.

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<sup>3</sup> Based on Esping-Andersens typology of welfare regimes (1990), and later model of Duncan Gallie and Serge Paugam (2000).

- **Conservative/Corporatist**

In countries with a conservative welfare state (Germany, Austria, France, Belgium, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, The Netherlands) a more corporatist structure of youth work can be found. While, on the one side there is strong interest of the state of providing socialisation towards the standard biography, the sociopedagogical aspects are as important as in Scandinavian countries but with a different focus. On the other side this objective is delegated to voluntary actors which to a high extent are incorporated into local, regional and national administration. The context of youth work is focused on Leisure, Counselling, and Marginalised Youth, while main action fields are: Extracurricular youth education, Open youth work/clubs, Sports, Target group orientated youth work, Youth associations and participation, Youth social work, International youth work, and Youth counseling. Educational pathways into youth work lead through: Social Work (and Cultural Animation) qualifications on professional education, and higher education level. As the result, apart from the professional Youth Workers, Social Pedagogues, and Cultural Animators are mainly involved in 'youth work'.

- **Mediterranean/Sub-institutionalized<sup>4</sup>**

In the South of Europe (Italy, Portugal, Greece, Spain, Malta) a clear responsibility of youth work (as part of local youth policies) can be identified through the provision of counselling, support and even training and employment opportunities. The focus of youth work is therefore mainly on Youth Transitions, Youth Information, Youth unemployment, Prevention of Social exclusion/marginalized groups, Counselling, and Leisure. Context and main issues addressed by youth work is linked to recognition of the increase of risks of social exclusion connected to rising youth unemployment and the mistrust of young people towards bureaucratic structures of employment service and training institutions. Main action fields of youth work are: Education, Cultural youth work, Leisure time orientated youth work, Youth information, Career services, Open youth work, Social care, Sports, International youth work, Youth associations and participation, Recreation and leisure services. Education and training pathways are marked with process of development of voluntary (non-governmental organizations and associations), as well as professional courses (regional professional schools for socio-cultural animators) and higher education level (degree in Social work and social education like in Spain). Apart from Youth Policy Professionals, 'youth work' is mainly delivered by Social Workers, Cultural Animators, Social Pedagogues, and Social Educators.

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<sup>4</sup> Whilst Esping-Andersen referred to southern European countries as conservative (due to the corporatist role of the Catholic or Orthodox Church) Gallie and Paugam rather stress the considerable loss of (sociocultural) relevance and influence of the Church which has led to a deficit or vacuum of regulation (2000).

Despite the context, there is a general need for broadening the access to qualification and professional youth work, since it has been characterised by a dividing line between professionals and volunteers in many cases. At the same time it is based on principles of participation and depends on credibility as a life-world oriented social institution. In this perspective it is apparently crucial that access to education and training, i.e. to qualifications and professional status in youth work, is not restricted. Therefore, European engagement in developing youth work and respective education and training must not neglect the potentials and experiences developed in this contexts by imposing professional standards taking their universal validity for granted.

Furthermore, independent of the structure of youth work in the countries and the different regimes, approaches and methods, it is obvious that quality youth work and certain standards are the basic. And these standards have to be reflected in youth work education and training. The Council of Europe strives for these standards in youth work and in youth work training since a long time. Offers from study sessions to long time Train the Trainer programmes focus on the further education of youth workers (volunteers and professionals alike).

Also the European Union aims with its Youth in Action Programmes (now in the Erasmus+ programme) on a professionalisation of youth workers by training programmes. The SALTO resource centers focus on exchange of good practise and opportunities for training and job experiences (especially regarding YiA activities). The Council of the European Union resolution on youth work invites the Member States and the Commission to:

- Enhance the quality of youth work, the capacity building and competence development of youth workers and youth leaders and the recognition of non-formal learning in youth work, by providing learning mobility experiences for youth workers and youth leaders.
- Develop and support the development of user-friendly European tools (e.g. Youthpass) for both, independent assessment and self-assessment, as well as instruments for the documentation of competences of youth workers and youth leaders which would help to recognise and evaluate the quality of youth work in Europe.
- Provide sufficient and appropriate European platforms such as databases, peer-learning activities, and conferences for the continuous exchange on innovative research, policies, approaches, practices and methods.

The Council conclusions on the contribution of quality youth work to the development, well-being and social inclusion of young people (2013/C 168/03) identifies not only priorities for quality youth work but also focuses on the prerequisites of this quality. And among these basic conditions is also the training of youth workers. Also the expert group on quality of youth work mentions education and training of youth workers as one of the basic items of good youth work.



But until now, no common ground for quality of education and training of those involved in youth work as volunteers or professional youth workers is defined.

That youth workers should have (at least basic) training to ensure quality standards in youth work seems to be out of question; but – as shown in the latest EC study on the value of youth work – not in all countries exist minimum standards of education for youth workers or specific training courses for youth work.

The newest developments in targeted and general youth work ask for ever more training and new skills of youth workers that have to be acquired somehow: be it career counselling, health education, intercultural competences or knowledge of various religions and ideologies to counteract radicalisation based violence. It might ask for new methods for approaching young people in the digitalised world, or for interaction. And it asks for new skills and competences concerning structures, laws and administration.

The question would be: What are the standards in youth worker training and education?

Which elements have to be involved, which way is it provided, how theory and practice are combined and what kind of certification it provides is unclear and open to discussion.

A main question is therefore: Where commonalities in different forms of youth work are, that can define basic elements of youth work training.

Another approach could be - all youth workers should be trained in all forms (youth clubs, organisations, information etc.) and then specialise in one?

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## 7 The value of youth work

How can political and public authorities be persuaded, beyond the rhetoric and the exhortations of the youth field, of the value of 'youth work' in order to support its consistent development and delivery?

By **Areg Tadevosyan**

There are not very many materials on elaborating this topic in the open sources, so the solution suggested to approach the topic, is to work through RIGHT QUESTIONS. In order to set a right question you need to have a part of the answer yourself, therefore tackling this topic through formulation of questions could be very beneficial.

First part of the right question is hidden behind the formulation of this workshop itself. It is reflected in the part which is formulated as “be persuaded”. Why somebody should be persuaded to do something in general. There can be several reasons behind, but the most widespread ones are:

- a) The one to “be persuaded” does not want to support the given sphere, due to some concrete reasons. It HAS the resources, but has conscious or unconscious reasons not to do so. In some of the countries for example the youth work sector is seen as an incubator of problems and revolutionary intentions, this can potentially destabilize the situation, which is already difficult without them. It is important to understand why “political and public authorities” are not feeling like supporting the youth work sector. What is the potential danger/problem that they can see in doing so? How is it possible to change this situation?
- b) Another possible and quite obvious reason can be that “political and public authorities” DO NOT HAVE enough resources to do so. They wish but they cannot due to mere absence/lack of resources. This reason is also quite realistic, in almost all of the countries present in this convention, authorities are in constant “crisis fighting” state and are trying to raise the efficiency of expenditure cutting. Here the possible right questions could be: how to enter the priority list of the given authority to be sure that you will not be “cut” and also the support will be even increased? One of the possible solutions for states in this situation could be for instance providing opportunities to the youth work sector to support itself (e.g. social entrepreneurship support schemes).
- c) A sub-solution for the point (b) can also be gaining support from consolidation with other sectors. Maybe there are also possibilities of mobilization

of other stakeholders having resources to diversify the support, such as private-public cooperation? Youth work serves communities. If it really provides to the community the added value that it suggests, then the community itself should become the supporting and sustaining actor for this sector. How can youth work gain support from the local authorities on community level and community members themselves?

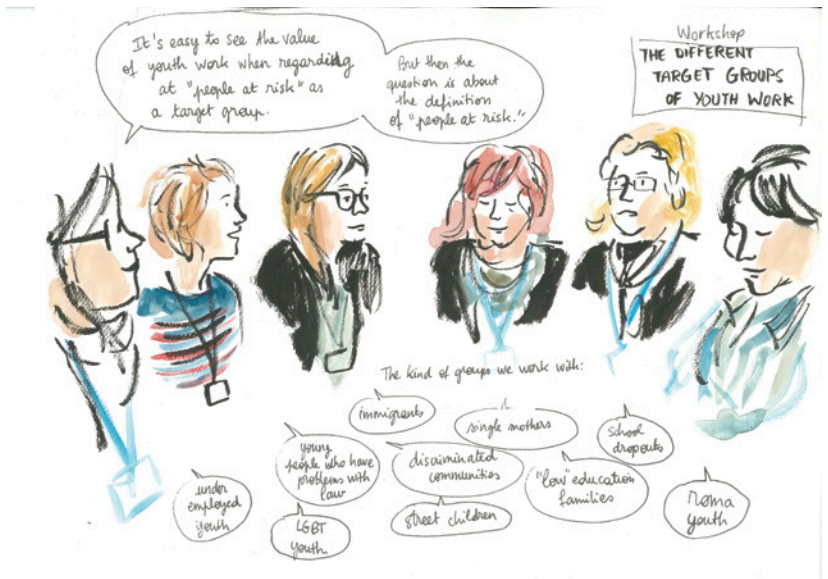
The other end of the problematic situation could be noticed under the “beyond the rhetoric and the exhortations of the youth field” part of the statement. In most of the cases the youth sector thinks that it does “whatever is possible” in the “best way” but it does not receive the support it deserves. This is really not right in many cases, therefore the next set of QUESTIONS could be elaborated on the “other end of the stick”, namely on the part of possible improvements of the approach of the youth sector to the given problematic. Here as well there can be several aspects to be addressed.

- d) The first aspect that can be interesting to review is somehow not present in the statement of the problem of the theme, but is still important. How is it possible to ensure that the “political and public authorities” are themselves stepping “beyond the rhetoric” when supporting the youth sector? If we look at the most of the national political documents, strategies, policies and the like, as well as the international political agendas that the national governments are signatory to assure, youth work, youth policy and youth in general seem to be among their main concerns, we often hear phrases like “youth is the future”, that “investment in youth is the best investment” etc. However, in many cases this dedication expressed is not going “beyond the rhetoric”. So a possible QUESTION in this case is: How can all the stakeholders in youth sector assure that these statements are taken good care of and a real support and work is done behind?
- e) Next aspect of the problematic worth underlining is similar and connected to the sub point (a) where we spoke about the agendas of the “supported” and “supporter” sectors. Here it is very important to concentrate on the “natural antagonism” of the youth work sector to the policy and programs of the public bodies. The youth sector itself is developing based on the assumption that there is a certain lack or deficiency in the sphere of public services, policies and programs which should be covered, addressed, lobbied and corrected by the youth sector. This “by definition” position of antagonism is creating a corresponding vision of the sector by the public bodies themselves. Even in cases when the public body is announcing a “decentralization” and “delegation” approach, still “subconscious” antagonism will be there affecting the efficiency and extent of the support provided. Here the right question might be: How to position youth work sector so that becomes a natural partner to the “supporter” bodies, preserving its watchdog and monitoring functions? How to provide a situation

when the agendas and activities of the youth work sector are in line and complementary with the policies and programs of the public bodies and both of them are working in cooperation for common good?

- f) Another aspect to be carefully studied should be the “beyond rhetoric” one. How is it possible to prove to the public bodies and (in case of the most countries also general public) that the results of the youth work are tangible and measurable? How is it possible to regularly create and update an evidence base on the results/products of the youth work, which would be a “language” understandable to public bodies? How to manage both to concentrate on “doing the things” but meanwhile having a possibility to translate the results to the two different languages of the public bodies and general public? The recognition schemes on various levels and for different stakeholders is a peculiar part of this aspect as well.

It is clear that the set of questions and aspects studied here are not all inclusive and universal for the wide range of the realities present in the Convention. But hopefully they can serve as a base for directing our discussions here towards a better understanding of the dialogue and cooperation between the youth work sector and public bodies, as well as better support of youth work sector in the general frameworks of the public policies and programs in our very turbulent times and transforming societies.





Declaration of the  
2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth  
Work Convention

# Making a world of difference

This Declaration, prepared within the framework of the Belgian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, is addressed to the Member States of the Council of Europe, the multilateral organisations (the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations), other European institutions, and political structures concerned with young people at national, regional and local level, the youth work field and young people themselves.

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## → The 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention

The 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention, five years after the first, brought together some 500 participants active in the youth work field. They listened to plenary speeches and presentations, took part in 24 working groups and 20 site visits that created the opportunity to look ‘under the hood’ at youth work practice that, for them, might be innovative and different, provoking more profound reflection on their own perspectives and practice.

There are multiple claims about the contribution of youth work to the development of young people and society. The keynote speeches and discussions captured the following dimensions of the role and impact of youth work:

- Advancing democracy, human rights, citizenship, European values, participation, equal opportunities and voice
- Promoting peace-building, tolerance, intercultural learning; combating radicalisation, preventing extremism
- Dealing with social and personal ambiguities and change
- Strengthening positive identities and belonging, agency and autonomy
- Developing ‘soft’ skills, competences and capabilities, cultivating navigational capacities and broadening personal horizons
- Enabling transitions to ‘successful’ adulthood, particularly education to working life
- Cementing social inclusion and cohesion; upholding civil society
- Engaging in collaborative practice, partnership working and cross-sectorial cooperation

The 1<sup>st</sup> European Youth Work Declaration celebrated and gave direction to this *diversity* of opportunity, action and experience that may be positively attributed to youth work. Since then, however, the development of youth work in different parts of Europe has been varied. While youth work remains supported, politically and financially, in some countries, it has fallen victim to austerity measures and political indifference in others. Sometimes the claims



made for youth work appear to be unconvincing. Youth work, as a result, continues to face challenges of funding, recognition and credibility.

The objective of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Convention was to identify the *common ground* on which all ‘youth work’ stands and its relation to wider agendas of concern to public policy and issues facing young people. In the context of ‘what brings us together is stronger than what divides us’, the expectation from the Convention was to give a new impetus to the political and institutional debate around youth work in Europe, in order to foster further development and stronger recognition.

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## ➔ The social situation of young people in Europe

In many different ways, young people from all backgrounds live in precarious circumstances. Some face pronounced, extended and multiple challenges. All need some level of support, and support in strengthening their autonomy. While enjoying new opportunities enabled through new technologies and digital media, the expansion of educational opportunities, access to information and more, they also face risk and uncertainty. These include qualification inflation, rising unemployment, conflict and war, threats to mental and physical well-being, debt and poverty, social inequality and exclusion, and a lack of suitable housing. There have been simultaneous changes in social and political participation, the scale of early school leaving, inter-generational relations, unintended consequences of austerity and migration, and a growth in extremist perspectives and occasionally behaviour. Youth work in its many forms is often linked to these issues in policy narratives about raising awareness, prevention strategies, and the development and implementation of solutions.

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## ➔ Youth work – diversity and reality

There is certainly no easy path to finding common ground. Contemporary youth work practice encapsulates street work, open work, project and issue based work, self-organised activity through youth organisations, youth information, exchanges and more. Historically, as the Youth Partnership histories of youth work clearly convey, the origins and trajectories of youth work have been anchored in different ways, with different priorities and goals. The roots of youth work in western and eastern Europe were underpinned by very different values. Youth work has been conceptualised in many different ways. Political commitment to youth work in different Member States has varied

considerably and sometimes ebbed and flowed dramatically. The structure and delivery of youth work has taken different forms, through religious organisations, municipalities and independent NGOs. Political recognition of youth work has taken many forms, sometimes through sufficient and sustainable funding, other times through the attachment of youth work to wider youth policy agendas, the strengthening of the status of youth workers or the professionalization and accreditation of youth work practitioners.

Within this diversity, which in some respects should be celebrated, the quest for common ground may appear to be elusive, yet it is an imperative task if the role of youth work is to be better defined, its distinctive contribution communicated, and its connections with, and place within, wider policy priorities clarified. It was with these tasks that the youth workers, youth policy makers and youth researchers who attended the Convention were challenged.

A strong consensus on the role of youth work did, indeed, remain elusive. However, there was broad agreement concerning the contributions that can be made by youth work both independently and collaboratively.

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## ➔ An overall vision for youth work in Europe

Youth work is about cultivating the imagination, initiative, integration, involvement and aspiration of young people. Its principles are that it is educative, empowering, participative, expressive and inclusive. Through activities, playing and having fun, campaigning, the information exchange, mobility, volunteering, association and conversation, it fosters their understanding of their place within, and critical engagement with their communities and societies. Youth work helps young people to discover their talents, and develop the capacities and capabilities to navigate an ever more complex and challenging social, cultural and political environment. Youth work supports and encourages young people to explore new experiences and opportunities; it also enables them to recognise and manage the many risks they are likely to encounter. In turn, this produces a more integrated and positive attachment to their own identities and futures as well as to their societies, contributing purposefully to wider political and policy concerns around young people not in education, training and employment ('NEET'), health risk lifestyles, lack of civic responsibility and, currently, extremism.

Youth work engages with young people on their terms and on their 'turf', in response to their expressed and identified needs, in their own space or in spaces created for youth work practice. Youth work can also take place in others contexts (such as schools or prisons) but engagement with it needs to remain on a voluntary basis.

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## → Youth work – distinction and intrinsic challenges

### 1. AIMS AND ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

The common ground of youth work is twofold. First, it is concerned with creating *spaces* for young people. Second, it provides *bridges* in their lives.

Both elements are fundamentally aimed at supporting the personal development of young people and strengthening their involvement in decision-making processes at local, regional, national and European levels. They are also focused on fostering ‘civic spirit’ and shared responsibilities among young people through the use of fun, creative non-formal learning activities.

Beyond creating autonomous spaces for youth work practice, youth work is also concerned with enabling young people to create their own spaces and opening spaces that are missing in other areas – such as schools, training, and labour markets. Similarly, youth work plays a bridging role in supporting young people’s social integration, especially young people at risk of social exclusion. Youth work also provides bridging support and advocacy in other contexts in young people’s lives.

There is pressure to specify and measure these and other outcomes of youth work. Attention should be given to outcomes and impact where they can be measured, but youth work should continue to focus on the processes and the needs of young people, remaining outcomes informed and not outcomes led. The Convention emphasised that youth work contributes to the development of attitudes and values in young people as much as more tangible skills and competences.

### 2. EMERGING PRACTICE

Youth work has always adapted to a range of circumstances and changing trends while remaining true to its core principles. The common ground facing contemporary youth work practice throughout Europe has to embrace at least two current challenges.

First, young people are increasingly engaging with new technologies and digital media. There is clearly a role for online youth work practice, in terms of exploiting a new space for youth work in a meaningful way, supporting digital literacy and enabling young people to deal with some of the associated risks. The practice implications for youth workers lie in new competencies required and new forms of boundary maintenance in relationships with young people.

Secondly, the increasing cultural diversity across Europe means that youth work practice has become more focused on the integration of young people and supporting intercultural learning. Critical practice elements for youth work include enabling young people to explore and build their own identities, attuning communication and information to culture and family contexts, and fostering inclusion while respecting cultural traditions and differences.

### 3. THE QUALITY OF YOUTH WORK PRACTICE

Irrespective of who delivers youth work – paid or voluntary – that delivery has to be of high quality. In order to support and sustain the provision of quality youth work, there was agreement that the following measures need to be established.

There needs to be a core framework of quality standards for youth work responsive to national contexts, including competence models for youth workers, and accreditation systems for prior experience and learning. Further, there always needs to be an appropriate balance between the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and application of practical skills. To this end, training programmes need to demonstrate suitable mechanisms for ensuring the development of reflective practice (praxis).

Training provision should correspond to the realities of youth work at different levels, adopt creative methods such as peer learning and exchanging good practice. It should ensure responsiveness to trends and changing circumstances in young people's lives, such as technology and migration (as discussed above), as well as building capacity amongst youth workers for intercultural communication and language skills.

As youth work engages more with other sectors working with young people, there is an emerging need for cross-sectorial education and training for youth professionals in general.

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## Youth work – connections and extrinsic challenges

### 4. WORKING TOGETHER

Youth work does and can address many social issues but seeks to balance this with more individualised questions of personal development and change. There were concerns that too much expectation can be placed on youth work to address societal problems, but this is essentially a question of balance and penetration.

There are inevitably tensions around youth work engaging with the agendas of others. There are always risks of being instrumentalised. However, the Convention agreed that youth work needs to strengthen connections with other sectors working with young people. The starting point is to jointly identify mutual objectives and opportunities for working together. Youth workers should be conscious of their own quality and importance and maintain their value base.

In particular, improved collaboration with formal education confers added value through 'extended' learning: youth work gives diversity and practical experience to formal education, and it also brings into schools the dimension of participation and co-creation. Youth work can also support young people's progress in formal learning, thereby supporting attendance and attainment.

## 5. RECOGNITION AND VALUE

The Convention agreed that there are three levels of recognition that have, up to now, been insufficiently addressed and require further attention.

First, to gain more recognition youth work needs active promotion and advocacy by all relevant shareholders in politics, public sector and civil society at different levels. Second, there should be greater recognition of NGOs working in the youth work field, including as independent partners in the dialogue shaping youth work development. Third, there needs to be recognition and validation of the learning and achievement that takes place through youth work in non-formal and informal learning environments.



# Recommendations and action points

## ➔ A European Agenda for Youth Work

Europe needs youth work! Investment in youth work is a necessary contribution to the development of a social Europe. Therefore the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention is emphatic about the need for a 'European Agenda for Youth Work', with its main aim to strengthen youth work in Europe.

### 1. ELEMENTS OF SUCH A 'EUROPEAN AGENDA FOR YOUTH WORK' SHOULD INCLUDE:

- A need for more and continuous European co-operation to further develop and strengthen youth work in Europe. This should be fostered through a recommendation of ministers in the Council of Europe and in the European Union.
- Responsibility for youth work rests at the level of Member States. The Convention sees a need to create a legal basis, national strategies or binding frameworks to safeguard and further develop youth work in the Member States.



- In most of the Member States youth work is mainly carried out at the local level, which has the final responsibility for youth work. The Convention is asking for more awareness of this local level responsibility and to agree with the local and regional authorities on a European Charter for youth work at local level.
- As youth work is mainly based on non-formal and informal learning the Convention is requesting the continuation of efforts to implement the existing and future European agendas on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.
- To gain more recognition youth work needs active promotion and advocacy by all actors in politics, public sector and civil society on the different levels, European, national, regional, local.

## 2. IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUTH WORK

- Quality youth work needs discussions about the necessary set of competencies and qualifications for youth workers and the development and implementation of related competence models.
- Training is a crucial element to support the development of quality youth work. Therefore strategies, concepts and programmes for the training of youth workers based on an agreed set of competences are needed.
- It is necessary to find ways of recognition of qualifications of youth workers - employed, freelancers or volunteers - through adequate forms of documentation, certification and validation of competencies, which youth workers gained throughout their practice.
- To help get youth work and youth workers' competencies recognised, national strategies on recognition of youth work and non-formal and informal learning in youth work are required.
- In some Member States youth work is recognised as a profession. However, pathways for the professionalization of youth work in co-operation with the educational sector are needed.

## 3. TOWARDS A KNOWLEDGE-BASED APPROACH

- There have been some measures to support knowledge-based youth work in Europe. The Convention supports the different actors to consolidate their efforts to build a knowledge base for youth work in Europe.
- Youth work needs more national and European research – exploiting different methodologies - about the different forms of youth work, its values, impacts and merits.
- There is an identified need for support for appropriate forms of scrutiny, inquiry and assessment of youth work practice and concepts in Europe.
- Based on the evidence of monitoring and research, youth work has a need for mechanisms for the development of reflective practice in Europe.

#### 4. FUNDING

- Youth work needs a sufficient and a sustainable system of funding. Within this, existing youth work practices and structures need to be funded as well as innovation and new forms of practice.
- The European cooperation in youth work needs a strong instrument to financially support European exchange and cooperation. The Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme is the main source of funding these projects and continues to support European NGOs in the youth work field.
- Funding instruments in youth work need to be accessible for the target groups, therefore access to information and sufficient guidance is needed.

#### 5. TOWARDS COMMON GROUND

- The Convention succeeded in taking some important further steps to find common ground for youth work in Europe. However, as youth work and its forms, conditions and practices in Europe remain so diverse, there is a need to continue work on exploring the common ground of youth work and its standards and concepts. These could result in a 'Charter for Youth Work in Europe'.
- There is a need for mutual development and the exchange of practices in youth work in Europe. Peer learning and peer review exercises on youth work will help to develop practices in and policies on youth work. Co-operation and exchange among youth work actors across Europe requires support for regular platforms for dialogue and sustainable networks and partnerships.
- Further development of the concepts and practice of youth work are required. Youth work has to find strategies to work on the current and emerging challenges faced by young people in Europe. Youth work has to renew its practice and strategies according to the changes and trends in society and politics. And youth work has to reach out to those target groups which are most affected by the social situation and living conditions of young people.
- Instruments at a European level are important for the development of youth work practice on other levels. There is a need to support the capacity of youth work to respond to new challenges and opportunities posed by new technologies and digital media.

#### 6. CROSS-SECTORIAL COOPERATION

- Youth work has established many links with other sectors, which has built up social practice for and with young people. There is a need for more collaborative practice, to gain more experience and develop models for closer cooperation between different actors from other sectors working with young people.
- These links and the existing practice should be mapped, monitored and



evaluated in order to exchange the learning from these experiences throughout Europe.

- These forms of co-operation need to also be supported by cross-sectorial training.

## 7. CIVIC DIALOGUE

- Participation is one of the main principles of youth work. The Convention is convinced that the development of youth work can only be taken further when young people get actively involved from the beginning at all levels - European, national, regional and local.
- As much as young people themselves, organisations in youth work working with and for young people need to be recognised and involved at all levels as partners in civic dialogue concerned with the development of youth work.

## 8. THE 3<sup>RD</sup> EUROPEAN YOUTH WORK CONVENTION

- The Convention is very grateful to the Belgian Chairmanship for hosting the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention. The Convention emphasizes the need for having a regular exchange of concepts, strategies and practice of youth work in Europe and asks Member States, Council of Europe and the European Commission to take the initiative to organise a 3<sup>rd</sup> European Youth Work Convention.

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## → Concluding remarks

Youth work is not a luxury but an existential necessity if a precarious Europe is to effectively address its concerns about social inclusion, cohesion and equal opportunities, and commitment to values of democracy and human rights. Youth work is a central component of a social Europe.

A failure to invest in youth work has three consequences. It is an abdication of responsibility to the next generation. It is a loss of opportunity to strengthen contemporary civil society throughout Europe. And finally, it weakens the potential for dealing effectively with some of the major social challenges (such as unemployment and extremism) of our time.

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